

THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN IMPROVING THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF AFGHAN YOUTH (2001-2021)

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ARTICLE INFO

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 04-02-2025

Revised: 06-08-2025

Accepted: 31-12-2025

Published: 31-12-2025

KEYWORDS

Afghanistan

Economic status

Job opportunities

Non-Governmental

Organizations

Youth

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in enhancing the economic prospects of Afghan youth through targeted initiatives in vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and financial assistance. Given the socio-economic challenges Afghanistan has faced from 2001 to 2021, NGOs have played a crucial role in bridging the gap left by government limitations by implementing various employment and education programs. This research aims to assess the effectiveness of these programs, identify key areas of NGO intervention, and analyse the challenges that hinder their success. The study employed a quantitative approach. The primary data was collected through structured questionnaires and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings reveal that NGOs have played an essential role in enhancing technical and vocational skills and creating job opportunities for Afghan youth. However, persistent challenges, including political instability, corruption, lack of transparency and weak coordination with government policies, have impeded the full realisation of their potential. Strengthening government-NGO collaboration, improving financial literacy programs, and investing in digital and vocational education aligned with market demands are essential for enhancing the sustainability and effectiveness of these initiatives. The study concludes that while NGOs remain instrumental in fostering economic development among Afghan youth, addressing structural and governance-related barriers is imperative for maximising their long-term impact.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The term "non-governmental organisation" (NGO) encompasses a wide range of entities, from grassroots groups to large international agencies, each addressing issues related to health, education, environmental sustainability, and human rights. Often used interchangeably with terms such as "non-profit," "voluntary," and "civil society" organisations, NGOs are defined as voluntary bodies operating independently of government control or with minimal government involvement, primarily engaging in humanitarian, social, or developmental activities. Broadly, NGOs are characterised as: i) non-governmental; and ii) not profit-oriented (Eze, 2023). These organisations play a crucial role in addressing socio-economic challenges, particularly in developing countries, where they fill service gaps and advocate for marginalised populations. In these regions, NGOs have become essential actors in areas where state mechanisms are insufficient to deliver essential services and foster development for all citizens.

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In developing countries, the need for NGOs is heightened due to systemic challenges, including political instability, economic limitations, and inadequate infrastructure. These barriers frequently prevent governments from meeting the basic needs of their populations, resulting in widespread poverty, limited access to education, inadequate healthcare, and insufficient job opportunities. NGOs address these gaps by providing targeted interventions that aim to improve living conditions, promote social welfare, and support community development. Through programs such as vocational training, healthcare services, educational initiatives, and microfinance schemes, NGOs empower individuals and communities to achieve greater self-sufficiency and resilience.

In Afghanistan, where political instability and inadequate infrastructure have hindered economic growth, NGOs have played a pivotal role in enhancing youth economic opportunities (Mansfield, 2019). Between 2001 and 2021, NGOs implemented a diverse range of educational, vocational, and employment-centred programs designed to bridge the economic gap for Afghan youth. These initiatives, which included vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and job creation strategies, sought to equip Afghan youth with the skills and resources necessary for economic self-reliance.

This study, therefore, examines the effectiveness of NGO interventions in improving the economic status of Afghan youth from 2001 to 2021, assessing activities such as vocational training, skill development, and job placement services, while also identifying challenges faced by NGOs, including political instability, corruption, and insufficient coordination with government policies.

1.1 Research objectives

1. To identify the effectiveness of NGO programs designed to enhance Afghan youth's economic status (2001–2021).
2. To evaluate the challenges faced by NGOs in implementing these initiatives.
3. To propose actionable recommendations for improving NGO performance and promoting sustainable economic development.

2.0 METHODS AND MATERIAL

2.1 Research Design

A quantitative research design was employed to evaluate the contributions of NGOs to youth economic empowerment. A combination of descriptive and analytical methods was used to assess NGO activities in employment generation, skill development, and entrepreneurship.

