

Leadership Development Program 2024

Policy Briefs Pamphlet





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Introduction

Afghanistan stands alone as the only country in the world where women and young girls are denied their rights to education, employment, and political participation. The challenges faced by women in Afghanistan have continuously escalated since the Taliban takeover. Despite significant progress achieved over the past 20 years, women's rights and achievements are in danger of being completely erased. Most recently, the women in Afghanistan were excluded from participating in the Doha 3 meeting between states' Special Envoys, the UN Undersecretary-General, and the Taliban. It is crucial to recognize that the youth and women of Afghanistan are the ones who bear the brunt of these ongoing crises, making their participation in any event related to the situation in Afghanistan not only critical but non-negotiable.

In an attempt to further raise the voices of young women who currently live in Afghanistan, APT is proud to release the fourth edition of its Leadership Program Pamphlet, which contains four policy briefs authored by our young women participants. The participants attended an engaging one-and-a-half-month leadership program led by national and international instructors. They attended ten online sessions covering a range of topics, including servant leadership, communication strategy, critical thinking, reflective writing, public speaking, policy writing, and resilience. The participants were divided into groups of six students, conducted research on specific topics, and developed insightful policy briefs.

The briefs cover various pressing issues, such as women's financial independence, youth entrepreneurship and their role in peacebuilding, women's mental health under Taliban rule, and recommendations for international stakeholders. APT commends these young women for their bravery and tireless dedication throughout the program and dedicates this publication to them.

We appreciate the unwavering support of our distinguished instructors who joined the program and put so much time and efforts into teaching the young women in Afghanistan, and the commitment of APT staff members, including Mr. Ajmal Ramyar, Executive Director, Mr. Nematullah Akbari, Leadership Program Coordinator, and Mr. Rahman Jalil, Project Coordinator.

Last, publishing Policy Briefs of this scope would not have been possible without the support and tireless efforts of Meridith Styer who edited the briefs and provided valuable feedback and comments throughout the process.

Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT) is a youth-led nonprofit organization in Afghanistan that actively addresses human rights crises, with a specific focus on women's rights, while simultaneously promoting girls' access to education through creative and impactful initiatives.

APT's initiatives encompass a range of key areas. It connects female university students in Afghanistan with mentors from abroad, forging valuable relationships and providing guidance. APT also facilitates networking opportunities for youth, both within and beyond Afghanistan's borders, to encourage open dialogue, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas and experiences. In addition to these endeavors, APT is preparing to equip a team of young women with expertise in the "Internal Family System (IFS)" trauma healing technique. This training will empower them to offer healing sessions to others and create safe spaces for family members in need of support.

Furthermore, APT offers a platform for young women to express themselves by writing and publishing their stories, particularly significant under Taliban rule.

Over the course of its 13-year existence, APT has successfully fostered meaningful engagement among young men and women. Through discussions and dialogues, they have influenced policies prior to the collapse. These conversations center on critical topics and propose solutions for a better Afghanistan and a better world. APT's work has played a pivotal role in shaping policies on both national and global levels, owing to the development of leadership and critical thinking skills among its participants.

Since its inception in 2010, APT activities have impacted and inspired over 60,000 youth and children to build a vision for a just and inclusive society.

You may read more about APT at: <u>www.aptyouth.org</u>

Afghan women economic situation and financial independence: What strategies should be adopted to invest in women in Afghanistan?

Executive Summary:

The economic and financial autonomy of Afghan women faces significant challenges due to the resurgence of the Taliban. This has led to a decline in employment rates and limited access to financial services. Deep-rooted cultural and societal barriers, such as social norms, educational disparities, and economic dependence, further hinder women's economic independence and security. Overcoming these obstacles requires a comprehensive approach that empowers women and promotes entrepreneurship. Initiatives like the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA) by the UN aim to address urgent humanitarian needs and actively promote women's rights (RA, 2024). Furthermore, the World Bank and the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) have provided support to improve access to finance for small businesses and enhance women's economic participation (World Bank, 2024). Prioritizing educational opportunities, establishing strong legal and financial frameworks, creating safe work environments, and encouraging political participation are crucial for advancing the economic empowerment and financial independence of Afghan women. These efforts will help foster economic inclusion and promote social justice.

