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EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT



FINANCING EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

Country Case Study for the Oslo Summit
on Education for Development

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This country case study is one in a series of country reports prepared for the Oslo Summit on July 6-7, 2015 and coordinated by the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution. The meeting – co-hosted by the Government of Norway and the UN Special Envoy for Global Education – will bring together partner and donor countries, multilateral organisations, civil society, the private sector, foundations and academia. It aims at mobilizing a strong and renewed political commitment to reach the 58 million children who are still being denied their right to education and to strengthen learning outcomes for children and youth. The Summit will bring forward success stories and best practices that can be taken to scale by bringing in new partners and mobilising funding, as well as illustrate bottlenecks and how they may be overcome.

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ACRONYMS

ARTF	Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DFID	Department for International Development
EFA	Education for All
ESPA	Education Support Programme to Afghanistan
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Project
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOA	Government of Afghanistan
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HRDB	Human Resource Development Board
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
NAC	Norwegian Afghanistan Committee
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TTC	Teacher Training Colleges
UNESCO	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
WB	The World Bank

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Afghanistan illustrates how a country emerging from decades of war and in a continued state of conflict has, together with its donors, a will to prioritize education. It is a success story in increased availability of and participation in education, girls included. This case study, however, documents the challenges of building up a management structure to handle such a progression in order to ensure the collection of accurate data for reporting and planning, the training and development of a sufficient number of qualified teachers, and the provision of monitoring, evaluation, and assessment of the quality of education.

The Afghan Ministry of Education estimates that there are presently 8.35 million students (39% of which are girls) in primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary government schools, including Islamic schooling, out of a school-aged population of 10.33 million. However, 3.3 million children, the majority of which are girls, are still out of school. The share of the population that is 25 years or older and has completed any level of formal education is less than 7% for men and 3% for women.

The major inequities in the Afghan education system include gender, geographic location, and language. Afghanistan has the highest level of gender disparity in primary education in the world, with only 71 girls in primary school for every 100 boys. Only 21% of girls complete primary education, with cultural barriers, such as early marriages, and a lack of female teachers being two of the main obstacles. There are also major differences in enrollment between rural and urban areas.

The Afghan education sector is confronted with numerous bottlenecks. Issues of supply include insecurity, limited human resources, infrastructure, teachers and teacher training, and teaching materials, while issues of demand side include economic factors, cultural barriers, and governance and capacity.

Afghanistan is presently the world's second largest recipient of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and dependent on external donors to maintain and develop their education sector. A noted concern is the expected reduction in external funding and the ensuing ability of the Afghan government to maintain their own revenue generation. The majority of donors channel their funding for education through the World Bank administrated Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund and the Education Quality Improvement Project. Afghanistan has joined the Global Partnership for Education. Private sector contributions are virtually non-existent.

There are a number of opportunities for action in the education sector, particularly to increase education for girls and increase the quality of the education. Among the recommendations are to strengthen and develop teacher training, increase the number of qualified teachers, and assess if and how the NGOs and CBOs might take on a larger role.

It is equally important to strengthen the MOE, specifically data and coordination efforts, to create mechanisms for competency-based hiring, improve the system for collecting and handling education data, and strengthen linkages and collaborations with other Ministries.

The Government of Afghanistan and donors are advised to explore any possibility for more girls to attend and stay in school. The government is advised to communicate transparently with donors on achievements and challenges to gain and maintain trust.

The Government of Afghanistan is recommended to build a domestic resources and support base, advocate the Afghan Parliament for the continued prioritization of funding for education in upcoming Afghan budgets, find ways to tap into private sector funds, and ensure a dialogue with local communities on their role in resource mobilization and support for education.

I. ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF EDUCATION¹

Afghanistan illustrates how a country emerging from decades of war and in a continued state of conflict has, together with its donors, a will to prioritize education. It is a success story in increased availability of and participation in education, girls included. This case study, however, documents the challenges of building up a management structure to handle such a progression in order to ensure the collection of accurate data for reporting and planning, training and development of a sufficient number of qualified teachers, and the provision of monitoring, evaluation, and assessment of the quality of education. In recognition of these difficulties, Afghanistan's timeframe for achieving the 2015 Education For All (EFA) goals was extended to 2020 when Afghanistan joined the EFA movement in 2005.

Access to Education

In the new Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, approved in 2004, Article 22 states that "education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan." The right to education for all Afghan children, regardless of their gender, abilities, disabilities, backgrounds, or circumstances is reiterated in the Education Law, adopted in August 2008.

School attendance was extremely low when Taliban rule ended in 2001, with only 1 million children receiving education, mostly boys. Many of the schools were run by NGOs, including for girls, with religious schools (madaris) also providing children basic reading and writing skills. Only in late 2001 did the Government of Afghanistan (GOA) assume responsibility for the education sector, gradually taking over from the NGOs over the next years.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) estimates that there are presently 8.35 million students (39% of which are girls) in primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary government schools, including Islamic schooling, out of a school-aged population of 10.33 million.² These numbers might be lower, as data from 2013 indicated that as many as 1.55 million students may be absent or have dropped out of school. The net enrollment rate (NER) in primary education in 2013 was reported at 64% for girls and 86% for boys, while NER in General Education (grades 1-12) was 50% for girls and 71% for boys. The estimated annual drop out rate is between 5 and 7% (about 400,000 students), and there are still 3.3 million children, the majority girls, reported to be out of school.

