

Addressing the Political Disruptions to the Afghan Scholarly Knowledge Systems: The Developmental Role and Implications of Diaspora Knowledge Networks

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Abstract

This paper examines the state of Afghan scholarly knowledge systems and communities in order to provide an overview and understanding of the role and implications of diaspora knowledge networks in addressing the political disruptions to the scholarly knowledge systems in Afghanistan. The conversation on scholarly knowledge systems is crucial as they are considered integral components of modern human society and, hence, are affected by and, in turn, affect society's structures, conditions, and complexities. The paper argues that the Afghan diaspora knowledge networks have great potential to strengthen the Afghan scholarly knowledge system, preserve local knowledge, and integrate the Afghan knowledge community with the global knowledge community. This potential, however, has vastly remained unused.

چکیده

این مقاله کوششی برای بررسی و ارزیابی سیستم‌های دانش افغانی می‌باشد تا تصویری جامع از پیامدها و نقش سیستم‌های دانش دیاسپورا (دور میهنی) در رسیدگی به اختلالات سیاسی در حوزه سیستم‌های دانش افغانستان ارائه دهد. سیستم‌های دانش‌پژوهی از آنجایی حائز اهمیت می‌باشد که در دنیای مدرن فعلی، بخش جدایی‌ناپذیر از جوامع انسانی هستند. این سیستم‌ها می‌توانند تأثیر متقابلی بر ساختار، وضعیت و پیچیدگی‌های جامعه داشته باشد. این مقاله نشان می‌دهد که شبکه‌های دانش دیاسپورای افغان از ظرفیت بالایی برای تقویت سیستم دانش افغانستان برخوردار می‌باشد و می‌تواند قامت سیستم دانش افغانستان را استوار نگه داشته و اعضای آن را با سیستم دانش جهانی وصل کند. با این حال، ظرفیت این شبکه‌های دانش و مفاد آن دچار بی‌توجهی گسترده‌ای بوده است.

Keywords: Scholarly knowledge, knowledge system, diaspora knowledge network, Afghanistan, knowledge transfer, development

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1. Introduction

The geographic location of Afghanistan in Central Asia has historically placed the country amid crossfire between major foreign hegemonic forces and their political agendas that have involved the use of Afghanistan as a geopolitical tool. For this reason and many other factors, including the country's complex ethnography and power divisions, Afghanistan has experienced some of the most longstanding and devastating conflicts in contemporary history. Although during these instabilities, the Afghan knowledge community has played a significant and fundamental role in shaping and advancing the country's sociopolitical and economic roadmap, it has also been under continuous attack and has experienced significant disruptions^{1 2}. Beyond damaging and destroying the physical spaces and infrastructures where local and formal knowledge networks form and operate, the destructive interruptions have slowed down and, at times, completely stopped the knowledge production, transfer, and dissemination processes and have forced members of the scholarly knowledge community to flee the country³.

With the Taliban completely seizing power for the second time in Afghanistan's history in August 2021, the Afghan knowledge system faces the risk of a complete downfall. Although following the takeover, there has been a strong appeal for emergency humanitarian assistance from the international community⁴, the long-lasting and detrimental effects caused by this authoritative regime on the Afghan knowledge systems, specifically the higher education sector and the scholarly knowledge community, have been undermined and overlooked. While it is undeniable that the humanitarian crisis caused by the regime's poor governance and the international community's imposed economic sanctions have far more direct and fatal consequences and hence must be prioritized, the risks to the future of Afghanistan's scholarly knowledge systems should also be acknowledged, understood and promptly addressed.

In this context, diaspora knowledge networks (DKNs) emerge as a critical yet underutilized resource. These networks, formed by Afghan scholars and professionals abroad, have the potential to support the Afghan scholarly community by preserving local knowledge and facilitating its integration into the global knowledge system. This paper argues that leveraging DKNs can mitigate the disruptions and contribute to the long-term resilience and development of Afghanistan's scholarly knowledge systems.

As global interconnectedness increases, the challenges facing Afghan scholarly systems have far-reaching implications. Addressing these disruptions is not only a matter of preserving local scholarship but also of maintaining the integrity of the global knowledge community. As such, this paper seeks to explore the role of DKNs in this dynamic, emphasizing the urgency of integrating Afghan scholars into broader knowledge networks to safeguard and advance scholarly activities amid ongoing political turmoil.

2. Methodology and Scope

This paper provides a conceptual analysis of Afghan knowledge communities, specifically the scholarly knowledge system and the diaspora knowledge networks, based on a literature review and internet search. A comprehensive literature review was conducted that aimed to identify key themes related to scholarly knowledge systems and diaspora knowledge networks. The Internet search was mainly focused on websites of Afghan diaspora organizations and networks, databases, and publications from international organizations. While English was the primary language used in the research process, searches in Dari⁵ were conducted to the extent possible. However, the limited availability of resources in Afghan languages limited the comprehensiveness of the research.

While I aim to examine the scholarly knowledge systems in Afghanistan, the Afghan diaspora knowledge networks, and the relation between the two, given the scarcity of specific research, this paper draws heavily on theoretical frameworks and studies of non-Afghan knowledge systems. It is essential to acknowledge that the findings are primarily theoretical and may not fully capture the unique aspects of Afghan scholarly and diaspora networks.

3. Definitions

As the concepts I aim to tackle here are broad and seemingly abstract, it is imperative to begin by defining some key terms. One of the foundational notions central to this article and hence worth contemplating is *knowledge*. The theoretical discussions surrounding what is and is not considered knowledge have taken place for centuries among thinkers and experts across different societies, cultures, and disciplines^{6,7}. It is an abstract yet powerful concept. However, for the purposes of this study, I define knowledge as “the accumulation of what has been perceived, discovered, or learned⁸.” There are countless ways of knowing and various types of knowledge, one of which is scholarly knowledge.