2.2 Population and Sampling

Out of an initially targeted 150 respondents, 107 completed the questionnaire. Respondents represented Afghan youth aged 15–35 from both rural and urban regions, including university students, graduates, young entrepreneurs and individuals seeking employment opportunities through NGO-led interventions.

2.3 Sampling Method

The study adopted convenience sampling, selecting participants based on accessibility and availability (Stewart, 2025). This approach facilitated efficient data collection from youth actively engaged with NGOs.

2.4 Data Collection

Primary data were gathered using structured questionnaires distributed online via Google Forms (through Facebook, WhatsApp, and email). The instrument included Likert-scale, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions measuring NGO activities, challenges, and outcomes. Secondary data sources included NGO reports, policy papers, and academic studies for triangulation.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics summarised demographic profiles, while Cronbach's Alpha assessed reliability. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test ensured sampling adequacy. Regression analysis was performed to measure the relationship between NGO activities and youth economic outcomes.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Merging the Results and Discussion parts into a single section is suitable. Precise and clear outcomes are necessary. The importance of the research findings should be thoroughly highlighted throughout the discussion section. Avoid using extensive citations and discussing previously published material.

3.1 Descriptive Analysis

Table 1. Demographic Data

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	9	8.4
Male	98	91.6
Age		
15-20	27	25.2
21-25	45	42.1
26-30	17	15.9
30-35	9	8.4
Above 35	9	8.4
Education		
Student	57	46.7
Bachelor's and above engaged with NGOs	50	53.3
Residency		
Rural	50	46.7
Urban	57	53.3
Total	107	100.0

The demographic profile of the sample consisted of 107 respondents. The gender distribution showed a significant imbalance, with 98 (91.6%) male respondents and 9 (8.4%) female respondents. Regarding age, 25.2% of the participants were between 15 and 20 years old, 42.1% were in the 21 to 25 age range, 15.9% were aged between 26 and 30, 8.4% were between 30 and 35 years old, and the remaining 8.4% were above 35 years of age. In terms of education, 53.3% of respondents were students, while 46.7% held at least a bachelor's degree or higher. As for residency, 46.7% of the participants resided in rural areas, while 53.3% were from urban areas.

3.2 Reliability Test

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was used, which measures the internal consistency of the survey.

Table 2. Demographic Data

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Activities of NGOs	0.949	15
Challenges and Problems of NGOs	0.877	11
Solutions and Approaches	0.743	7

The results show that the questionnaire has strong reliability, as indicated by the Cronbach's Alpha values for the three primary constructs:

- NGO Activities: 0.94
- Challenges Faced by NGOs: 0.87
- Proposed Solutions: 0.74

Since all values are above 0.70, the reliability of the questionnaire is confirmed, ensuring that the data collected is consistent and valid for further analysis.