The number of students in universities, governmental institutes, and private higher education institutes was reported to be 200,000 in 2013 – one of the world's lowest. Even though the number of universities and institutes has increased from 17 to more than 150 since 2001, they are primarily private and concentrated in the capital Kabul as well as larger urban cities. Technical skills training and vocational education is provided for 81,812 students (20% female) in 105 institutes and 145 schools, though also predominantly in urban areas. The share of the population that is 25 years or older and has completed any level of formal education is less than 7% for men and 3% for women, according to the GOA.

The number of teachers was around 187,000 in 2013 (32% female), while the number of students studying to become teachers was 72,000 (53% female). The pupil to teacher ratio (PTR) in primary education was 45:1 in 2013 as compared to the international norm of 40:1, though with variations between 35:1 and up to 54:1 in the provinces. Only 10 of 35 provinces are within the norm.

There is noted concern over the inclusion (or lack thereof) of vulnerable groups and children with disabilities into the education system. The MOE acknowledges a lack of follow through despite the signing of the Kabul Declaration on Inclusive Education in 2010 and the Road Map towards Inclusion in 2009. A number of NGOs are active in this field and complement the limited MOE activities; some address how schools and the education are organized, others how education is tailored to different groups of vulnerability, and a few on developing teacher education tailored to these groups.³

Inequities in education

The major inequities in the Afghan education system include gender, geographic location, and language. Afghanistan has the highest level of gender disparity in primary education in the world, with only 71 girls in primary school for every 100 boys.⁴ Only 21% of girls complete primary school, with cultural barriers, such as early marriages, and a lack of female teachers being two of the main obstacles (GOA 2015).

There is also a major difference in enrollment in primary education between rural and urban areas. The Education Inequality profile for Afghanistan⁵ shows that 58% of boys and 52% of girls in urban areas attend school, while in rural areas only 41% of boys and 28% of girls attend. To further highlight both the gender and location disparities, 80% of the richest boys in urban areas completed primary school in 2011, while the same was true for only 4% of the poorest girls living in rural areas.

Finally, there are major disparities between two of the main language groups - the Dari language, spoken in central and northern Afghanistan and in major cities, and the Pashtu language, spoken in the southern parts of the country. Students using Dari had the highest level of educational attainment with 52% having completed at least primary education, while the number for those using Pashtu is only 29%. Smaller language groups, such as the Uzbek/Turkmens, are even lower at 23% primary school completion. Language disparities may be further exacerbated by gender, as the least performing sub-group are Pashtu-speaking girls living in the southern part of Afghanistan, the area with the highest conflict level and the strictest segregation between genders.

Quality of education and learning

The rapid build-up of the Afghan education sector provides challenges both for ensuring and measuring the quality of education and learning. The GOA points out that "By most standards, the education quality in Afghanistan is very low. Learning outcomes are generally poor. A few sample studies suggest that about less than half of the children are able to meet the minimum required learning outcome at their level of study." Furthermore, it has found that for technical training "most of the education is theoretical and of very little practical value" (GOA 2015).

The first learning assessment for the Class 6 level was recently released,⁶ stating "...while there are small numbers of Class 6 students operating at the higher level of proficiency in each of the domains of reading, writing and mathematical literacy, there is a substantial proportion of the population that is not able to perform simple reading, writing and mathematical tasks." A comparison with three peer regional countries indicates that their Class 4 students are performing at a similar or a higher level compared to Class 6 students in Afghanistan. The report suggests that "what is needed is a focus on the quality of teaching, both through policy and planning in the wider level, and through the professional practice of individual teachers in classrooms."

II. KEY BOTTLENECKS

The education sector has achieved great growth over the past decade, especially given its extremely challenging starting point. However, Afghan education is confronted with numerous bottlenecks, both on the supply side (including security, limited human resources, infrastructure, teachers and teacher training, and teaching materials) as well as the demand side (including economic factors, cultural barriers, and governance and capacity).

Supply side:

Security

Afghan education has been strongly influenced by a challenging security situation in parts of the country, especially the southern regions. In 2012, 553 schools (almost 10%) with 275,000 students were closed due to insecurity, and the number is probably higher today.

Infrastructure

In 2013, there were 14,600 government schools in operation, of which 6,100 were primary schools (41%), 27% lower secondary schools, and 32% upper secondary schools. Only half of government schools operated from dedicated school buildings; the rest are in open areas, tents, mosques, and private houses. Around 30% of schools lack safe drinking water, 60% lack sanitation, and about 31% are running on multi-shifts. About 2.5 million children in primary school age do not have access to school within two kilometers, assumed to be normal travel distance for that age group. As such, many students find this learning environment to be very challenging and having negatively influenced both their learning and how long they stay in school. The MOE is concerned that multi-shifts, while allowing more students to access schooling, reduce teaching hours per student and may have a negative impact on learning quality.