The concept of *scholarly knowledge*, albeit widely used, is not an unambiguous term. In the Western world, scholarly knowledge is commonly understood in the context of scientific and academic research⁹. However, in the case of Afghanistan, a significant amount of the produced knowledge is built on local and informal knowledge systems as opposed to formal institutional systems. In the context of Afghan scholarly knowledge, college instructors, professors, researchers working in think tanks and research centers, and master’s and Ph.D. candidates, as well as undergraduate students, form the Afghan *scholarly knowledge community*.

As a social entity, a knowledge community has its structures and dynamics, which, among other things, can influence the knowledge production process in different ways¹⁰. These dynamics, norms and standards, how knowledge is organized, relations between scholars, the government and donors, and the politics of knowledge production are some of the elements which collectively form a *knowledge system*¹¹. Therefore, despite the very insufficient amount of literature available, in examining the Afghan scholarly knowledge system, this paper will not be limited to analyzing only the higher education sector; instead, the concept will be looked at from a more comprehensive and holistic viewpoint that takes into account Afghanistan's historical and sociopolitical context as well.

An essential aspect of this context is the Afghan diaspora, whose relation with the Afghan knowledge system is the main focus of this research. The origin of the word *diaspora* is Greek, and in the literal sense, it means scattered. In its broader sense, diaspora refers to people who migrate from their country of origin and create networks in their country of residence that, more often than not, transcend borders¹². Members of a diaspora often share common goals and characteristics that bring them together and lay the ground for collective action¹³. In her article "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse," Butler redefines the concept of diaspora by examining its historical and contemporary applications. She critiques broad definitions and emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding that considers economic, social, and political factors contributing to diaspora formation¹⁴.

Diaspora knowledge networks (DKNs), whose contributions and characteristics will be discussed further in the paper, refer to the informal and formal linkages among skilled individuals living outside their country of origin, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, skills, and resources¹⁵. These networks are instrumental in promoting intellectual collaboration and driving innovation across borders. DKNs are “a

system of coordinated research, study, results dissemination and publication, intellectual exchange, and financing across national boundaries"¹⁶. When referring to diaspora knowledge communities, the terms *organization* and *network* may be used interchangeably at times; however, one important distinction to be made between the two in this context is that an organization is formed intentionally, whereas a network is more organic, less organizational, and could form across different organizations formally or informally.

4. The Scholarly Knowledge System in Afghanistan

After narrowing the concepts of scholarly knowledge and scholarly knowledge systems, it is essential to provide some background and context on the state of the scholarly knowledge system in Afghanistan. While the history of formal education in the country is relatively recent, informal education and knowledge sharing in non-organized and private spaces have a long history, and areas of knowledge such as medicine, history, science, astrology, and literature rooted in customs and religion have been around and thriving in the country for centuries¹⁷. However, as a country that has experienced some of the most devastating conflicts for nearly four decades, it is natural that the systems, networks, communities, foundations, and infrastructure of scholarly knowledge and higher education have been at great risk of falling apart and complete disintegration¹⁸.

4.1. A Brief History of Afghan Higher Education

Contemporary higher education, as the core of the Afghan scholarly knowledge system, is deeply rooted in the country's past. The foundation of formal higher education was first laid in November of 1932 when the Kabul Medical Faculty was founded¹⁹. Following the establishment of this faculty, Kabul University, as the first university in the country, was developed with the gradual establishment of other faculties and departments²⁰. Kabul University became the cornerstone of Afghanistan's higher education system, offering faculties in science, humanities, law, and medicine, among others²¹.

Between 1932 and 1978, the state of higher education was stable but transformational and progressive²². Higher education in Afghanistan rapidly progressed and developed in the late 1960s²³. This period, which was known as the "New Democracy" or "decade of the constitution," was the era of political awareness and the formation of an educated class "more open to debate"²⁴ in Afghanistan with the newfound political and social freedoms. It was the era of unprecedented public demonstrations that resulted in successive structural changes in the government as well as the higher education sector. In "Political Order in Changing Societies," Samuel Huntington states that "Afghanistan may well be the only country in history where at one time [in the 1960s] Ph.D.s made up half the cabinet."²⁵

As higher education and the creation of modern higher education infrastructure were an important part of the nation's developmental policies, the Ministry of Higher Education and Ideological Training was established in 1977²⁶. During the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, various major higher education institutions, as well as independent and public research centers such as Herat University, Balkh University, the Kabul Polytechnic University, and the Academy of Sciences of Afghanistan were established²⁷.

However, the relative stability of this era and the scholarly and academic growth were interrupted by the Soviet invasion that took place following the communist coup in 1978²⁸. The new communist government radically changed the higher education system by renewing the curriculum and restructuring the faculties and departments at different universities and institutions across the country. During this period, there was an emphasis on technical and vocational education aligned with Soviet educational models²⁹. However, these sudden changes were also accompanied by physical destruction and violence, specifically the imprisonment, killing and persecution of the members of the Afghan scholarly knowledge community³⁰.

Although the momentum in the higher education sector slowed down in the Soviet era³¹, the serious disruption to the scholarly knowledge system occurred during the civil war that started in 1992. The civil war following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the rise of the Taliban in the mid-1990s further devastated Afghanistan's education system³². The series of insurgencies and continuous conflict during the 1990s led to the destruction of the country's critical foundations. The exclusion of women from higher education³³, as well as the physical and political disruptions to the sector before and during the Taliban's conquest and occupation of the country, have had long-term effects on the country's scholarly knowledge system and the Afghan scholarly knowledge community worldwide. Afghanistan's post-Taliban struggles, in addition to the 30 years of war, left the country among the poorest in the world, and the environment of war, ongoing conflicts, and insurgencies left the higher education institutions and knowledge systems in dire need of rebuilding.

The fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 marked the beginning of a new era for higher education in Afghanistan. Supported by the international community, the country embarked on a comprehensive reconstruction of its educational system³⁴. Several new universities and higher education institutions were established, including private universities, which introduced competition and innovation in the sector³⁵. Additionally, efforts were made to improve gender inclusion in higher education, with significant increases in female enrollment³⁶.