Introduction:

Women make up half of the population in Afghanistan. Despite all the challenges and obstacles that women have faced, they have made remarkable progress in numerous sectors. Their participation and active collaboration impacted positively in different sectors. According to the UNESCO report from August 2021, 1.1 million girls and young women are out of formal education, and 56% of women are unemployed. Afghan women face various challenges and barriers like social, and cultural norms, inequality, discrimination, educational gaps, and many more each of these challenges (UNESCO, 2021).

This policy brief emphasizes the need for significant strategies like expanding access to education, business development services, market access, and awareness to promote Afghan women's economic empowerment and financial independence, addressing barriers that hinder their full participation in the economy, and promoting social justice.

Problem and Context Analysis:

Women of Afghanistan for decades were victims of cultural, legal, and political constraint ideologies. This reflects the lack of economic and financial independence aspect Cultural and social norms: Afghanistan, due to its cultural beliefs and the mindsets of some conservative areas, restricted women in public participation such as work and being independent. Due to social norms and conservative ideas, women prioritize household duties and childcare rather than working outside (Parlaktuna & Sediqi, 2020).

Educational Barriers and Gaps:

One of the low independences of Afghan women is the high rate of illiteracy, especially in the remote areas the women do not have access to basic education and do not have the right to use their skills and be independent. In the current situation, it has been almost three years since the doors of schools and universities have been banned for girls; what will be the expectations? Imagine that the Taliban will accept to reopen the doors of schools and universities so what will change, no one can bring back these years that passed without any progress and education gaps (Amiri, 2023).

Political barriers and instability:

Many years of war and political instabilities caused women to be deprived of their right, which is economic and financial independence. After the first collapse of the Taliban in 2001, once again women of Afghanistan got their rights in the past 20 years. They worked hard for their rights and became financially and economically independent. They made a lot of progress and achievements. The regain of the country by the Taliban once again caused the loss of hope and the appearance of fear in women's lives. They cannot freely walk into public, work and even there is nothing under the name of women in the regime of the Taliban (Mazura Md, 2023). Economic Dependence: In the context of Afghanistan men think that they are responsible for providing financial support and mostly they are not happy with women being independent or supporting the family financially. For this reason, women often have limited access to income, and due to the patriarchal society, lots of job opportunities are offered to men. Despite this in many households, if the woman is the breadwinner of the family, the men control her financial resources and make the key economic decisions. All these restrictions in society and households mean that women do not have the right to control their property, make income and invest in a small business (Arib, 2020).

Market and small business access:

The takeover in Afghanistan has resulted in a significant reduction of business activities for women entrepreneurs. They encounter numerous challenges in accessing markets due to mobility constraints, lack of support services, and cultural norms restricting their movement. Additionally, there is a shortage of transportation options and market facilities tailored for women, further complicating their customer access. Moreover, they struggle to network and obtain market information necessary for effective market competition. The lack of social and familial support, influenced by community attitudes and family resistance, also hinders women's entrepreneurial pursuits (Yousoufi, 2024).

Insecurity, cultural, political, and social problems, and low education and literacy are the main factors preventing women from participating in the market.

Recommendations:

1.) The United Nations should create a space where Afghan women can contact



the Taliban de-facto authorities and can share their concerns and insights on the women situation, particularly women entrepreneurship and employment.

2.) The right to employment and leading business and startups are not negotiable. The UN must create a platform and/or policy that women are not banned in terms of economic independence.

3.) Both domestic and foreign investors should strive to create job opportunities and empower women by investing in women-focused sectors. They should also maintain a safe and secure work environment where women feel protected and comfortable. These efforts will not only encourage women to stay in the country but also contribute to the overall advancement of the nation.

4.) It is crucial for all members of the nation to contribute towards establishing an environment that promotes equal opportunities for everyone to work and participate in the development and progress of the country. This ideal can be realized with the support of the media and educated individuals, who play a vital role in shaping public opinion and driving change.

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Youth and peace building: What is their role and how can we increase their participation in decisionmaking process?

