



# ACBAR Advocacy Series

## NGO voices on education



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## Introduction

The Afghanistan Pilot Participatory Poverty Assessment (APPPA) is a project that, through civil society involvement, aims to collect, document, disseminate and advocate the 'voices' of poor Afghans for inclusion in the upcoming Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), and more broadly throughout civil society. APPPA will achieve this through a research component and an advocacy component.

This paper is one of a series of advocacy papers produced in the advocacy component, the purpose of which is to improve the quality of civil society - including non-governmental organizations (NGO) engagement in sectoral debates and to provide recommendations for implementation of sectoral activities. This will be achieved through the presentation of the perspectives of the NGO community in relation to sectors identified, during the APPPA research component, as priorities by APPPA-target communities. For a more comprehensive understanding of the issues identified, further inquiry and discussion is advised.

Based upon the sectoral priorities identified by APPPA-target communities, a number of national and international NGOs working within the education sector were approached for interviews and to participate in a subsequent round table discussion. The issues emerging from these interviews were tabled for validation in the roundtable discussion, which also allowed participants to prioritize issues and propose recommendations. The resulting draft advocacy paper was then circulated for comments to ACBAR's membership who provided feedback for integration.

It should be noted that this paper does not reflect an exhaustive investigation of the sector's technical areas, nor can it be presumed that the issues presented are held by consensus among the diverse range of NGOs consulted.

The education sector is one of the most costly to the state: in addition to the Government budget over \$425 million has been invested in the sector by the major donors between 2002 and 2006<sup>1</sup>. 44.6% of the population is under the age of 14<sup>2</sup> and almost 20% under the age of 5<sup>3</sup>. Only 25% of school buildings were categorised as "useable" at the end of 2006<sup>4</sup>. There is a huge shortage of qualified school teachers, especially women and predominantly in rural areas, currently less than 50% are high school graduates<sup>5</sup>.

From the research and Roundtable discussion undertaken a consensus was reached in recognising and prioritising the principle issues faced by NGOs and the Education system in general.

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<sup>1</sup> Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Programme (LRRD) in Afghanistan: Education Sector Review in Afghanistan (2001 – 2006), Banzet and Geoffroy, 2006

<sup>2</sup> IndexMundi.com

<sup>3</sup> Program Proposal: Girls Education Support Program, Aga Khan Foundation- Canada (AKFC), July 2007

<sup>4</sup> Parents and Children Speak Out: Is Government-Provided Education Fulfilling Afghan Children's Rights, Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, Bourguignon, September 2007

<sup>5</sup> Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Programme (LRRD) in Afghanistan: Education Sector Review in Afghanistan (2001 – 2006), Urgence Rehabilitation developpement D, Banzet and Geoffroy, 2006

### Underpinning Issue

- The importance of continued capacity and co-ordination enhancement

### Prioritised issues:

1. Increasing the number of teachers (for formal and non formal education)
2. Increasing the provision of quality education.
3. Improving access to quality and appropriate education, classrooms and school facilities

### Consulted Agencies (Interview and Roundtable Participants)

Afghan Development Association, Aga Khan Foundation (Afghanistan), American University of Afghanistan, CARE International, Concern, Coordination of Afghan Relief, Hope Worldwide, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children USA, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, Turquoise Mountain Foundation



## THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUED CAPACITY AND CO-ORDINATION ENHANCEMENT

Participants recognised that a clear, efficient and successful education policy requires continued improvement in the capacity and coordination of the three Ministries involved in the provision of education: the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled (MoE, MoHE and MoLSAMD). Coordination within and between these ministries, NGOs, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and donor bodies needs to increase to ensure policy is effected in an organised and efficient manner. The high turnover rate of senior administrative staff within these ministries is one of the main factors in preventing the level of progress seen within other ministries.

“The current system is flawed [due to] the turnover of Ministers of Higher Education, all entering the role with different ideas, generally not liking the previous plan and replacing it with a different one”.  
University Staff Member

The education sector is one of the most costly to the state, the vast majority of the MoE budget is spent solely on salaries, to the detriment of basic internal infrastructure. Additionally, both the MoE and the MoHE are dependant upon external expertise and financial aid to function at current levels; over \$425 million has been invested in the education sector by the major donors between 2002 and 2006<sup>6</sup>.

Despite huge efforts corruption is viewed as endemic, examples range from nepotism to ghost teachers on the payroll to the misappropriation of school materials e.g. textbooks.

Each ministry is highly bureaucratic, with few decision makers all at a central position; this affects all aspects of the running of the education system. Some participants interviewed felt that the Government is autocratic and its employees may have lost sight of the fact that they are the civil servants of Afghanistan.