Despite progress, the Taliban's return to power in August 2021 has significantly impacted the higher education system. The displacement of educated Afghans, including university professors, researchers, and students, has led to a "brain drain"³⁷. Additionally, the Taliban's policies have exacerbated educational inequalities, particularly for women and ethnic minorities. The current climate of fear and uncertainty undermines the environment necessary for academic growth and intellectual freedom.

The history of higher education in Afghanistan is a testament to the resilience and perseverance of its people in the face of profound challenges. However, the ongoing political instability continues to pose significant obstacles to the development and sustainability of the Afghan scholarly knowledge system.

4.2. Scholarly Knowledge Production in Afghanistan

Scholarly knowledge production in Afghanistan has a rich history rooted in Islamic scholarship and has evolved through various political, social, and economic changes. Despite the significant challenges described in the previous section, Afghan scholars have continued contributing to various fields of knowledge.

Historical Context: Afghanistan's scholarly tradition dates back to the medieval period, during which it was a significant center of Islamic learning. Cities like Herat, Balkh, and Kabul were renowned for their madrasas and libraries, attracting scholars from across the Islamic world³⁸. These Islamic schools were the primary institutions for higher learning, focusing on religious studies, including the Quran, Hadith, and Arabic literature. They also covered various sciences, such as mathematics, astronomy, and medicine³⁹. Prominent scholars such as Abu Rayhan al-Biruni and Avicenna (Ibn Sina), whose monumental works like "The Canon of Medicine" had a lasting impact on both Islamic and Western medicine, contributed significantly to knowledge in fields like philosophy, medicine, and natural sciences, laying a foundation for future intellectual endeavours in the region⁴⁰.

Contemporary Developments: In the contemporary world, public and private universities and research centers have been crucial to the country's scholarly knowledge system. From the end of the reign of Mohammad Zahir Shah, the Republic of Mohammad Daud Khan, and later following the fall of the Taliban, research work was institutionalized in many faculties of experimental sciences and humanities, and professors and students were encouraged to conduct scientific research⁴¹. Despite the ongoing conflict, after the fall of the Taliban in 2002 and the US invasion, higher education in Afghanistan was revitalized, and the scholarly knowledge system started to address the existing gaps in the system⁴². In the last two decades, the scholarly knowledge system grew exponentially, and in 2021, there were hundreds of private and non-governmental institutions and research centers in various scientific and academic research fields.

However, the overall research output remains limited due to several factors:

- **Security Concerns:** Persistent conflict and instability hinder fieldwork and data collection.
- **Infrastructure Damage:** Prolonged conflict has resulted in the destruction of educational infrastructure, including schools, universities, and libraries. This damage severely limits access to quality education and research facilities.
- **Resource Limitations:** Inadequate funding, outdated laboratories, and limited access to academic journals and resources impede research activities.
- **Displacement of scholars:** Many skilled scholars have left the country due to security and economic concerns, leading to a shortage of qualified researchers.

4.3. The Politics of Scholarly Knowledge Production in Afghanistan

The politics of knowledge production is a critical yet often overlooked area of study. Although it may seem abstract, its implications are concrete and far-reaching. Knowledge production is not a neutral endeavour; it is deeply embedded in power structures that determine whose voices are heard and which perspectives are considered credible⁴³. The politics of knowledge production in Afghanistan is particularly evident due to its complex socio-political landscape and heavy reliance on international aid.

Theoretical Framework

The intersection of power and knowledge has been extensively analyzed by Michel Foucault, whose theories provide a critical framework for understanding how power structures shape the production and dissemination of knowledge. Foucault argued that knowledge is not merely a tool of power but is intrinsically linked to it; power and knowledge directly imply one another⁴⁴. This means that those who control knowledge production also wield significant power. This relationship is evident in how certain epistemologies dominate while others are marginalized. Scholars like Edward Said⁴⁵ and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak⁴⁶ have expanded on this by examining the colonial and postcolonial dimensions of knowledge production, demonstrating how Western epistemologies have historically dominated global scholarly landscapes, often to the detriment of non-Western knowledge systems.

Recent studies have continued to explore these dynamics, particularly in the context of developing countries. Many studies highlight how Western academic standards and frameworks often dictate what is considered valid knowledge, thereby marginalizing alternative perspectives⁴⁷. These scholars argue that the imposition of Western paradigms in non-Western contexts not only limits the diversity of knowledge but also reinforces existing power hierarchies. In Afghanistan, this dynamic is particularly pronounced given the country's reliance on international aid and the influence of external donors on research agendas.

External Donor Influence

The role of external donors in shaping research agendas in Afghanistan cannot be overstated. Dr. Orzala Nemat⁴⁸ and others have critically examined how donor priorities influence the type of research that gets funded and, consequently, the kind of knowledge that is produced. Nemat highlights that much of the research on Afghanistan is produced according to the terms set by donors, who often subscribe to Eurocentric ideologies and standards⁴⁹. This dynamic significantly limits the scope for local scholars to contribute and for local knowledge to be recognized⁵⁰.

Research funding from international donors often comes with specific agendas that align with the donors' strategic interests⁵¹. This can lead to a narrow focus on certain areas deemed relevant by these external actors, such as security and counter-terrorism while neglecting other crucial aspects of Afghan society and culture. The prioritization of non-Afghan scholarship further exacerbates this issue, as local scholars may find it challenging to compete with well-funded, internationally recognized research institutions. This situation not only marginalizes local voices but also creates a skewed understanding of Afghan realities, shaped more by external perceptions than by indigenous insights.

Marginalization of Local Scholarship

Indigenous knowledge systems represent a critical yet often overlooked component of global knowledge production. Scholars like Battiste⁵² and Smith⁵³ argue for the importance of recognizing and valuing these knowledge systems, which are deeply rooted in local contexts and experiences. Decolonizing knowledge systems involves the process of challenging and dismantling the dominance of Western epistemologies and methodologies in favor of incorporating and valuing diverse ways of knowing, particularly those of Indigenous and marginalized communities⁵⁴. This approach seeks to recognize the validity of non-Western knowledge systems, address historical and ongoing power imbalances, and create inclusive spaces where multiple epistemologies can coexist and contribute to global knowledge production.

