

# MAKING CHILDREN OUR PRIORITY

WORLD VISION CANADA  
FRAGILE CONTEXTS  
CASE STUDY

AFGHANISTAN



## THE CONTEXT FOR CHILDREN IN AFGHANISTAN

Three decades of conflict, historic droughts and the resulting number of internally displaced persons continue to pose challenges to long-term sustainable development in Afghanistan.

Health remains an everyday struggle for children, in a country where the *infant mortality rate* is the highest in the world.

More than **30%** of children under five are underweight and vaccine coverage remains low (*only 18% of children between from 12-23 months are fully vaccinated*).

Education, especially for girls, remains largely out of reach and *only 12.6% of girls have learned to read.*<sup>1</sup>

Negative and often violent disciplinary methods against children, such as verbal and physical abuse, are widely accepted in Afghan society.

Harmful practices such as child marriage are routine coping measures for displaced families and those living in poverty.

## OUR WORK IN AFGHANISTAN

World Vision began its operations in Afghanistan in 2001 by responding to the urgent needs of children and families affected by natural disasters and conflict. More than a decade later, our programs have expanded to longer-term, child-focused and community-driven development programs that integrate health, nutrition, child protection and education. Our work is well established in Herat, Badghis and Ghor provinces in the western region of Afghanistan.

### An Integrated Programming Approach

Too often in our sector, programming—especially in emergency situations—has taken a siloed approach, e.g. one program focusing on health, another on education, and yet another on child protection. Children have complex needs and challenges, therefore our approaches are most efficient and effective when they tackle multiple vulnerabilities simultaneously.

### Building a Strong Foundation for Learning

World Vision is working to support improved learning outcomes and child well-being, including health indicators, through its early childhood development (ECD) initiatives. The **Foundational Development for Afghan Children** at

**Early Years (FACE)** project works with parents as “first teachers” and improves parents’ understanding that children are indeed learning long before they step foot in a classroom.

FACE empowers parents with effective yet low cost interventions. It emphasizes the importance of reading, singing and playing, which are critical for stimulating brain development, language and vocabulary skills that will be essential for school readiness and strong learning outcomes.

The project also works with parents to build their knowledge and confidence to use positive parenting approaches, including non-violent discipline, that are vital for children’s social and emotional well-being. Parents receive valuable information about birth spacing, the importance of vaccines, and when to seek healthcare for their children—all of which can lead to improved health outcomes.

To ensure the sustainability of the project, World Vision engaged community leaders and members of local government and saw improved efforts among these stakeholders to actively promote ECD and child-protection mechanisms. Developing the capacity of parents to provide in-home learning and support to their children—coupled with government and community support to strengthen local systems to reduce violence and promote education—is essential to children’s ability to thrive and realize their full potential in all aspects of their lives.



## WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

Across our programming, we are seeing the importance of **creating an enabling environment for effective programming**. This means working with decision makers at all levels—parents, community and faith leaders, local government and children themselves—to create buy-in, strengthen local health, education and protection systems and ensure sustainability.

It is also critical that **services be integrated**. For example, initiatives for early childhood care and development should integrate maternal, newborn and child health care services, as well as improve care-seeking behaviour and health outcomes. Supporting children who are forced to work means offering flexible or non-formal opportunities for education. It also means working with their families to address the root causes of poverty that keep children out of school in the first place.

We know that **raising awareness of child rights and protection issues** among caregivers, community members and children themselves **will significantly enhance the protective environment for children in their communities and in their family settings**. Children must feel safe and protected in all aspects of their lives and feel empowered to speak out when those rights are not being upheld.



### Cared For and Protected

World Vision established the first Street Working Children's Enrichment Centre in Herat in June of 2011. This multi-sectoral program works with some of the most vulnerable children in the region, including street working children and internally displaced people. It aims to address the root causes of child homelessness, neglect and poverty, while working with children and their families to raise awareness of child rights and the importance of education.

This Centre welcomes children ages 6 to 12 and provides them with a safe place to access health care, school

rations, formal education and life skills. For the first 200 graduates, the project meant catching up and improving their academic performance. More than 95% of participants have since passed the school entrance exams and 90% have integrated into formal education systems.

Children in the program are also able to access health care services. By establishing a health care center, the project was able to reach 93% of children in the program when they needed care, whereas at baseline only 12% of children in the program reported having visited a doctor when they were ill.

### ABOUT WORLD VISION

World Vision is a global relief, development and advocacy organization working in nearly 100 countries and in partnership with 650,000 Canadian supporters. We have 65 years of experience working alongside communities across development, fragile and humanitarian contexts. We seek to ensure that girls and boys are healthy, educated, protected and empowered to be change agents for more equal, inclusive, peaceful societies. World Vision is committed to gender equality as foundational to life in all its fullness for every child.

This is a series of four case studies, each highlighting World Vision's work in a fragile context, developed to accompany our white paper:

**[Making Children Our Priority: How Canada Can Do Better For The World's Most Vulnerable Girls and Boys \(2019\).](#)**