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PRESSEMITTEILUNG

AFGHANISTAN: Desperate mother agreed to sell her unborn baby as debt-ridden families are pushed to crisis point

Kabul, 18 March – An Afghan mother agreed to sell her unborn baby as the country's economic crisis forces jobless, debt-stricken parents to abandon their children, Save the Children said.

Stories like these are becoming all too common in Afghanistan as destitute parents resort to increasingly desperate measures to survive. In a recent survey, Save the Children spoke to 30 families who had exchanged a child for debt, and analysis by the aid agency suggests that as many as 121,000 children could have been exchanged across the country since August 2021.

Nosheen*, 36, lives with her husband and their five children in Afghanistan's northern province of Jawzjan. She is pregnant with their sixth child, but her husband, Aziz* told her they had no choice but to sell the unborn child.

"Sad doesn't even come close to how I feel," said Nosheen. "If you lose a needle, you will be sad. This is my child. Of course, I will be sad."

Aziz, 47, explained they were offered approximately USD \$565 for their unborn baby, which would allow the family to repay a considerable portion of their debt.

He said: "We are in a very bad situation. We have nothing to eat in the house. Every day I go to the city centre to work. I hardly earn enough money for a few pieces of bread. Most days I can't find work. I decided that, as I have five children, I will sell our unborn child so that the others can survive and don't die of hunger."

The collapse of the economy and the ongoing fallout from last year's drought have triggered an unprecedented food crisis in Afghanistan. The majority of families have lost some or all of their incomes and are unable to afford the rising cost of food, and as the war in Ukraine increases the cost of commodities around the world, there's a risk that the cost of living in Afghanistan could rise even further. Save the Children's survey found that 96% of families are eating a very limited variety of foods or foods they do not want to eat, and more than half of adult respondents (52%), reported that their children were showing visible signs of malnutrition, such as thinning or stunted growth.

Like many families in Afghanistan, Nosheen and Aziz have resorted to borrowing money to feed their children and they are now in debt.

"I have borrowed 70,000 Afghanis (approximately \$809) for food," said Aziz. "Today people knocked at the door asking for their money. Being in debt is worse than being hungry because they demand the money every day, but I don't have money to pay."

"We wait for someone to bring us a few pieces of bread, if not we go hungry the whole day or night. I struggle hard to find work so that my children don't go hungry."

Save the Children has been supporting the family with cash assistance, and has since convinced the family not to go ahead with the sale of their child. The agency's child protection team will continue to visit the family regularly to ensure the child is safe and protected after it is born.

The foreign aid that once propped up Afghanistan has been slow to return after governments and international financial institutions cut funding and froze Afghanistan assets in the wake of last year's transition of power. Save the Children is calling for the international community to urgently find solutions to unfreeze financial assets to restart the Afghan economy, and warned that the measures are worsening the humanitarian crisis.

Save the Children's Director of Advocacy and Campaigns, Athena Rayburn, said:

"The tragic lengths that parents are going to, to keep their children alive tells you just how dire the situation is getting in Afghanistan. Organisations like ours are doing everything they can to support families who have lost everything, but with the economy at a standstill, Afghan families are sinking into quicksand."

"While the world's attention is on the plight of refugees fleeing Ukraine, we must not forget the people of Afghanistan. Funds are urgently needed to keep children alive and with their families. However, there is no amount of aid that can replace a functioning economy. Until we address the economic crisis, families will have no other option but to make desperate, life-altering decisions in order to survive."

Save the Children is providing families with urgent cash assistance, which helps to prevent families resorting to desperate measures like giving up their children, marrying their daughters or cutting back on meals.

At a recent cash distribution for struggling families, one mother, Fatima*, told Save the Children's team: "I have six children. I was even considering selling them because I can't afford to provide for them. We haven't paid the rent for the house for two months now. The owner warned us that he will throw us out into the snow. Getting this cash will save me from selling my child."

Since September the agency has reached 913,000 people – including 508,000 children – and provided more than 155,000 people with cash transfers. It is also identifying children who are at risk of neglect, exploitation, violence or abuse, and works with their families to come up with long-term solutions to ensure they are kept safe and have their rights protected.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Between November and December 2021, Save the Children surveyed 1,409 adult respondents in seven provinces where we have an operational presence: Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Kabul, Kandahar, Nangarhar and Sari-pul. 2.1% of respondents said they had exchanged a child for debt.

Stratified random cluster sampling was performed with the district as the primary sampling unit, and ensuring a gender balance among respondents. The districts represent the four regions of Afghanistan and cultural groups within them.

Our sample is representative of Save the Children's programme participant populations in the seven districts.

The seven districts are spread over the four regions of Afghanistan (West, South, East and North region) and represent all population characteristics in Afghanistan.

Foto- und Videomaterial finden Sie hier:

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Kontakt:

Save the Children Deutschland e.V.

Pressestelle – Silke Zorn

Tel.: +49 (0)30 – 27 59 59 79 – 232

Mail: silke.zorn@savethechildren.de

Für mehr aktuelle Informationen folgen Sie uns online:

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Über Save the Children

Im Nachkriegsjahr 1919 gründete die britische Sozialreformerin und Kinderrechtlerin Eglantyne Jebb Save the Children, um Kinder in Deutschland und Österreich vor dem Hungertod zu retten. Heute ist die inzwischen größte unabhängige Kinderrechtsorganisation der Welt in rund 120 Ländern tätig. Save the Children setzt sich ein für Kinder in Kriegen, Konflikten und Katastrophen. Für eine Welt, die die Rechte der Kinder achtet. Eine Welt, in der alle Kinder gesund und sicher leben und frei und selbstbestimmt aufwachsen und lernen können – seit über 100 Jahren.