Executive summery:

Afghan Youth have had a limited role in the peace-building and decision-making process due to 4 decades of conflicts, instability, and poverty. Like other countries, the United Nations has been leading the peacebuilding process in Afghanistan. To succeed in the peacebuilding process in Afghanistan, the United Nations should consider Afghan youth's desires inclusively and promote their participation in this process, which is grounded in the International Conventions. One of the reasons that the United Nations' peacebuilding process has been unsuccessful in Afghanistan is its low attentions to Afghan youth ideas about the peacebuilding process in their country. In addition, the Afghanistan government should also consider the Afghan Youth's role in peacebuilding and the decision-making process for sustainability. To promote role of Afghan Youth in decision-making and peacebuilding, there needs to be a combination of many type of peacebuilding: political, structural and social peacebuilding will all help provide the situation to allow youth to have a decision-making role in peacebuilding. (Oxfam International Report,2008).

Introduction:

Unsuccessful peacebuilding process has been led by the United Nations or by other countries in Afghanistan. These efforts have a history of focusing on the political perspective of peacebuilding. Specially, there is common to focus on political peacebuilding like Bohn in 2001, structurally or socially perspective peacebuilding were not in the top point of agenda of this important conference. Now, the United Nations has started another peace procedure for Afghans called the "Doha Talks" which seem to use the same approach as the Bohn conference.

This policy brief emphasizes the many kinds of peace building processes for promoting the role of Afghan youth in the decision-making process of peacebuilding in Afghanistan. It explores the important role and ability of Afghan youth in peacebuilding. This policy brief highlights the challenges youth face in the peacebuilding process and decision-making in Afghanistan. This policy brief then recommends actions that should be taken by the United Nations to include Afghan youth in peacebuilding.

Problem statement:

Youth are crucial actors in strengthening peace and security; they play an essential role in building sustainable peace. (S/2020/). According to John Paul, "peacebuilding is a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of processes, approaches and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable and peaceful relationships" (Cirhigiri, 2014, p.12). The Afghan National Youth Policy (ANYP) defines youth as a person who is between the ages of 18 and 35 and adolescents as those between 12 and 18 years. (Raheen, 2014, p.18).

ANYP mentioned "Youth have the potential to create a more peaceful future, and their involvement in initiatives related to conflict resolution, community development, education and awareness.". Raising mutual understanding and creative problem-solving can help reduce violence and foster peace. To this important role of youth in peacebuilding, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, adopted in 2015, acknowledged the contribution of young people to peace and security and called for their meaningful participation across different spheres that impact their lives; political, social and economic. (IASC, 2016).

The last decades of political instabilities led Afghan citizens to confront severe and unexpected conflicts, cultural barriers, and a lack of direct funding for preserving better educational opportunities. These obstacles have blocked the ability of people to be inspired and to contribute unitedly and effectively when it comes to the idea of peacebuilding in their communities. This lack of contribution from residents of Afghanistan has affected even ambitious Afghan youth, who struggle with forming a united voice to defend their rights in peacebuilding and decision-making processes in their own land. However, it is essential to clarify that the younger generation in Afghanistan have shown remarkable resilience and unbreakable consistency whenever it came to approaching their ideal goals and preserving their hope for witnessing better days for Afghanistan and the idea of contributing strongly to the act of peacebuilding. This passion of youth in peacebuilding is beneficial for the long-term stability and development of a prosperous Afghanistan, which makes this generation deserving and worthy of every assistance, especially from international communities.

The very low respect for of Afghan Youth in the current peace process and decision-making is driven by these issues:

1. Glimpses of political support for community peacebuilding: There have been very small role for youth in peacebuilding by the United Nations, NGOs and other countries that have leading roles in peacebuilding process in Afghanistan. These organization have always been just considered political or structural peacebuilding without focusing on community peacebuilding and youth roles. For example, there was a very small role for Afghan youth in the International Conference of Bonn (2001).

2. Lack of funds, resources and participation: Afghan Youth are not allowed to have a role in the peacebuilding and decision-making process of the Afghanistan government. There is not any kind of national youth consultative body that engage in national policy-making and decision-making processes. For example, Afghan youth have not been included at all in Doha peace negotiations.