Afghanistan has a very young population, with 50% under the age of 15 and 35% of the population of school age. The large youth population, combined with an annual population growth of 2.4% (according to the World Bank) and a trend towards urbanization, will present new challenges for the MOE in coming years.

Teachers and teacher training

Despite major efforts to recruit and train teachers, only 43% meet the minimum qualification requirements to teach at all levels. Most of those who are qualified seek to teach in urban schools, as they find better living conditions, more services easily available (including nurseries for their children), and generally better security. This leaves rural areas with a pool of unqualified teachers that are largely hired on a contract basis and unable to deliver appropriate instruction to students.

Nevertheless, the capacity building of teachers has been a priority of the MOE in recent years. Around 70% have received three sets of short trainings designed to improve basic classroom management skills. Teacher Training Colleges are established in all provinces, with an increasing number of “rural satellites” colleges in place for those who cannot easily access urban centers. However, the majority of students who are accepted into these colleges are students with the lowest marks from secondary school, many of whom failed to enter universities. Furthermore, teachers interviewed for this case study had experienced resistance from provincial school administrations to adapt new teaching methodologies. Reasons for this resistance could include unfamiliarity on the part of current administrators with emergent methodologies and preference for the old system of having students repeat after the teacher.

Teaching materials

There has been a major investment in developing new curricula and teaching materials in recent years, drawing on international and regional expertise. New books and teacher guides have been prepared for all grades, but distribution throughout the country has been slow. As more teachers gain experience with this new material, revisions and updates will be expected.

Demand side

There are equally many bottlenecks inhibiting education on the demand side. This is partly due to the decades of conflicts in Afghanistan and partly due to limitations set by culture and tradition, the latter creating a particular barrier to girls' education.

Economic factors

The Afghan economy is extremely weak, and despite massive international support over the last decade, Afghanistan was ranked as the 13th least developed country on the 2013 Human Development Index. The GOA National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment for 2011-12 established that 36.5% of Afghans were not able to meet their basic needs and are under the national poverty line, defined at 1.255 Afs (USD \$22) per person per month.⁷

As such, many parents are not able to prioritize sending their children to school, instead considering them as needed in the household or for securing the income of the family. GOA statistics shows that 21% of Afghan children (about 1.9 million) aged 6-17 years are working, and of these 13% can be classified as child laborers. The decision to work contributes to low school attendance and high drop out rates.

Cultural barriers and early marriage

In addition, there are a number of cultural barriers and limitations set by tradition, especially for girls. According to the MOE, cultural barriers are the primary reason that girls do not attend school and/or that their parents do not allow them to do so. Early marriage is one of the main reasons. The United Nations Population Fund estimates that "some 46% of Afghani women are married by age 18, 15% of them before age 15."⁸ A second reason is the shortage of female teachers. Only 31.7% of teachers and 17.4% of primary school teachers are women. There are four provinces with less than 5% female teachers, and 80 out of 364 districts have no female teachers at all. Finally, the lack of facilities and surrounding walls leave girls feeling vulnerable and prevent them from wanting to attend school. These cultural barriers are particularly strong in the conflict-affected southern and southeastern parts of Afghanistan, as illustrated by the inequality data.

Governance and capacity

Great time and effort has been put into building and developing the governance and management systems for the education sector in Afghanistan. However, a challenge frequently cited by both academic studies and civil society members is the extremely high corruption rate and the prevalence of nepotism for political appointments in governance structures.⁹ Though anti-corruption measures are highly prioritized by the new Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani, it is likely to remain a challenge over the coming years and might reduce the potential impact of investments in the education sector.

The MOE acknowledges that their internal inefficiencies are "also, to a large degree, associated with inadequate technical capacities in the administration," although a donor appraisal of progress on GPE conducted jointly by CIDA, DANIDA, Embassy of Sweden and USAID recognized that "some programs have better rates of execution than others."¹⁰ Furthermore, the MOE recognizes that the low quality of education is influenced by school administrators "not [being] able to provide strong institutional leadership." The MOE is likewise concerned that its heavy dependence on external technical

assistants has left its own staff underdeveloped, as many of these experts “are leading activities rather than developing the capacity of civil servants.”