3.3 Factor Analysis

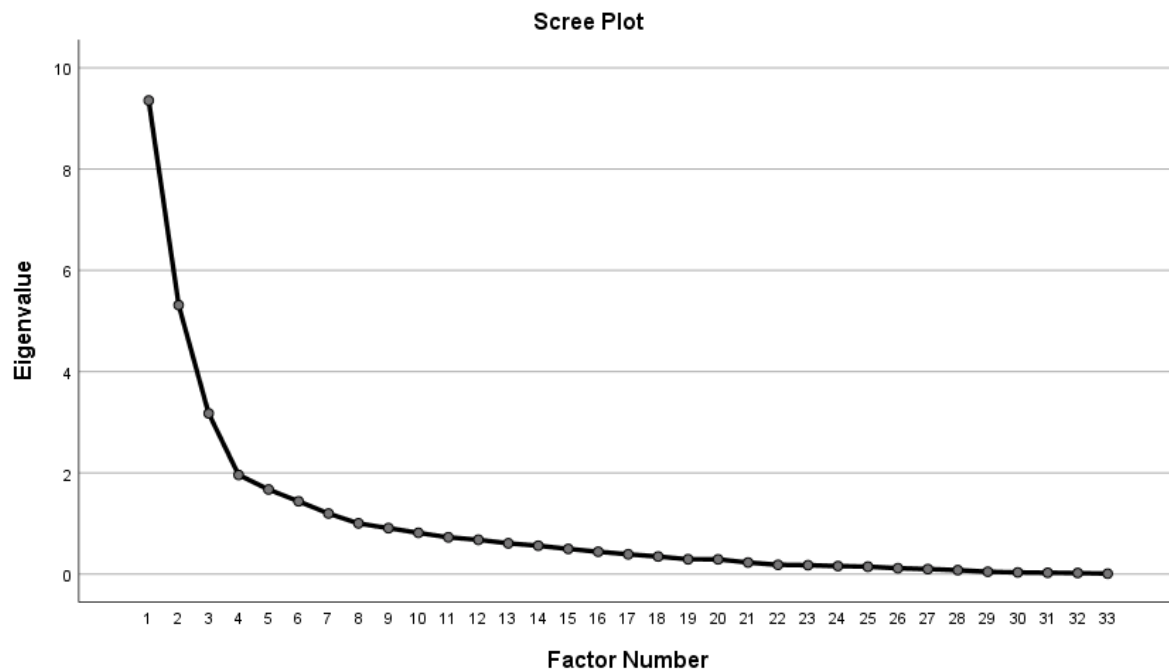
Before conducting factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was used to measure sampling adequacy, and Bartlett's test was applied to examine the presence of correlations among the variables. The results are presented in Table 3:

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test Results

KMO Value	Bartlett's Chi-Square	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
0.61	1425.580	528	0.000

- The KMO value ($0.61 > 0.60$) confirms that the sample size is adequate.
- The Bartlett's test ($p < 0.05$) suggests significant correlations among the variables, validating factor analysis.

Since both tests confirm the validity of the dataset, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and a Scree Plot Analysis were conducted to explore the main components affecting the role of NGOs in youth economic empowerment. The leading indicators related to this role are outlined in Table 4.



To determine the impact of NGO activities in Afghanistan, principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted. The influencing factors were categorised into three main components: NGO activities, challenges, and solutions, as summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Factor Loadings of Key Variables

NGOs Activities	Factor Loadings
NGOs provide vocational training for youth	0.862
Vocational training programs are effective for youth employment	0.922
Skills provided by NGOs match labour market needs	0.873
NGOs help youth establish small businesses	0.904
NGO entrepreneurship workshops increase youth income	0.874
NGOs offer financial assistance for youth entrepreneurship	0.781
NGO programs enhance youth income levels	0.861
Job opportunities created by NGOs improve the youth's economic status	0.871
NGOs reduce youth poverty through social and economic programs	0.732
Challenge	Factor Loadings
Political instability hinders NGO programs	0.862
Corruption in government and NGOs affects economic projects	0.942
Dependency on foreign aid limits economic sustainability	0.947
Lack of economic and educational infrastructure reduces NGO impact	0.864
Cultural and gender-based restrictions limit youth participation	0.923
Proposed Solution	Factor Loadings
Strengthening NGO-government cooperation for better economic impact	0.968
Establishing vocational training programs in remote areas	0.712

Providing low-interest loans to young entrepreneurs	0.811
Enhancing financial literacy and economic awareness among youth	0.901
Expanding NGO investments in education and technology	0.771

Considering the above components, it is essential to define the research model to assess the role of NGOs in improving the status of youth in Afghanistan.

3.4 Research Model

To examine the impact of NGOs on youth economic empowerment, an econometric regression model was employed. Fig. 1 illustrates the research model, depicting the relationships between NGO activities, the challenges they face, and the proposed solutions for improving the economic status of Afghan youth.

$$Y = \beta + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + u_i$$

In this model, Y represents the dependent variable, β denotes the coefficients, X1 corresponds to NGO activities, X2 represents challenges, and X3 signifies proposed solutions. The error term (u_i) accounts for unobserved factors affecting the dependent variable.