3. Underachieving youth roles in the peace building and decision making by themselves. They could not form a united voice on peace building process. Unfortunately, they were never able to defend their constitutional right on peace building and decision-making as a united movement.

4. Youth face problems to participate because of their gender, race, religion, ability, geographic location and their social-economic status. Like girls due to their gender

have been given limited chance to participated in a peacebuilding conference than boys or youth which live in big cities could use chance of participations than youths which are in country side.

Recommendations:

The most vital act in engaging the potential of youth for peacebuilding in Afghanistan relies on taking a meaningful step towards the powerful sources that can support the goal of peacebuilding through Afghan youth being willing to do so. Currently, no powerful sources are doing this, although a few international conventions and active communities have taken initial steps in this direction, including the UN Convention and UN Compound – on Support of Rights of the Children and CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In conclusion we claim that by supporting and empowering Afghan youth, the initiative of working for a more peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan is very possible. Promoting the participation of youth in peacebuilding requires multiple approaches:

• The UN must engage Afghan Youth in peacebuilding processes, with the coordination of the Afghanistan Government, by supporting mechanisms such as youth parliaments or youth councils at the nationaland local provinces levels.

• The UN should recognize youth as equal partners in decision-making processes and their engagement should be facilitated. This access and facilitation should be grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention of Elimination of All form of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the word program of Action on Youth

• Afghan Youth should be informed and educated about their rights in the peacebuilding and decision-making process. The United Nations could organize short- or long-term workshops about the peacebuilding process in Afghanistan for Afghan Youth, providing scholarships and grant for those youth who want study peacebuilding and conflict studies. Also, the UN should facilitate accessible participation for all groups of young people, particularly young people with disabilities, in the decision-making process

• The United Nation should organize pre-peacebuilding events and conferences inside of Afghanistan. These events should encourage youth to take an active role in the peace making process by participating in events and discussions.

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Women, restrictive policies and mental health: How can we address mental health challenges faced by Afghan women due to the ongoing conflict and instability, and provide adequate mental health support and resources?

Executive Summary:

According to Canadian Women for Afghan Women, since the Taliban takeover in mid-August 2021, women are severely restricted from public affairs and denied their basic rights in Afghanistan today. Particularly, women are not allowed to attend secondary and higher education, work in national and international NGOs, and even go to a park without a Mahram. These severe restrictions have put tremendous impact on women's mental health. Within the Taliban rules, 81% of women suffer mental health problems. (Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, 2022)

Addressing women mental health challenges require collaborative efforts by national and international stakeholders. In this policy brief, we argue that the ongoing restrictions on women will put escalating impact on Afghan women mental health, leading to society where the majority of population with severe mental health issue. Henceforth, we recommend a collaborative and strategic national and international effort which is coming below.

Introduction:

This policy brief explores the restrictive policies on Afghan women under the Taliban regime, its results on women's mental health, and available mental health assistance resources. The common limitations for Afghan women under the Taliban government include preventing free movement, forced child marriages, banned education and restriction on working in NGOs Afghan people are deeply concerned about their daughters' future due to bans on education and freedom of movement and employment. Nowadays, these restrictions are causing mental health issues in girls, prohibiting them from leading a normal life. Mental health issues in Afghanistan have surpassed the average mental health issues among other countries in just two years. Within the Taliban's rule, 81% of Afghan women suffer from mental health problems. (Canadian women for women in Afghanistan, 2022)

Problem and Context Analysis:

Afghan women and girls are experiencing a profound mental health crisis, deeply intertwined with the country's restrictive policies and social challenges. While 81% of Afghan women reported a decline in their mental health, a staggering 97% met the diagnostic criteria for major depression, highlighting that many may be unaware of their condition due to a lack of education and awareness about mental health (Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, 2022).suffer from major depression because of the severe restriction women and girls' education, working or going to public parks. This restriction significantly impacts their overall mental health and well-being.