“The current system is flawed [due to] the turnover of Ministers of Higher Education, all entering the role with different ideas, generally not liking the previous plan and replacing it with a different one”.

## Key Recommendations

Recommendation: Departments within the ministries should continue to restructure. Ministries with overlapping roles should work together and inter-ministerial dialogue should be promoted. CSOs should facilitate this where they have the expertise. Donors need to ensure funding conditions are met and that there is accountability where they are not.

Recommendation: Clear and comprehensive legislation devised by experts within education in conjunction with, rather than just by, lawyers and politicians is required. Continuity of education policy should be maintained, allowing for changes in ministers.

Recommendation: Decentralization of ministerial responsibilities should take place to increase efficiency and decrease actual and perceived levels of bureaucracy, as well as promoting capacity building of all levels of the Government.

Recommendation: Universities should be given autonomy, allowing individual institutions to select students, curriculum, testing and the intake per subject.

<sup>6</sup> Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Programme (LRRD) in Afghanistan: Education Sector Review in Afghanistan (2001 – 2006), Urgence Rehabilitation developpement D, Banzet and Geoffroy, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Program Proposal: Girls Education Support Program, AKF (Canada) , July 2007

<sup>8</sup> Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education Strategy for The Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2007

## INCREASING THE NUMBER OF TEACHERS (FOR FORMAL AND NON FORMAL EDUCATION)

The shortage of qualified teachers, especially women and especially in rural areas, continues. Currently there are 68,000 practicing, though not necessarily qualified, primary school teachers. In order to fulfil the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) of an estimated teacher requirement of 180,000 primary school teachers, this number would have to grow by 9% pa<sup>7</sup>.

Donor focus remains on increasing the numbers of primary and secondary school teachers- predominantly female, which, although benefiting this predominant section of society, results in less funding for Universities and many vocational education programmes.

Teaching is viewed by many as a career, certainly in urban areas, for people who have failed the University entrance examination. Those with a grade 14 education often prefer to go to University and onto a professional career with a higher earning capacity.

Newly qualified teachers (NQT) are required to teach within the state system for a minimum number of years, dependant on the course completed. In practice however, these obligations are often not fulfilled<sup>8</sup>.

The low salary of state school teachers affects recruitment and retention; they often have to take on additional employment which has a negative effect on the quality of their teaching<sup>9</sup>. Many trained teachers prefer to work for international institutions or private schools where they can earn far more than the state salary they are offered.

“Teachers, especially those of girls, remain targets of the Taliban insurgents.”  
-NGO staff member

Private schooling reduces the burden from the state sector. Participants endorse the promotion of the private system, monitored and accredited by the MoE, within the new Education Strategy.

Security remains an underlying factor influencing the uptake of teaching posts in some rural/ conservative areas, especially for women where they may face threats or murder.

“Teachers, especially those of girls, remain targets of the Taliban insurgents”. NGO Staff Member

## Key Recommendations

Recommendation: In rural areas students should be accepted into teacher training with a lower grade of education (Grade 9) to teach the first few grades, rather than the state requirement, for permanent teaching positions, of Grade 12. These teachers can be improved educationally over time in several ways:

- Actively support rural communities to “grow their own” teachers from within their communities, thus mitigating cultural issues and some security issues.
- Teacher preparation classes, scholarships and community involvement can be utilised to enhance the attractiveness of teaching as a career and selection of future teachers.
- Accredited pre-service and in-service training should be provided to bring less qualified teachers up to standard over time.

Recommendation: Legislation requiring all NQT complete their minimum return of service should be implemented, ensuring a steady stream of new teachers enter the system whilst repaying the cost, via employment, of their training.

Recommendation: State teaching salaries need to be increased across all geographic areas. Teaching will become a more economically attractive career; with a reasonable standard of living attained it will also allow teachers the freedom to concentrate on teaching.

“If you have got talented teachers you can take big steps in overall education development”. NGO Staff Member

Recommendation: The profile of teaching as a career can be further raised by portraying teaching as a highly valued career via national campaigns and within the media.

## INCREASING THE PROVISION OF QUALITY EDUCATION

One of the principal challenges facing the education system throughout Afghanistan is the current quality of education provided. The quality issue encompasses concerns such as the educational standard of teachers, the training they have received, the teaching practices employed, accreditation and the resources available to both teachers and students.

The MoE strategy states that in order to be employed as a permanent teacher, recruited by the MoE, one must have attained Grade 12 to teach in the provinces and Grade 14 to teach within Kabul. Teachers recruited at a provincial level are employed as contract teachers and cannot access the same benefits as the former, but are also not restricted by the same educational requirements.