In Afghanistan, the marginalization of local scholarship is a significant issue. The dominance of donor-driven research agendas means that local scholars often struggle to gain visibility and credibility. This marginalization is not just a loss for Afghan academia but for global knowledge production as a whole. Local scholars bring invaluable perspectives and insights that are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of Afghanistan's social, cultural, and political landscape. Supporting local scholarship involves more than just providing funding; it requires a fundamental shift in how knowledge is valued and produced.

Practical steps to enhance the value of local knowledge include fostering collaborative research projects that prioritize local leadership, integrating local languages and cultural contexts into academic discourse, and establishing platforms for Afghan scholars to publish and share their work on both national and international stages. Additionally, creating mentorship programs that connect local scholars with experienced researchers can help build research capacity and expertise. Developing local research institutions and think tanks, and ensuring access to international academic networks and resources, are also critical measures to increase the production and recognition of locally driven knowledge.

In summary, the marginalization of local scholars and the dominance of external donor agendas perpetuate existing power imbalances and hinder the development of contextually relevant knowledge production. There is a pressing need to support Indigenous knowledge systems and create spaces for local scholars to contribute meaningfully to the production of knowledge specifically pertaining to their country.

5. Afghan Diaspora: Beyond a Scholarly Knowledge Community

The rise in migration worldwide led to the creation of transnational communities that are referred to as the *diaspora*. The Afghan diaspora consists of millions of individuals who have left Afghanistan, mainly due to prolonged conflict and instability. This diaspora has settled in various regions across the world, forming significant communities, particularly in Iran, Pakistan, Europe, North America, and Australia⁵⁵.

The history of the Afghan diaspora is deeply intertwined with the geopolitical events of the region. Their migration is not just a tale of displacement but also of resilience and adaptation. In host countries, they have established vibrant communities that maintain strong cultural ties to Afghanistan while also

integrating into and enriching the cultural and social fabric of their new homes. The legacy of displacement is carried forward through generations, influencing diaspora interactions with both their host countries and Afghanistan. This history sets the stage for understanding the complex roles played by the Afghan diaspora in knowledge production and transnational knowledge networks, which will be explored in the subsequent sections of this paper.

5.1. Brief Background

The history of instabilities and conflict in the country, not surprisingly, yielded several waves of migration. Each wave of migration has been influenced by different factors, ranging from military interventions and civil wars to economic instability and persecution. The early migrants of the Soviet era were primarily refugees, many of whom settled in camps in Pakistan and Iran⁵⁶. Over time, these camps became semi-permanent settlements. The later waves, particularly those moving to Western countries, often included individuals and families with higher educational levels and professional backgrounds, who were able to integrate into different sectors of their host countries⁵⁷. While some immigrants trickled into North America and Europe as early as the 1950s, the exponential growth of Afghan diaspora communities began to take shape in the 1980s⁵⁸. The modern Afghan diaspora can be understood as having been formed through five key eras, each marked by distinct events that triggered large-scale movements of people:

Soviet Invasion (1979-1989): The Soviet invasion marked the beginning of large-scale emigration from Afghanistan. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans fled to neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, escaping the war and the associated hardships. Many also sought refuge in Western Europe, North America, and Australia⁵⁹.

Civil War (1989-1996): Following the withdrawal of Soviet troops, Afghanistan plunged into a brutal civil war. The ensuing violence led to a second major wave of migration, with many Afghans leaving for the safety of the West or joining earlier diaspora communities in neighbouring countries.

Taliban Regime (1996-2001): The Taliban's rise to power initiated another migration wave, particularly among ethnic and religious minorities and those opposed to the Taliban's stringent policies.

2001-2021: The fall of the Taliban post-2001 led to a temporary slow-down in emigration, with some of the diaspora returning to Afghanistan. However, the continuing instability, recurring violence, and economic challenges sustained Afghan migration flows.

Taliban Takeover in 2021: The Taliban's rise to power for the second time created one of the biggest migration waves, displacing thousands of Afghans.

5.2. Diaspora and Development

Historically, migration and development have been viewed through distinct lenses. Migration policies focused on managing flows, integration, and security, while development policies aimed at economic growth, poverty reduction, and social progress in origin countries. This separation often overlooked the interconnectedness of migration and development processes. The concept of transnationalism highlights the multiple ties and interactions linking migrants and their home countries⁶⁰.

Understanding these connections is crucial for recognizing the potential of diaspora knowledge networks (DKNs). These networks leverage the expertise and resources of diaspora communities to support the preservation and integration of local knowledge into global systems, thereby addressing the disruptions to Afghan scholarly knowledge systems. By examining the role of diaspora and development, we can better understand how DKNs can contribute to the resilience and advancement of Afghanistan's scholarly activities amid ongoing challenges.

Transnational networks, comprising social, economic, and political connections, have become pivotal in shaping development outcomes. Migrants maintain relationships with their countries of origin through remittances, investments, knowledge exchange, and political engagement, which can significantly impact development⁶¹.

Economic Contributions

Economic contributions from the Afghan diaspora, particularly in the form of remittances, are a crucial source of household income in Afghanistan. These funds help reduce poverty, improve living standards, and provide resources for education and healthcare. According to the World Bank, remittances to Afghanistan accounted for a significant percentage of GDP, highlighting their importance in the national economy⁶². Additionally, the Afghan diaspora often invests in businesses in their home country, creating jobs and stimulating local economies. This entrepreneurial activity has led to the development of new industries and markets, enhancing economic diversification and growth⁶³.

Political Contributions

The Afghan Diaspora's political contribution to the development of Afghanistan cannot be understated. Afghan diaspora organizations have played a significant role in advocating for policies and international support beneficial to Afghanistan. Their efforts have influenced foreign aid, trade agreements, and international diplomatic support⁶⁴. Members of the Afghan diaspora have also engaged in peacebuilding initiatives, facilitating dialogue and contributing to conflict resolution efforts. Their unique perspective and ability to mediate between different groups are valuable in fostering peace⁶⁵.