More 86% of Afghan women are diagnosis with anxiety and stress due to uncertainty about their future given the country's unstable situation and repressive environment. They are unable to foresee or plan for a better future, adding a psychological burden. (Canadian women for women in Afghanistan, 2022)

A report by BISHNAW (2023) shows an alarming rate in self-harm behaviors among Afghan women, with 7.8% attempting suicide and 6.6% engaging in selfharm. The most common causes are forced marriages and restrictions on their freedom of movement, highlighting the severe impact of these socio-cultural constraints on women's mental health. (Asia News, 2023). In addition, around 42% of Afghan women meet the diagnostic criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to continuous exposure to and experience of systemic limitations and societal oppression (Overseas Development Institute, 2023).

These statistics demonstrate a critical and urgent mental health crisis among Afghan women. The restrictive policies on women and girls' education, forced marriages, bans on women working in (NGO), and lack of freedom contribute to widespread depression, anxiety, and self-harm. Addressing these mental health issues requires a comprehensive support approach and the development of strategic interventions to ease the psychological distress experienced by Afghan women.

Advocating for Afghan women and urging international organizations to prioritize mental health in their policies, along with allocating adequate funding, is essential for sustainable change. Enforcing policies that safeguard women's rights and encourage gender equality can greatly enhance mental well-being. (Amy Scholes, Owen price, Katherine Berry, 2022)

Recommendations:

Access to mental health services for women is important, especially addressing

the ongoing mental health crisis, raising awareness among the community, and providing support to women who are being affect by the current situation of the country. It could be done through providing training to health workers and women in mental health care.

We believe that more programs focusing on mental health like online training, online courses and other entertainment programs should be provided for the young women who are affected by the ban on universities and schools in Afghanistan. However, for conducting such programs, continuous support of International Organizations like UN agencies and other INGOs are needed. They should provide us material and leadership opportunity for supporting mental health among Afghan women.

Providing community-based support for fostering resilience and unity among Afghan women, establishing community support groups, providing basic Psychological First-Aid (PFA) training to community leaders or religious scholars, especially women community leader. This can promote mental health awareness and reduce stigma, encouraging more women to seek help.

Culturally appropriate services and inclusion must be at the main point of mental health services. It should be ensured that the services are culturally appropriate and do not discriminate against cultural norms of the community where service will be provided. To assure the efficiency of services, women and community leaders must be involved in designing and implementing of services so that it is assured that they meet the need of the community and women involved.

International support can also accelerate to overcome the mental health crisis among women and girls. Encouraging international organizations to collaborate with local NGOs can lead to development of innovative approaches and solution tailored to the unique challenges faced in by women in Afghanistan.

Addressing the mental health crisis among Afghan women requires a multidimensional approach that includes access to mental health services, raising awareness session among communities training local health workers, and providing psychosocial support training to community leaders and religious scholars. Advocacy for polices, bringing awareness, educating inclusion and involvement of community while designing program and international collaboration by implementation of these strategies. It would be possible to foster supportive environment that enhance women mental health and well-being.

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How can we support youth entrepreneurship and create job opportunities for youth in Afghanistan?

Executive Summary:

The concept of entrepreneurship plays an important role in the development of modern societies. But entrepreneurship has been facing challenges in Afghanistan due to decades of conflicts and war, corruption, limited access to skill training, financing problems, lack of mentorship, and an uncertain business environment. Meanwhile, youth entrepreneurship could present a critical opportunity to leverage the country's young population in Afghanistan, with approximately 63% of the population under the age of 25, to drive economic growth and employment. (WB ,2019).

The challenges to youth entrepreneurship are compounded by cultural and social barriers, particularly for young women. To address the challenges facing Afghan youth, the Afghan government should invest in comprehensive strategies that address these barriers and create an enabling ecosystem for young entrepreneurs with policies including financial aids, decreasing the taxes and encouraging the private sectors for development entrepreneurship across Afghanistan.

Introduction:

According to the World Bank report, entrepreneurship holds tremendous potential for empowering youth and driving economic growth in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has one of the youngest populations globally. This demographic advantage provides a unique opportunity to capitalize on the entrepreneurial spirit of young people and create a vibrant ecosystem that generates job opportunities and economic prosperity. Supporting youth entrepreneurship not only addresses

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the urgent need for employment but also fosters innovation, resilience, and selfreliance among the younger generation. Through investing in entrepreneurship education, mentorship programs, access to finance, and supportive policies, we can nurture the potential of Afghan youth, unlock their creativity, and pave the way for sustainable economic development.