Much time spent within Teacher Training College (TTC) is involved in increasing the general standard of education of the trainees to that of Grade 14, which is the educational standard required for University entrance. The focus on content areas over pedagogy leaves little or no time for focussing on teaching and pedagogical skills training, and leads to some graduates of the TTCs entering University rather than teaching as a profession.

Due to the standard of current teacher training, most teachers are ill equipped with the subject area knowledge, pedagogical skills and classroom experience necessary to provide quality instruction. The Afghanistan Compact states that by 1389 70% of teachers will have passed a competency test. Although this goal is admirable, it seems ambitious to attempt. This would need to test knowledge at the highest curriculum level teachers are likely to teach and also encompass teaching methods, the latter of which are not the mainstay of teacher training curriculum.

There are still not enough teaching resources, including text books and teaching guides. The national curriculum textbooks that are in circulation, despite editing, contain too many mistakes and have not been printed in all relevant languages.

Higher education students and lecturers cannot access relevant library books in languages they can understand. Often specialised books are written only in English and in many cases faculty libraries remain locked for fear that books may be stolen. Higher education institutions, therefore, often depend on outdated lecture notes. This practice also occurs in some vocational education establishments.

“By gaining Dari books the students would be able to feed their interest and knowledge, we want to do this but with the cost and non-availability of such books we are as yet unable to do this”. NGO Staff Member

Higher Education institutions are disconnected; there is little communication and resource sharing despite both the shortages in resources (teaching expertise and physical resources) and the geographical closeness of some institutions.

Corporal punishment continues throughout most formal educational institutions, despite legislation and

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-NGO Staff Member

work to address this problem. Current teaching practices are not student centred, teachers predominantly lecture at students, rather than allowing a two way dialogue.

“Schools are not friendly to students, democracy should start in primary schools with a relationship between students and teachers...some faculties beat their students; this is not constructive or appropriate”.  
NGO Staff Member

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There is no credentialing and accreditation system within vocational education, creating difficulty in assessing students and defining qualifications. Within the universities, education credentialing is still based on seat time rather than demonstrated mastery of the course content. Additionally, when a student fails just one class the whole quarter is failed, putting a financial burden on students and their families and tying up university places.

The lack of a standardized credentialing system based on mastery of course content also impacts returning refugee children and students who may have attained a higher level of education than that received by their peers. For instance, unless returnee children have a full high school diploma, they

are usually placed within a class a grade lower than that which they have been accredited with, due to the difference in the quality of education received<sup>10</sup>.

## Key Recommendations

Recommendation: Mechanisms for teachers to improve themselves need to be established, for instance in-service courses, especially for females, with remote support to ensure that the learning outcomes from such courses are translated into real classroom improvements. For morale it is also important that these are accredited.

Recommendation: Further advances need to be made in the production and content of both quality school curriculum text books and in the appropriation of translations of higher education text books. In terms of resources and their distribution, investment in logistical systems needs to be made.

Recommendation: Higher education institutions should share resources, for instance students should be granted access to any university library.

Recommendation: TTC curriculum and in-service training should include training in alternative discipline methods, which should be rolled out into all educational institutions. It should also provide a greater focus on teaching methods and skills, in order to create a practical student centred education system.

Recommendation: National accreditation system(s) need to be formalised and implemented. Such system(s) need to be recognized by all three ministries; with training given to education providers.

<sup>10</sup> Sector Reform in Public Health, Education & Urban Services 2007 A report by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), July 20, 2007

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO QUALITY APPROPRIATE EDUCATION, CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOL FACILITIES

There are still a wide range of barriers to education within the country. These barriers vary considerably and if the Government is going to achieve its Afghanistan Compact goal of gaining 75% male and 60% female enrolment by 2010 it must continue to address the issues of access to quality education.

Despite ongoing rebuilding and renovations there are still vastly insufficient permanent classrooms and schools. Many "schools" are still either tents or outdoor areas, without adequate sanitary facilities or access to drinking water. Schools in insecure areas, particularly those educating girls, remain the targets of insurgents.

Parents are unwilling to allow their children, especially daughters, to travel long distances to school, citing harassment and security risks. Seasonal extremes create additional problems travelling to school and affect the length of the school year regionally; the hardship of dealing with weather extremes is further exacerbated by inadequate or non-existent power supply for heating and cooling.