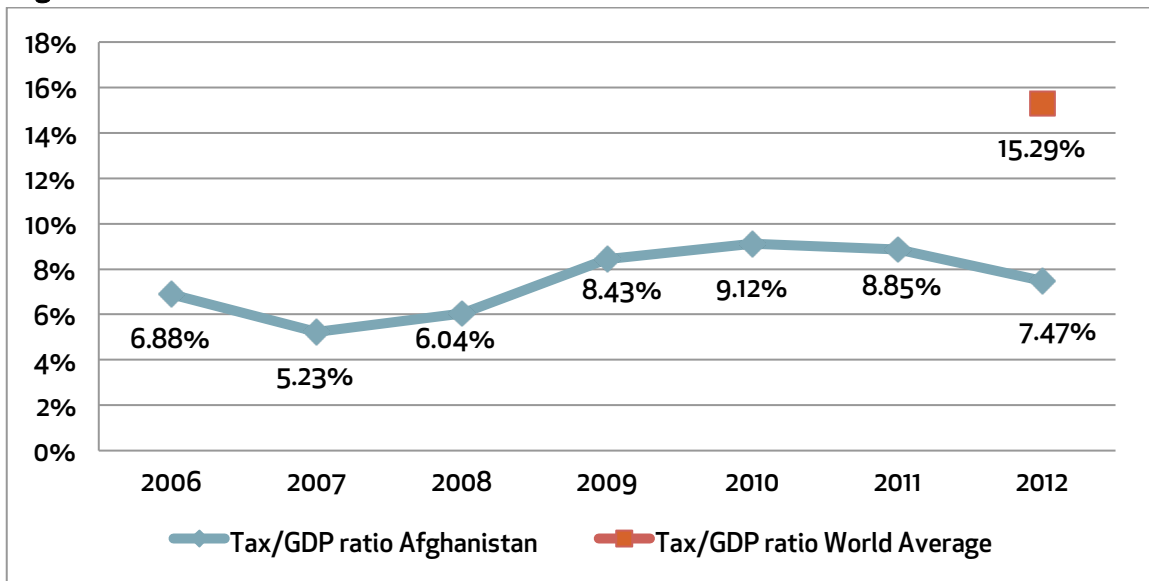
Interviews conducted for this study indicated that while there are major improvements in the professional and management capacity at the Ministry in Kabul, this has not taken place to the same degree in the provincial and district offices, despite a series of short-term trainings. The donor appraisal found that “it is mainly at the provincial and district levels, where services are delivered, where capacity tends to be the weakest.”

Finally, as pointed out by MOE officials, the lack of verified data collected in the education sector is a major challenge for accurate planning, measuring, and reporting of achievements and impact. The aforementioned appraisal report states that the present information gap has had an impact on education planning and implementation. Security challenges limit data collection on certain parts of the country, allowing only for indicative target setting for provincial equity. Lack of statistical data on activities and outcomes in the provinces complicates planning at all levels and makes quality of education difficult to measure. Lack of accurate figures about student populations or inventory hampers planning for emergency preparedness.

III. CURRENT STATE OF FINANCING

Afghanistan is presently the world’s second largest recipient of Official Development Assistance (ODA), behind Egypt. With more than \$5.26 USD billion dollars in aid received in 2013,¹¹ it is completely dependent on external donors to maintain and (if possible) further develop its education sector, and to reach the MDGs and SDGs. A noted concern is the expected reduction in both external funding for Afghanistan, as donors withdraw their military forces and reduce their activities, and the ensuing ability of the Afghan government to maintain (and/or increase) their own revenue generation. Tax revenue as a percentage of GDP has gradually been reduced over the last years, but represented only 7% in 2012.

Figure 1. Tax to GDP Ratio



Source: World Bank, 2013.

The scarcity of verified data makes it a challenge to provide an accurate presentation of the current state of financing, including expenditure amounts and spending effectiveness. What follows below is therefore a more general presentation of available data from recent Ministry of Finance (MOF) and MOE reports, complemented where available with data from the World Bank’s Afghanistan office.

The MOE reported the following achievements in 2013:

- The total expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP has fluctuated between 2.68 and 4.60% between 2009-13, and is projected to stabilize at around 4% from 2014 onward.
- Public current expenditure on primary education per pupil as percentage of GDP per capita was 6% in 2012.¹² Different figures emerged from the interviews on expenditure on each primary student per year, ranging from \$50 to \$60-65 USD.
- Public expenditure on primary education as a percentage of total education expenditure has been constant at 71% since 2011.

For the present fiscal year 1394 (which is 2015 in the Western calendar), 13% of the national budget is allocated to education purposes, which has been reduced from 17 % in 2009. The MOE recognizes that this is low compared with other developing countries, but is due to Afghanistan’s high security expenditure level.

Table 1. GOA: Trends in education expenditure in million Afghanis and as % of national budget and of GDP¹³

	Year							
	1388/ 2009	1389/ 2010	1390/ 2011	1391/ 2012	1392/ 2013	1393/ 2014	1394/ 2015	1395/ 2016
CORE Expenditures	131,305	153,868	192,328	182,818	348,245	428,378	487,664	496,627
Education Expenditure	22,322	24,619	30,003	31,079	40,396	55,689	63,396	64,562
Ed.in % of total core	17	16	15.6	17	11.6	13	13	13
Nominal GDP in USD millions	615,082	729,905	861,947	1085,680	1140,584	1245,607	1376,801	1518,643
Ed as % of GDP	3.63	3.37	3.48	2.86	3.54	4.47	4.60	4.25

Source: Afghan Ministry of Education, 2015.