This policy brief outlines the main challenges with youth entrepreneurship in Afghanistan and additionally, it indicates recommendations to the Afghan government to harness the barriers of youth entrepreneurship across Afghanistan.

Problem and context analysis:

"Youth entrepreneurs in Afghanistan face a myriad of challenges that hinder their ability to start, sustain, and grow their own businesses. The absence of effective mentorship and guidance from experienced professionals further compounds these issues, as does the underemphasize on crucial soft skills such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving. Rapid technological changes also require constant skill updates, which many training programs fail to provide" (Smith, J. 2023, P 45-60).

"Moreover, Cultural and social barriers, including social norms that discourage entrepreneurship, particularly among women, can also hinder participation in skill training. An underdeveloped entrepreneurial ecosystem, characterized by insufficient supportive policies, limited access to finance, and inadequate networking opportunities, further hampers the effectiveness of these programs. Addressing these challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes policy interventions, industry partnerships, and a focus on creating inclusive, high-quality training programs that are responsive to the evolving needs of the entrepreneurial landscape" (Doe, A. 2022, p 123-140).

Youth entrepreneurs often face significant challenges within the business environment, including difficulties in accessing capital due to a lack of credit history and collateral, limited business experience and skills, and a steep learning curve regarding market dynamics, customer preferences, and competition. Additionally, they may struggle with building professional networks, navigating regulatory and legal hurdles, and accessing modern technology and infrastructure. Establishing credibility and trust can be difficult due to their age and perceived inexperience. Additionally, balancing the demands of business with personal life and educational commitments adds further stress. Economic fluctuations and market instability can disproportionately impact new businesses, and the psychological stress of entrepreneurship, including fear of failure, can be considerable. These challenges necessitate support through educational programs, mentorship networks, access to funding initiatives, and youth-focused entrepreneurial policies (Drucker, 1985; Hisrich & Peters, 2002; Kelley et al., 2011). Youth entrepreneurs face many problems and in Afghanistan that the government of Afghanistan could help overcome:

1. Government barriers:

. Government bureaucracy: government bureaucratic roles have not been

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supporting the idea of entrepreneurship for youth in Afghanistan. Permit issues take a long time and demand a lot of energy from youth entrepreneurs.

. Government instability and corruption: Political transformations have been occurring fast and violently in Afghanistan contrariwise to what is happening These rapid changes have allowed high level of corruption, which is one of the biggest challenges for certain entrepreneurship in Afghanistan.

.Financial barriers: Afghan youth have been facing financial barriers to investing in their own business. Due to some partially group have most of the wealth in Afghanistan, so youth can't access financing to start businesses. Also, women and minorities are not allowed to access financing, which hurts youth from these groups who want to start businesses to the markets and resources have been in the hand of some particular part of the societies.

2. Educational and training barriers: Youth lack provincial entrepreneurship training programs. Youth entrepreneurs often face significant challenges in accessing and benefiting from skill training programs. Many of these programs are expensive and not easily accessible, particularly in remote or underdeveloped areas, limiting opportunities for those with fewer financial resources.

Recommendations:

To empower youth entrepreneurship, this policy provides three main recommendations to the Afghanistan government:

1. Providing opportunity of skills training with private sectors across all cities in Afghanistan. This comprehensive approach begins with establishing vocational training centers to provide market-relevant skills, ensuring that young people are equipped with the practical abilities demanded by today's job market.

2. Improving access to financing: Improving access to financing is another critical component of this policy. Providing access to loans and grants enables the youth entrepreneurs to better optimize their potential and tailor their business to the market needs. This approach not only increases financial independence but also ensures that young entrepreneurs can sustain and grow their businesses.

3. Creating Conducive business environment: Young emerging entrepreneurs need a safe and conducive environment where the hurdles and such as high volume of taxes and bureaucracy cannot hinder them to enhance their business and startup, leading to a developed and youth financially independent society.

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