Social and Cultural Contributions

Diaspora communities help preserve local knowledge and promote Afghan culture abroad, fostering a sense of identity and community among Afghans. This cultural engagement can also lead to a greater appreciation and revitalization of cultural heritage within Afghanistan⁶⁶. The continuous movement of

skilled professionals between the diaspora's home and host countries, or "brain circulation," promotes the integration of home countries into global markets as migrants facilitate the exchange of knowledge, skills, and best practices. This dynamic movement can enhance systems and foster social development⁶⁷.

Challenges and Negative Impacts

While the Afghan diaspora plays a complex role in the development of Afghanistan, offering numerous opportunities, there are also significant challenges to consider. The migration of skilled workers often leads to a net decrease in human capital in the source countries. This loss is particularly acute in sectors that require highly specialized knowledge and experience, such as healthcare and engineering. The depletion of professional expertise can hinder development and weaken institutional capacities. The reduction in human capital due to migration can lead to slower economic growth and lower productivity in the home country⁶⁸. As skilled workers leave, the remaining workforce may lack the expertise and experience needed to drive innovation and efficiency.

Additionally, while remittances provide immediate financial support, they may taper off over time as migrants settle permanently in their host countries and form new financial obligations. This decline can create economic instability in the home country, which may have become dependent on these inflows for economic sustenance. More importantly, migration can exacerbate income disparities within the home country. Families receiving remittances often experience significant improvements in their living standards, while those without migrant members may not benefit from these financial inflows. This disparity can lead to social tensions and inequality.

The Afghan diaspora's contributions to development are multifaceted, encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions. Their efforts in remittances, investments, advocacy, and knowledge transfer significantly impact Afghanistan's development. However, addressing the challenges associated with brain drain, economic dependence, and social disparities is crucial for harnessing the full potential of the Afghan diaspora for sustainable development.

5.3. Role in Knowledge Production

In light of the ongoing displacements and disruptions faced by Afghanistan, it is crucial to explore avenues for strengthening and ensuring the continuous growth of Afghan knowledge networks. The Afghan diaspora, with its vast reservoir of expertise and resources, plays a pivotal role in this endeavor. By leveraging their positions in academia, professional networks, and policy advocacy, diaspora members can significantly contribute to the development and sustainability of Afghan knowledge systems. This section offers concrete policy suggestions that can help stakeholders address the challenges and harness the potential of the Afghan diaspora. By focusing on the following seven areas, stakeholders can support initiatives that not only address immediate needs but also lay the foundation for long-term growth and integration of Afghan knowledge into the global economy.

Academic Contributions

The Afghan diaspora's contributions to academia are profound and multifaceted, reflecting their diverse expertise and commitment to both their host countries and Afghanistan. Members of the Afghan diaspora hold academic positions in prestigious universities around the world, where they engage in teaching, research, and publication, thereby enhancing global and local knowledge systems. Through their teaching roles, Afghan diaspora academics also contribute to the education of future generations. They mentor students, guide research projects, and facilitate academic exchanges between Afghanistan and their host countries. Their academic contributions span various fields, including history, political science, economics, medicine, and engineering.

For instance, many Afghan scholars have been integrated into the higher education systems in Western countries. These scholars have played pivotal roles in shaping academic discourses and contributing to international research collaborations. Institutions such as the University of Central Asia and initiatives like the Afghan Research Initiative (ARI) have supported over 100 Afghan scholars in exile, allowing them to engage in significant research and policy advocacy efforts. This initiative has facilitated the connection of Afghan scholars with global academic networks to address critical development issues related to Afghanistan^{69 70}.

Programs facilitated by organizations such as the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security (GIWPS) have placed Afghan scholars in leading U.S. academic institutions, where they continue their work in legal, social, and cultural fields. These efforts not only support the personal and professional growth of these scholars but also contribute to broader academic discourses on Afghanistan and its development⁷¹.

Collaborative Research

Diaspora scholars and professionals often engage in collaborative research projects with institutions in Afghanistan. These collaborations are vital for capacity building, as they bring expertise, resources, and innovative methodologies to Afghan institutions. Joint research initiatives address various issues, from public health and education to economic development and governance, contributing to the overall knowledge infrastructure in Afghanistan. Projects like the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) involve collaboration between local and diaspora researchers to produce high-quality, policy-relevant research⁷².

Collaborative research in public health, for instance, has been pivotal in addressing healthcare challenges in Afghanistan. Dr. Zalmai Rafiq, an Afghan-American public health expert, has partnered with Kabul University of Medical Sciences to conduct research on maternal and child health. Their joint studies on improving prenatal care and reducing infant mortality rates have led to the implementation of more effective healthcare policies and practices⁷³.

Educational Initiatives

Members of the *Afghan* diaspora are involved in educational initiatives aimed at improving access to quality education in Afghanistan. They establish scholarships, fund educational programs, and create online learning platforms that connect Afghan students with global educational resources. These efforts are crucial in bridging the educational gap exacerbated by decades of conflict.

For instance, initiatives such as the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), founded by Dr. Sakena Yacoobi in 1995, exemplify the efforts to bridge educational gaps. AIL focuses on providing education to women and children, particularly in rural and underserved areas. By offering mobile literacy classes, community-based education, and teacher training programs, AIL has made significant strides in enhancing educational access and quality in Afghanistan⁷⁴.

Digital Platforms and E-Learning

The Afghan diaspora has transformed the educational landscape in Afghanistan through digital platforms and e-learning initiatives. These platforms provide access to a wide range of courses and training programs, allowing Afghan students and professionals to acquire new skills and knowledge. By leveraging technology, the diaspora helps overcome the limitations of traditional educational systems in Afghanistan.

Code to Inspire (CTI), founded by Fereshteh Forough, an Afghan-American social activist, is a great example of this. This innovative program, which is the first coding school for girls in Afghanistan, provides young Afghan women with the skills needed to pursue careers in technology. Through online and in-person coding classes, CTI empowers students with digital literacy and programming skills, thereby opening new opportunities in the tech industry⁷⁵.