While the total public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP remains low, the MOE is concerned that the Early Childhood Care and Education, Higher Education, Adult Literacy, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training have inadequate proportions of the education envelope to meet the objectives set.

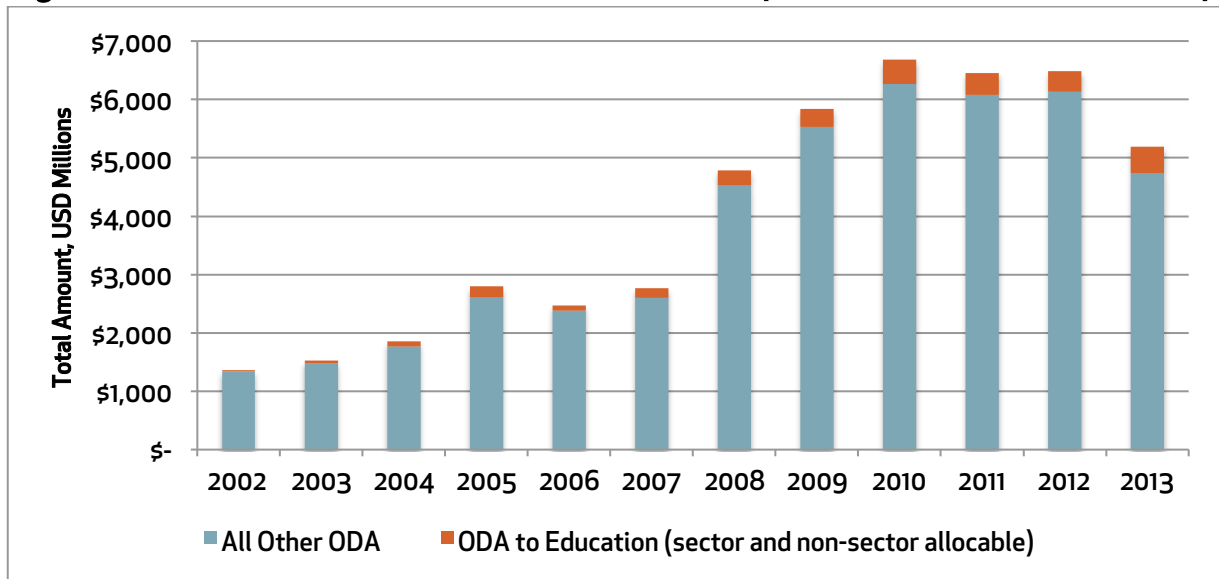
Domestic spending for development is underutilized

The Afghan Annual Budget is divided into an “operating” part and a “development” part, the latter solely funded by external donors, although these donors also contribute to the operating budget. In 2012, the education development budget constituted 17% of the total budget (the same percentage as each of the two previous years), while the education operation budget’s share of the total budget was 9% (down from 12% in 2011 and 11% in 2010). The operating budget primarily covers salaries and running costs, and is typically fully utilized by the MOE. The development budget covers investments in the education sector (including school buildings, teacher trainings, textbook development, and printing) though it is highly underutilized; in 2012, the MOE only spent 32.3% of its development budget. In its EFA review report, the MOE identified a rather complex range of causes for their low expenditure of the development budget, including: 1) delays in receiving funds from donors; 2) time-consuming procurement processes; 3) issuing of budgets for multi-year projects in the first year; 4) delays in transferring budget from the MOF to the MOE; 5) lack of available funding in province banks; 6) low capacity of MOE departments in developing proposals and determining specifications; 7) technical issues in some contracts; 8) corruption; 9) unrealistic planning and budgeting; and 10) insecurity in some areas.

External financing and donors’ need for control

Afghanistan remains dependent on external financing of the education sector, and donors remain concerned about MOE capacity to manage and control the funding. Overall ODA to Afghanistan has grown 281% since 2002, increasing from \$1.36 USD billion in 2002 to nearly \$5.19 USD billion in 2013. Similarly, ODA to education (sector and non-sector allocable) has also grown from \$22.75 million in 2002 to \$449.8 million in 2013, but remains a small part of the ODA budget, capturing only between 2-6% of funds.

Figure 2. Total Disbursements: ODA and Education (Sector + Nonsector Allocable)



Source: OECD, 2015.

The majority of donors channel their funding for education through the World Bank administrated Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) and the Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP). EQUIP was initiated in 2005, passed phase II in 2007, and has begun initial planning for a phase III. Due to its low expenditure rate, it has requested a one-year no cost extension for EQUIP II until September 2016. The argument made by the MOE is that this will allow them to complete the 2015-2020 National Education Strategic Plan, and to avoid an implementation gap between EQUIP II and III. The MOE is arguing for negotiation of a more predictable and less bureaucratic 3-5 year financial framework for the education sector, as well as to have funds channeled primarily through national budget structures.

The donors on their side emphasize the need for control of the spending, even if that will require a longer processing time, but indicate a willingness to discuss how procedures might be improved. They do, however, share MOE's own concern about their low capacities in developing proposals and documents for approval and their subsequent implementation.