Dependent Variables

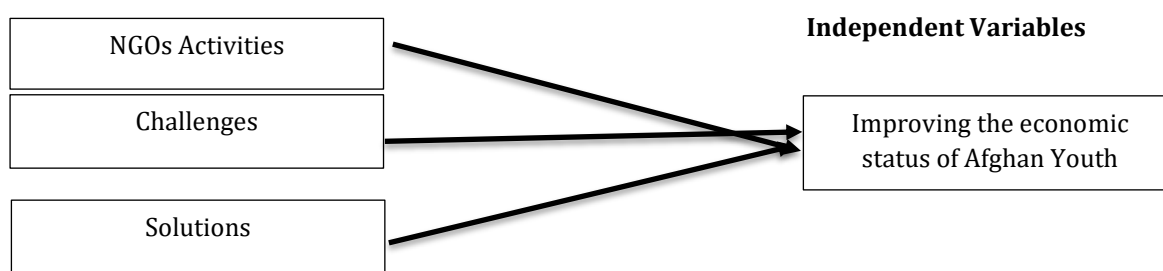


Fig. 1: Research Model

3.5 ANOVA Test for Model Validity

To verify the accuracy of the model, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was conducted.

Table 5: ANOVA Test Results

Independent Variables	Degrees of Freedom	F-Stat	Significance
3	3	13.614	0.000

The significant p-value ($0.000 < 0.005$) confirms that the model is valid. The regression results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Beta	Std. Error	T-Value	Sig. T	R ²	Adjusted R ²
NGO Activities	0.385	0.038	3.030	0.04	0.73	0.752
Challenges	0.031	0.053	5.245	0.007		
Solutions	0.234	0.029	1.848	0.008		

$R^2 = 0.73$, meaning that the independent variables explain 73% of the changes in youth economic conditions. The Final Regression equation is:

$$Y = 0.267 + 0.38X_1 + 0.031X_2 + 0.234X_3$$

The model indicates that NGO activities contribute to 38% of changes in youth economic conditions, while challenges negatively impact the outcome by 3.1%, and proposed solutions account for 23.4% of economic improvements.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the crucial role of NGOs in enhancing the economic well-being of Afghan youth by providing comprehensive support in vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and financial assistance. Through structured training programs, NGOs equip young individuals with industry-relevant skills, enabling them to secure employment opportunities in various sectors. Additionally, by fostering entrepreneurship, these organisations help young people establish and sustain small businesses, contributing to economic self-sufficiency and job creation within their communities.

Moreover, NGOs facilitate access to financial resources, including microloans and grants, which empower young people to overcome economic barriers and invest in their professional development. The significance of these efforts is evident in the scale of NGO interventions; in 2018 alone, they implemented 2,537 projects across Afghanistan, with a total expenditure of \$ 876 million, highlighting their substantial contribution to the country's socio-economic development. Through these multifaceted initiatives, NGOs not only promote individual economic empowerment but also play an integral role in driving broader economic growth, alleviating poverty, and reducing youth unemployment rates.

However, despite these significant contributions, persistent challenges such as political instability, corruption, and inadequate infrastructure continue to hinder the full realisation of NGO initiatives. Furthermore, the lack of effective coordination between NGOs and government institutions restricts the sustainability and scalability of economic development programs.

To address these challenges, strengthening partnerships between NGOs and the government is imperative to ensure that economic development programs are aligned with national priorities and implemented effectively. Expanding financial literacy programs is also crucial in empowering young entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills necessary for successful and sustainable business ventures. Additionally, investing in digital education and vocational training tailored to labour market demands will bridge the skills gap and enhance employment opportunities for Afghan youth.

The study also highlights the broader implications for policy development, emphasising the need for targeted reforms to create a conducive environment for NGO-led initiatives. This includes policy frameworks that promote transparency, accountability, and efficient resource allocation to maximise the impact of development programs. Infrastructure investment, particularly in digital connectivity and vocational education, is also critical to ensuring that youth in both urban and rural areas benefit from these initiatives.

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