Policy Advocacy

Afghan diaspora members also engage in policy advocacy, influencing educational and cultural policies both in their host countries and in Afghanistan. By participating in policy discussions, writing policy briefs, and advising governmental and non-governmental organizations, they ensure that Afghan perspectives are considered in decision-making processes. Their advocacy efforts can contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective policies that benefit both the diaspora and the homeland.⁷⁶

Afghan women in the diaspora have been particularly active in peace advocacy. Organizations like the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) have been instrumental in advocating for the inclusion of women's voices in the peace process. They have organized campaigns, lobbied international bodies, and provided critical support to women in Afghanistan to ensure their participation in peace negotiations.^{77 78} The Afghan-American Chamber of Commerce (AACC) regularly publishes policy briefs and advises both the Afghan and U.S. governments on economic and trade policies. These briefs cover a range of topics, including trade agreements, investment opportunities, and economic reforms. By providing expert

analysis and recommendations, the AACC ensures that the interests of Afghan businesses and the diaspora community are represented in policy-making processes⁷⁹.

Professional Networks

Professional networks and associations formed by the Afghan diaspora play a pivotal role in knowledge production and dissemination. Organizations like the Afghan Academy Professionals Network (AAPN)⁸⁰ and the Afghan-American Chamber of Commerce (AACC)⁸¹ facilitate connections among Afghan professionals, promote professional development, and support collaborative research projects. Both APN and AACC play crucial roles in knowledge sharing and mentoring within the Afghan diaspora community. APN's initiatives include publishing newsletters and research articles that highlight the achievements and contributions of Afghan professionals. Additionally, APN's mentoring programs have been instrumental in providing guidance and support to young professionals entering various industries⁸². AACC's focus on business development includes mentorship for Afghan entrepreneurs, helping them navigate the challenges of starting and growing businesses both in the diaspora and in Afghanistan⁸³.

Network Connections

In addition to knowledge transfer, the diaspora creates and utilizes network connections to facilitate migration and settlement processes. These intergenerational networks provide multifaceted support and vary across countries depending on the diaspora's country of origin, their sociopolitical conditions, and the host country's attitude towards immigration⁸⁴. For example, the TechNation Afghanistan initiative, founded by Afghan tech entrepreneurs, connects Afghan professionals in the technology sector. TechNation provides a platform for networking, knowledge sharing, and collaborative innovation. By hosting hackathons, workshops, and training programs, TechNation helps Afghan tech professionals develop their skills and contribute to the growth of the tech industry in Afghanistan⁸⁵. These networks of scientific, financial, professional, technical, and other expatriates are diverse but share a common goal: their capacity and motivation to contribute to their homeland's development.

6. Diaspora Knowledge Networks

Diaspora Knowledge Networks (DKNs) represent an evolving concept within the broader field of diaspora engagement. These networks are defined by their primary function: the facilitation of knowledge transfer between highly skilled individuals residing abroad and their countries of origin⁸⁶. Unlike traditional diaspora activities focused on financial remittances, DKNs emphasize the exchange of intellectual capital, skills, and expertise⁸⁷. This transfer is facilitated through various channels, including but not limited to mentorship, consultancy, virtual collaborations, and on-site projects. The objective is to leverage the diverse experiences and specialized knowledge of the diaspora to address specific developmental challenges in their homeland.

The emergence of DKNs can be traced to the increasing globalization and mobility of professionals. As people migrate, they acquire new skills, knowledge, and perspectives that can be invaluable to their home countries⁸⁸. DKNs harness this potential by creating structured pathways for engagement.

6.1. Characteristics and Limitations

One of the most prominent characteristics of DKNs is their transnational nature. Unlike traditional networks confined within national borders, DKNs operate on a global scale, bridging the geographic divide between diaspora members and their home countries⁸⁹. This transnational dimension allows for a dynamic flow of knowledge, skills, and resources. For instance, an Afghan engineer working in Canada can share insights and best practices with colleagues in Afghanistan, contributing to local projects and initiatives without needing to be physically present. This global reach not only enhances the diversity of perspectives within the network but also ensures that the home country can benefit from cutting-edge developments and practices worldwide.

DKNs are inherently multidisciplinary, bringing together professionals from various fields such as science, technology, business, arts, education, and healthcare⁹⁰. This diversity is a significant strength, as it enables the network to address a wide range of developmental challenges through a holistic approach. For example, a project aimed at improving healthcare infrastructure in Afghanistan might involve medical professionals, engineers, IT specialists, and management experts, each contributing their unique expertise. This multidisciplinary approach fosters innovation and ensures that solutions are well-rounded and sustainable. Additionally, it allows for cross-sectoral learning and collaboration, where insights from one field can inspire breakthroughs in another.

The organizational structure of DKNs tends to be flexible and often informal, which can be both a strength and a limitation. On the positive side, this flexibility allows for rapid adaptation to changing circumstances and encourages a broad range of participation from the diaspora community. Members can contribute in various capacities, from providing occasional advice to leading significant projects. However, the lack of formal structure can also lead to challenges in coordination and sustainability. Without clear governance and funding mechanisms, DKNs may struggle to maintain momentum and achieve long-term impact⁹¹.

DKNs often operate with minimal funding and rely heavily on voluntary contributions from their members. This can restrict the scale and scope of their activities. For instance, organizing training programs, workshops, or on-the-ground projects requires substantial investment in terms of time, money, and infrastructure. Without adequate resources, DKNs may struggle to implement their initiatives effectively. Additionally, accessing funding from external sources can be challenging due to the informal nature of many DKNs, which may lack the structures required to apply for grants or sponsorships. Another limitation is the potential for unequal participation within the network. While some diaspora members may have the time and resources to engage actively, others may face constraints that limit their involvement. This can lead to uneven contributions and impact across the network. Furthermore, the

reliance on digital communication tools can exclude those with limited internet access or technical skills, particularly in the home country.

