

Hello and welcome to As It Is. I'm Jonathan Evans in Washington.

Today on the program, we tell how one Nigerian agency is working to raise the literacy rate among adults in northern Nigeria. But first, we turn to women's rights, jobs and education in Afghanistan.

Security risks are said to be widespread in the southern Afghan province of Kandahar. Yet the number of women working in Kandahar has risen during the past year. Mario Ritter has more.

Women Gain More Rights in Afghanistan

Jawaid Faisal is a spokesman for Kandahar's governor. Mr. Faisal told VOA's Afghan service that the provincial government employs more than 1,150 women, most of them as teachers. That is up from about 900 female teachers last year.

Kandahar is the former power base of the Taliban and its leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar. He disappeared in late 2001 after United States-led forces ousted the Taliban from power.

The Taliban ruled Kandahar from 1994 to 2002. During that period, women were banned from working outside the home. Most girls could not attend school, and no girls graduated. This year, 500 girls will complete high school.

Mohammad Ewaz Nazari is an education official in the province. He said Kandahar has about 47,000 female students. And the numbers are rising. He described an increasing demand for jobs among both educated and uneducated women.

Mr. Nazari said 600 illiterate women have asked the government to help them find work. He said the provincial government is attempting to find jobs for these women, who cannot read or write.

In addition to government positions such as teachers, women are also working for private businesses. Maryam Durani operates a local radio station. She is also a leading women's rights activist. She won the International Women of Courage Award in 2012, an award given by the American Secretary of State.

Maryam Durani said women in Kandahar need more job opportunities. But she also said they must consolidate -- strengthen -- the gains they have already made.

A non-governmental group, the Afghan School Project, has given women year-long scholarships that can lead to careers. The recipients attend programs at the Kandahar Institute of Modern Studies. The Institute offers training in business management, information technology, English and communications.

Some Afghans have expressed concern that the Taliban could regain power now that US troops are moving toward the end of fighting in Afghanistan. And they say the progress of women's rights could be lost if that happens.

I'm Mario Ritter.

And I'm Jonathan Evans. You are listening to As It Is.

Nigeria Promotes Literacy

Nigeria has one of the world's highest rates of people who cannot read or write. But a government agency is taking steps to help more than 400,000 Nigerians in Kano State become literate. Bob Doughty has more.

The Kano State Agency for Mass Education has set high goals for literacy. The goals may be hard to reach because the adults and young people the agency wants to teach are not attending school.

Minister of State for Education Nyesom Wike reported on the situation last September. The minister said the number of illiterate Nigerian adults has increased by 10 million over the past 20 years. The current total is 35 million. The nation also has more than 10 million children who are not in school.

To improve that situation, Kano's educational agency has joined with "Education for All" -- a project of the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Working together, they have launched more than 8,074 adult literacy classes in 44 local government councils. The effort is expected to reach about 403,700 people. Success would mean a 90 percent adult literacy level by 2015.

The agency says it has 16,000 facilitators to teach and train students. The aim is to extend its reach to all the 44 local government councils in the state.

Kano City Women Center is one of many learning centers for young and adult women. It serves 965 students at its school and 145 more women at a vocational or occupational center.

The school teaches English, mathematics, geography, biology, chemistry, economics, and other subjects. At the vocational center, women learn how to knit and sew and make products like soaps and air fresheners.

Halima Aminu is 25 years old and a mother of three children. She once left school because of a lack of financial support. She started attending the Kano City Women Center in 2010. Today, she is in her final year at the senior secondary-school level.

“When I come to school in the morning I will enter my class, when I finish learning - that is, taking lectures- then I will go back home. I have children, I will teach them and help them to do their homework ...”

Halima Aminu hopes to continue her education at the next level and someday become a medical doctor.

I’m Bob Doughty.

And that’s our program for today. Be sure to join us at this same time tomorrow for another As It Is. I’m Jonathan Evans. Thank you for listening.