There is a significant drop out rate amongst children nationally, especially girls from Grade 4 onwards, stemming from four main issues: parental beliefs/ attitudes, poverty, availability and quality of education provided. For girls, in some areas, this stems from the belief that girls are more useful to the family working at home and preparing for marriage. In other areas it revolves around the availability of a female teacher and the culturally appropriate/ necessary dividers and dual facilities for gender segregation, including the ample provision of University female dormitories.

Whilst it is acceptable in many areas for pre-pubescent girls to be taught by male teachers before the age of 10 or 11, after puberty parents will withdraw girls from schools with insufficient divided/ dual facilities. In other areas differing cultural attitudes towards women require that a completely separate school structure exists.

The naming of schools affects acceptability, where one school exists in a location it is generally called a "boys school", regardless of whether it admits girls; where this is the official description of a school many parents are unwilling to allow their girls to attend.

In schools with a large intake and many shifts it is common for children to receive only two and a half hours of teaching each day. It is unsurprising that after several years of this level of teaching many children remain illiterate and that the parents perceive the value and benefit such a school education provides is less than that the child could gain in employment.

In many rural areas there is no access to education post Grade 6, despite education to Grade 9 being free and compulsory for all children, leaving no option but to leave the school system.

"If people know that somebody who graduates from Grade 6 is no different than he was before, then they won't send their children to school". NGO Staff Member

"Quality education" was deemed by parents to include the following: daily homework, the presence of teachers who know how to teach, a child's enjoyment of school, and his or her ability to read and write – AREU Briefing paper Series: Looking Beyond the School Walls, 2006.

# Key Recommendations

Recommendation: Increased building of schools, utilising local materials and labour. The buildings are cheap and simple for a community to maintain; many participants felt that 'community owned' buildings would be protected to a degree from damage.

Recommendation: Where alternative transport does not exist, local adults could be utilised to walk with the children to their school, addressing some safety issues. This solution does not, however, assist pupils or teachers travelling to remote schools in periods of bad weather e.g. spring floods, which closes off access by foot.

Recommendation: Attention to the naming of schools needs to be given – especially in rural areas, when only one building exists and a school has both a boys and a girls shift, schools should be called "Boys and Girls School" and contain the necessary dividers.

Recommendation: To reduce drop out rates, in addition to raising quality and duration of lesson time, participants felt the provision of a clear academic route for students (including vocational education), taking ability into consideration was a necessity.



A girl in Roshana Balkhi High School in Mazar-e-Sharif fills in as the teacher of 45 girls in the class.

# Key Recommendations and Conclusions

The keystone of creating a national education strategy is the ability of the three ministries involved in educational provision, together with the Ministry of Finance, to coordinate and communicate effectively with each other and the provincial and district education officials. Devolution of power also needs to occur in order that officials at provincial and district levels can make decisions and that universities can become more autonomous. In order that this can occur civil society needs to continue assisting in the establishment of the systems and the enhancement of capabilities of individuals. All Roundtable participants reached the consensus that this underpins all other issues.

NGOs consulted advocate that increasing the number of teachers is the top priority, allowing for the above. Simply, there are not enough and this problem is set to increase with the age demographic of the population. The state needs to attract career teachers and needs to address four main issues in doing so: the low current educational standard of the population nationally (and therefore of possible teachers), the better salary that educated individuals can command elsewhere, the safety issues that surround teachers, especially female, in some areas and finally the profile of teaching is low; teaching is often viewed as a career for those that fail to get into university.

The issue of the current quality of education revolves around the training provided to and the ability of teachers. TTCs were identified as generally being places to attain Grade 14 education rather than learning teaching skills. The issue of quality also covers the lack of quality resources available, including state text books within schools and the provision of specialist texts within universities- all of which need to be translated into appropriate languages. Finally, in order to assess the quality of teaching and learning a formalised system of credentialing and accreditation needs to be constructed and rolled out.

Access to quality education was acknowledged by participants as inextricably linked with the need for classrooms and school facilities. Afghanistan is large and geographically diverse, with its population predominantly spread over the varied rural terrain; the seasonal extremes affect access to schools which are often some distance from settlements, this distance also aggravates safety fears adults have for their children, particularly girls. The erratic provision of electricity for heating and cooling adds to the problem of attaining a full school year. The availability of buildings, teachers and facilities for both boys and girls continues to be an issue, often there is no local schooling beyond Grade 6. The lack of facilities and teachers affect drop out rates for both boys and girls. Recommendations included in this report include establishing classes closer to settlements, or organising local adults to walk with children where no alternative exists and re-naming schools. Finally, creating and publicising a clear academic pathway for learners will demonstrate to communities where their education may take them.





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