Denmark stood out in the Afghan National Budget for 1394 (2015) as the largest bilateral education donor to Afghanistan, and since 2003 had provided support to the MOE through their Education Support Program to Afghanistan (ESPA), aimed to secure larger sustainability and ownership by the Afghan government. This included a secondment of staff to the MOE that ensured a very close working relationship between Denmark and the Ministry. Allocation of ESPA funds and identification of training and capacity development needs in the Ministry took place through regular meetings. The intention when the project began was for more donors to join, and then to distribute the management and responsibility of the program among this larger number of donors.

Interviews with MOE staff describe this high level of Afghan ownership and collaboration as their preferred way of relating to a donor, highlighting close working relationships, the co-creation of common goals, flexibility, and the ability to "develop as we go" as major benefits. To the MOE, this approach stands in contrast to the more remote, bureaucratic, and slow-processing ARTF.

However, Denmark has decided to end their direct funding and to channel their education funding through the ARTF from 2015 onward. The main reason is that it will raise their funding level above the required threshold for participation in ARTF decision-making bodies. However, it was acknowledged that the model had come with a heavy administrative burden over time, especially as the MOE was rather fragmented in their structure, had limited capacity, and faced challenges relating to corruption during the implementation.

Private sector contributions are virtually non-existent

Most external donors are providing their support through grants (*see next section*); there are presently no systematic attempts to secure private funding or to borrow from private capital markets. The MOE recognized the contribution to the education sector from some Afghan individuals and businesses that provided funding for the building of schools and purchase of equipment, but no systematic collaboration with the private sector is in place or planned for.

In addition to the traditional development donors, the MOE highlights the role of countries, such as Turkey and India, in support of education, including accepting Afghan students for higher education in the respective countries. These two donors maintain direct contact with the MOE regarding planning and reporting on their education activities in Afghanistan, but do not take part in the general coordination efforts organized by the MOE or the ARTF.

Afghan relationship to the Global Partnership for Education

Afghanistan joined the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in 2011. GPE was established in 2002 as a multilateral partnership with the aim of ensuring good quality education for all children. Denmark was, until end of 2014, the coordinating agency for the GPE (now Canada). UNESCO acts as the Supervising Entity and the Human Resource Education Board (including different ministries and donors, *see below*) constitutes the Local Education Group (LEG). Afghanistan has received a three-year grant of \$55.7 USD million (starting January 2013), to be implemented by the MOE. The program has four priorities:

1. Strengthen community and social mobilization and governance systems at the local level.
2. Expand and reinforce multiple pathways to education.
3. Increase the number of qualified female teachers in areas with high gender disparity.
4. Streamline policy and administrative systems in the MOE.

The program targets a number of provinces that are “insecure, underserved, difficult to access, [and] have [the] lowest education and economic indicators,” and as such aim to address some of the identified inequalities in the Afghan education system.¹⁴ Since the GPE recruited its own staff (including teachers), developed its own materials, and established its own GPE Coordination Unit, it has been slow to implement and document results thus far. Nevertheless, this emphasis on the gradual building of ownership and social mobilization is one of its most promising features, as promoting active community and parent involvement helps ensure buy-in, support, and a larger sense of responsibility towards the program. Ideally, this community support can then be drawn on to reopen schools that have been closed due to attacks or threats. Finally, the program aims at recruiting and training local teachers, who are more likely to remain in their rural homes, and to provide training for local religious teachers (mullahs) in pedagogy, basic reading, and numeracy skills.

There is no available evaluation of the GPE that outlines its successes and shortcomings, though a concern expressed by some donors is a lack of coordination and a potential fear of it being a separate program rather than an integrated part of Afghan education strategy and management. However, such integration should not be difficult to achieve, as there are a number of coordination efforts in the education sector with which the GPE could link. The most important forum is the MOE-led and donor co-chaired Human Resource Development Board (HRDB). The MOE explains that the HRDB meets biannually with representation from the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, external donors, and international and national NGOs working in education. In addition, there are regular ARTF meetings on their education support, which the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance also attend. Most donors take part in these meetings, with the exception of a few emerging donors that coordinate their activities directly with the Ministry of Education.