6.2 Impact on the Afghan Scholarly Knowledge System

DKNs have become critical in the contemporary knowledge economy, leveraging the global dispersion of skilled professionals to foster innovation and development. They play a critical role in shaping the scholarly knowledge systems of home countries. In the case of Afghanistan, integrating DKNs into Afghan scholarly systems has several profound impacts. According to a report by Kuschminder, diaspora knowledge networks have facilitated the return of skilled expatriates to Afghanistan, contributing to various academic and research initiatives⁹². These networks mobilize the skills and expertise of Afghan professionals abroad to support educational and research institutions in Afghanistan. Diaspora networks not only provide direct support through knowledge transfer but also help create a resilient educational framework capable of withstanding socio-political challenges. This section focuses on the multifaceted impacts of DKNs on the Afghan scholarly knowledge system.

Enhancement of academic standards and programs: DKNs contribute to raising academic standards and improving educational programs⁹³. Afghan diaspora scholars can be instrumental in introducing international best practices, modern pedagogical approaches, and innovative teaching methodologies. They can help update curricula and align academic programs with global educational norms, ensuring that Afghan students receive a quality education that meets international benchmarks.

Access to global networks: DKNs provide local scholars with access to global academic and professional networks, which are crucial for fostering collaboration and intellectual exchange⁹⁴. Afghan researchers can benefit from joint research projects, international funding opportunities, and participation in global conferences. This integration into the global academic community enhances the visibility and impact of Afghan research on the world stage.

Research collaboration and capacity building: DKNs facilitate collaborative research between diaspora scholars and local academics, addressing specific challenges faced by the home country⁹⁵. These collaborations lead to advancements in various fields, including healthcare, environmental sustainability, and public policy. The Afghan diaspora has also played a crucial role in building research capacity by providing training, mentorship, and facilitating access to international research networks. These efforts have enabled Afghan researchers to produce high-quality research and contribute to the global body of knowledge.

Digital transformation and e-learning: The digital transformation of education, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has seen significant contributions from the Afghan diaspora. DKNs have supported the development of online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and digital resources. These innovations make education more accessible to students across Afghanistan, including those in remote and conflict-affected areas. They also introduce Afghan institutions to modern educational technologies and best practices in e-learning.

Addressing gender disparities in education: DKNs play a crucial role in promoting gender equality in education. They can support initiatives that encourage female participation in higher education and research, including scholarships, mentorship programs, and advocacy efforts aimed at creating a more inclusive academic environment. These initiatives empower women to pursue higher education and careers in research, addressing gender disparities in the academic sector.⁹⁶

7. Discussion: Afghan DKNs and Development

The involvement of the Afghan diaspora in enhancing scholarly knowledge systems and higher education in Afghanistan presents both significant challenges and unique opportunities. Addressing these challenges effectively and leveraging the opportunities can lead to sustainable development and resilience in the Afghan academic sector. This section delves into the complexities of knowledge transfer and the specific challenges and opportunities associated with the developmental capacity of DKNs for Afghanistan.

Challenges

One of the primary challenges is the sustainability of initiatives. As mentioned before, many diaspora-led projects rely heavily on external funding from international donors and organizations. The fluctuation of these funds can jeopardize the sustainability of ongoing programs, making it difficult to maintain momentum and ensure long-term success. Additionally, while diaspora networks bring in expertise and resources, building local capacity to sustain these initiatives independently remains a critical challenge. Ensuring local institutions can maintain and expand these programs without continuous external support is essential for their long-term viability.

Coordination and integration also pose significant challenges. The lack of coordination among various diaspora groups and between these groups and local institutions can lead to fragmented efforts, resulting in duplicated efforts and inefficient use of resources. Aligning diaspora-led initiatives with local and national education policies and priorities can be complex. However, ensuring that these efforts complement rather than compete with existing programs is crucial for their success and for maximizing their positive impact on the education system.

Additionally, political and security instability in Afghanistan further complicates the situation and poses significant risks to both local and diaspora participants. These challenges can hinder the implementation of projects and deter diaspora engagement, making it difficult to achieve sustained progress. Frequent changes in government policies and administrative structures can disrupt ongoing projects and create an uncertain environment for long-term planning. Stability and consistency in policy are needed to support sustained academic and research initiatives.

Cultural and social barriers add another layer of complexity. Understanding and navigating the cultural dynamics of Afghan society is essential for the success of diaspora-led initiatives. Misunderstandings and lack of cultural sensitivity can lead to resistance and reduce the impact of these efforts. While progress has been made, gender disparities in education and research continue to be a significant challenge⁹⁷.

Overcoming societal norms and ensuring equal opportunities for women and ethnic minorities remain a critical area of focus.

In terms of knowledge transfer, Afghanistan's educational and institutional frameworks are often underdeveloped, which hinders the country's ability to effectively absorb and utilize the knowledge transferred from the diaspora. As explored by Knowledge Transfer Theory, successful knowledge transfer relies heavily on absorptive capacity, defined by Cohen and Levinthal as the ability of the receiving entity to recognize, assimilate, and apply new knowledge⁹⁸. For DKNs, this involves the transfer of academic, technical, and professional knowledge from diaspora members to institutions and individuals in their country of origin. In the context of Afghanistan, the absorptive capacity is notably limited due to several significant challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficiently trained personnel, and a lack of resources, which constrain the potential benefits of any knowledge transfer. Additionally, the ongoing political instability and security issues further impede the establishment of a stable and conducive environment for knowledge assimilation and application. Consequently, while the Afghan diaspora is equipped with valuable expertise and resources, the limited absorptive capacity of Afghanistan poses a major hurdle in leveraging these assets for substantial academic and developmental advancements.

Opportunities

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities that can be leveraged to enhance the impact of diaspora involvement in Afghanistan's scholarly knowledge systems. One of the most promising opportunities lies in leveraging global networks. Leveraging the expertise of the Afghan DKN members can significantly enhance the quality of education and research in Afghanistan, providing local institutions with access to global best practices and cutting-edge knowledge. Partnerships between Afghan institutions and international universities and research centers can facilitate knowledge exchange, joint research projects, and academic collaborations. These collaborations can lead to innovative solutions to local challenges and elevate the global standing of Afghan research.