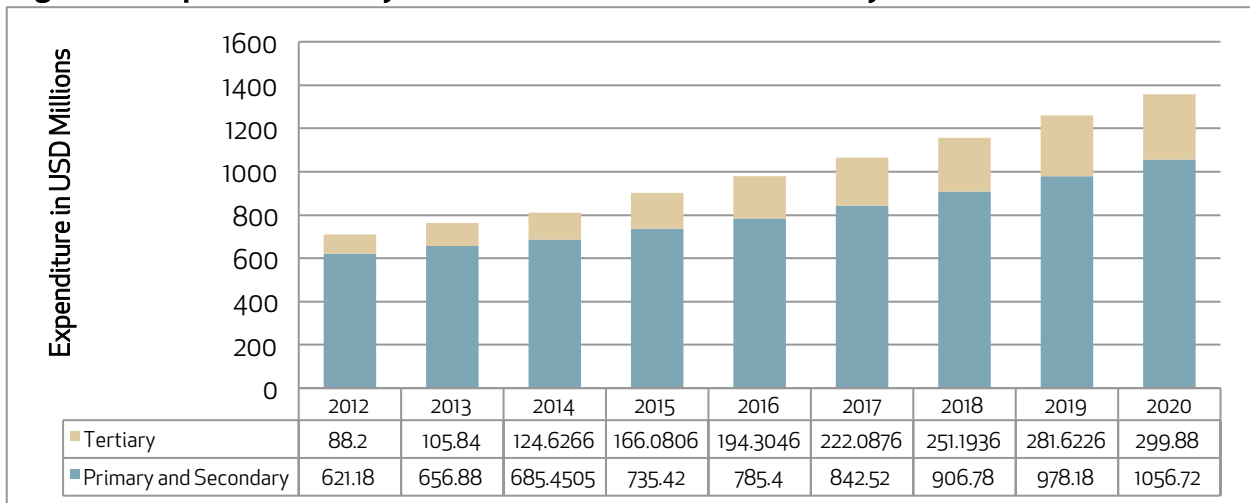
IV. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

All interviewees consulted for this study emphasized the importance of education, and many the importance of girls' education, in protecting the progress made over the last decade and for further developing Afghanistan. The MOE notes that "households of illiterate heads are 31% more likely to be poor than those of literate heads, and the household poverty rate decreases steadily with higher levels of education." This is what draws many students to schools, institutes, and universities - they recognize that their futures and Afghanistan's prosperity depend on increased knowledge and skills.

However, one of the key issues Afghanistan currently faces is whether it can secure its gains and capitalize on opportunities for further development given the likely reduction in funding in the coming years. The MOE fears that funding for education might be reduced if international donors reduce their commitment for Afghanistan at a time when a considerable part of the Afghan population remain illiterate, have dropped out, or have not yet had access to education. These fears are further exacerbated by the possible spread of insecurity to larger parts of Afghanistan, which may divert resources away from education and put an even larger number of students out of school.

The World Bank (2014), drawing on Afghan data sources, has developed two projections to encapsulate the financing needs for the education sector until 2020. One is a Baseline Scenario, which at the moment seems most realistic (*see below*). It plans to extend minimum service standards for the present number of students with an annual addition of 820,000 new students, including hiring an additional 12,000 new teachers annually, constructing 700 new schools, and the costs associated with developing and distributing textbooks and teaching material for this number of students. Unit cost per student is calculated at \$68 USD, or 9.7% of GDP per capita.

Figure 3. Expenditure Projection for Baseline Scenario Projection



Source: World Bank, drawing on AFMIS and EMIS.

The Expansion Scenario, on the other hand, sets the expenditure at \$150 USD per student, and has a larger emphasis on improving the quality of education. This includes reaching the 4.6 million children still out of school, building and renovating 2,400 schools annually, hiring and training 37,000 additional teachers, and training the 50% of teachers presently lacking basic qualifications.

Interviews established that the MOE and donors agree to continue to channel funds for education through the ARTF, as this has proved a trusted mechanism that ensures a fair degree of influence and prioritization from the Afghan government. However, it is advised that the parties assess if procedures, timelines, and processes can be altered to expedite implementation.

While there have been major achievements in Afghanistan since 2001, there is still concern over the quality of education. There is a broad recognition that more funding alone, if available, would not

ensure quality education for all. Rather, quality education depends on a number of factors that must be addressed in parallel and should be included in the new education strategy for 2015–2020, in the planning for EQUIP III, and any extension of the GPE.

While there is a lot that needs to be done across many levels, these recommendations focus on basic and lower secondary education.

1. Start with the teachers:

- **Strengthen and develop teacher training**, including methodology. Create a long-term strategy for expanding teachers' education beyond 2 years.
- **Increase the number of qualified teachers**, especially female teachers and teachers in rural areas. Possible incentives include financial support, housing allowances, and salary for accompanying family members. Another approach is to prioritize teachers that have completed two years of work in rural areas for higher teacher education.
- **Assess if and how NGOs might take on a larger role** in: advanced teacher training (including new methods and models), support for and teaching of vulnerable groups, community mobilization, and community-based education. The strong community linkages some NGOs have also enable them to operate in conflict areas.