The expansion of digital infrastructure and e-learning platforms presents another significant opportunity. These platforms can make education more accessible, especially in remote and conflict-affected areas, bridging geographical barriers and providing continuous learning opportunities. Technology also enables virtual collaboration between diaspora members and local academics, overcoming geographical barriers and fostering continuous engagement. Virtual platforms can facilitate regular interactions, mentorship, and joint research efforts.

Another crucial area where diaspora networks can make a substantial impact is capacity building and training. DKNs can provide training and professional development opportunities for Afghan academics and researchers, including workshops, seminars, and online courses that enhance their skills and knowledge. Establishing mentorship programs where experienced diaspora professionals guide and support local academics can lead to significant improvements in research quality and academic performance. Mentorship can also help in nurturing future leaders in academia and research.

The diaspora can also play a crucial role in advocacy and policy influence. By advocating for policies that support education and research in Afghanistan, diaspora members can influence policymakers and stakeholders, helping create a more conducive environment for academic growth and development. Diaspora organizations can raise awareness about the importance of education and research in Afghanistan, mobilizing resources and support from international communities and organizations. This can lead to increased funding and global attention to the needs of Afghan academic institutions.

Finally, the diaspora can foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in Afghan academic institutions. By introducing new ideas and approaches, they can stimulate research and development activities that address local challenges and opportunities. Supporting the establishment of start-ups and research-driven enterprises can create job opportunities and drive economic development, leveraging the skills and expertise of both local and diaspora communities. This can lead to sustainable economic growth and enhanced research capabilities.

8. Conclusion and Reflections

This paper has examined the critical role of diaspora knowledge networks (DKNs) in addressing the disruptions to Afghanistan's scholarly knowledge systems caused by prolonged conflict and political instability. Despite the resilience and fundamental contributions of the Afghan knowledge community, ongoing conflicts have severely damaged the physical and intellectual infrastructure necessary for knowledge generation, dissemination, and preservation. The Taliban's resurgence in August 2021 has exacerbated these issues, posing a significant threat to the future of Afghanistan's higher education and scholarly knowledge production systems. Reflecting on the findings of this paper, several key insights and broader implications emerge that highlight the multifaceted role of DKNs in the context of Afghanistan's scholarly knowledge systems.

The Afghan diaspora, with its pool of skilled professionals and scholars, represents a crucial yet underutilized resource. By leveraging DKNs, the Afghan scholarly community can benefit from the preservation of local knowledge, the integration of global best practices, and the enhancement of academic standards and research capacity. These networks offer opportunities for collaborative research, digital transformation, and policy advocacy, all of which can contribute to the resilience and development of Afghanistan's scholarly knowledge systems.

However, several challenges must be addressed to fully harness the potential of DKNs. These include ensuring the sustainability of diaspora-led initiatives, improving coordination and integration with local institutions, navigating political and security instability, and overcoming cultural and social barriers. Additionally, enhancing the absorptive capacity of Afghan institutions is essential for effectively utilizing the knowledge and expertise transferred through DKNs.

Furthermore, effective engagement with DKNs necessitates a deep understanding of the cultural, social, and political dynamics of both the diaspora and the local Afghan context. Initiatives that lack cultural sensitivity or fail to include diverse perspectives may face resistance or fail to achieve their intended

impact. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt inclusive approaches that recognize and value the contributions of all community members, including women and marginalized groups.

Policymakers and international organizations have a crucial role to play in creating an enabling environment for DKNs. This includes providing funding and support for diaspora-led initiatives, developing policies that facilitate international academic collaborations, and ensuring that local institutions are equipped to engage with global knowledge networks. By prioritizing education and research in their development agendas, policymakers can help build a more resilient and sustainable scholarly knowledge system in Afghanistan.

Ultimately, integrating Afghan scholars into broader knowledge networks is not only crucial for preserving local scholarship but also for maintaining the integrity of the global knowledge community. By addressing the immediate disruptions and supporting the long-term development of Afghanistan's scholarly knowledge systems, DKNs can play a pivotal role in ensuring that Afghan scholars continue to contribute to the global body of knowledge amid ongoing political turmoil.

9. Limitations and Further Research

While this paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the role and implications of diaspora knowledge networks in addressing the disruptions to Afghanistan's scholarly knowledge systems, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study primarily relies on a literature review and secondary data sources. Consequently, the findings do not fully capture the unique aspects and nuances of Afghan scholarly and diaspora networks. Many sources are anecdotal or based on reports from international organizations, which may not fully represent the on-ground realities. Additionally, the scarcity of resources in Afghan languages restricted the depth of the analysis. This reliance on secondary data and English-language sources could introduce biases and overlook critical insights available in local languages such as Dari and Pashto.

Furthermore, the study draws heavily on theoretical frameworks and studies from non-Afghan contexts. While these frameworks provide valuable insights, they may not fully account for the specificities of Afghanistan's historical, cultural, and political landscape. The reliance on Western theoretical perspectives could introduce biases and overlook indigenous knowledge systems.

Moreover, while the paper highlights the critical role of DKNs, it does not extensively explore the perspectives of local Afghan scholars and institutions. The impact of internal efforts and the resilience of local academic communities in the face of political disruptions are areas that require further investigation. Future research should investigate how local academics perceive the role of DKNs, their experiences with knowledge transfer, and the challenges they face in collaborating with diaspora networks. Understanding these internal dynamics is essential for a holistic view of the scholarly knowledge system in Afghanistan. This local perspective can provide a more nuanced view of the interplay between diaspora and local scholarly efforts.

Furthermore, investigating the impact of DKNs on gender equality and social inclusion in Afghanistan's academic sector is critical. Future research should be conducted to assess how diaspora-led initiatives address gender disparities and promote the participation of marginalized groups in higher education and research. By addressing these areas, future research can provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the potential and challenges of diaspora knowledge networks in supporting Afghanistan's scholarly knowledge systems. This, in turn, can inform more effective strategies for leveraging diaspora contributions to foster sustainable academic and developmental progress in Afghanistan.

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