2. Strengthen the MOE, specifically data and coordination efforts:

- **Create mechanisms for competency-based hiring** at all levels of the Ministry of Education, from Kabul to the districts, so that all offices are staffed with capable educators and managers in key positions. Special attention should be given to recruiting a higher percentage of Afghan employees (rather than external technical experts) and female employees.
- **Improve the MOE system for collecting and handling education data** using an independent, external quality control group, so that education planning and reporting are based on accurate numbers.
 - Form independent monitoring and evaluation groups at the local community level to track MOE and donor spending, especially in the most insecure areas. These can build on existing parent committees or Community Development Councils.
- **Strengthen linkages and collaborations with other Ministries**. For example, the MOE could work with the National Solidarity Programme and their CDCs for prioritizing the building and/or improving of schools for their allocated block grants, and possibly work through these councils rather than establishing separate ones for education.
 - Ensure continued government-led coordination with donors and other ministries, and avoid the establishment of additional coordination mechanism for single projects. Invite all donors to participate.
- **Explore any possibility for more girls to get in and stay in school**, such as providing appropriate sanitation facilities, building surrounding walls for schools, providing transport opportunities for primary schools, and offering culturally appropriate dormitories for higher education.
- **Communicate transparently with donors** on achievements and challenges to gain and maintain trust.

3. Build a domestic resources and support base:

- **Launch a campaign** targeted at the Afghan Parliament and other ministers to advocate for the continued prioritization of funding for education in the coming Afghan budgets.
 - More specifically, advocate for an increased percentage of GDP to be allocated for education in order to reduce reliance on external aid.
- **Tap into private sector funding** in a more systematic way, as suggested by the Minister of Education. Monitor spending of these resources to ensure accountability and efficiency.

- **Engage in dialogue** with local communities on how they may continue to generate support and resources for their local schools (especially in conflict-affected areas) and ensure recognition and transparency of such support (possibly by listing such support on the entrance of each school).

With a more solid managerial and professional foundation in place, the Ministry of Education and Afghan Government will be in a better position to handle an increased level of funding for education. Donors can then consider increasing their funding and channeling more of it bilaterally. However, if Afghanistan is to make further progress towards the MDGs and achieve Education for All by 2020, the present level of funding must at least be maintained.

Afghanistan presents an opportunity to draw on the established GPE model and regional experiences with community-based schools to strengthen interactions with communities and parents, to ensure their ownership and to reduce barriers so that all students (in particular girls) to attend and remain in school.

ENDNOTES

¹This study has primarily drawn on data from the following publication: Ministry of Education (2015) and Afghanistan National Education for All (EFA) Review 2015 Report, January 2015, Kabul. All other sources are noted.

²The MOE does make the following reservation in footnote 1 to the draft National Education Strategic Plan 2015- 2020: "There are serious doubts on the accuracy of Afghanistan's educational data: data are based on school principals' self-reporting and principals tend to inflate enrolment figures because enrolment data are used for resource allocation, and still there is not a verification system in place," available at <http://moe.gov.af/en/page/1831/nesp-iii-2015-2020>, visited on 06.05.2015.

³I.e. the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee collaborates with the Kabul Education University (and selected Teacher Training Colleges) and the Indonesian University of Education developed a Master's Degree Program on Inclusive Education to be offered to Afghan teachers.

⁴Government of Afghanistan (2015) *Afghanistan National Education For All 2015 Review Report*. Kabul, MOE.

⁵Available at <http://www.epdc.org/education-data-research/afghanistan-education-inequality-profile>, visited on 03.06.15.

⁶T. Lumley, J. Mendelovits, R. Turner, R. Stanyon and M. Walker (2015) *Class 6 Proficiency in Afghanistan 2013. Outcomes of Learning Assessment of Mathematical, Reading and Writing Literacy*. Victoria, Australian Council for Educational Research.

⁷Central Statistics Organisation (2013) *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011 – 2012* available at <http://www.af.undp.org/content/dam/afghanistan/docs/MDGs/NRVA%20REPORT-rev-5%202013.pdf>, visited 12.05.2015.

⁸See <http://www.unfpa.org/news/escaping-child-marriage-afghanistan>, visited on 03.06.2015.

⁹Transparency International ranks Afghanistan as the worlds 4th most corrupt country in their 2014 Corruption Index available at http://issuu.com/transparencyinternational/docs/2014_cpibrochure_en?e=2496456/10375881, visited 14.05.2015.

¹⁰See GPE (undated) *Appraisal of the Afghanistan Education Interim Plan*, by CIDA, DANIDA, Embassy of Sweden and USAID, available at <http://www.globalpartnership.org/content/appraisal-education-sector-plan-afghanistan>, visited 09.06.2015.

¹¹World Bank, Net Official Development Assistance Received 2013.

http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ODAT.CD?order=wbapi_data_value_2012+wbapi_data_value&sort=desc.

¹²This is GOA figures, uncorroborated by a third party source.

¹³Where not readily available Education expenditure is computed: Core Expenditure divided by percentage of nominal GDP and multiplied by Education expenditure as % of GDP. Education in % of total core is taken from MOF annual budgets, except, 2009, which is taken from a paper "Public Expenditure Trends. Working Paper for Public Expenditure Review, DfID and WB, 2010, and 2012, which is taken from "Afghanistan: Recent Budget Developments. Sr. Budget Officers' Meeting, Bangkok, Thailand, OECD/MOF, 2012.

¹⁴Global Partnership for Education (2014) *GPE Afghanistan Semi-annual Report*, Kabul, GPE

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