

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Ministry of Education



***Defining the GAPS:***

***THE CASE OF AFGHANISTAN***

***(From Education Reforms to Sustainable Development)***

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***Bridging the Gaps: Risk Reduction, Relief and Recovery***

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## **1.0 INRODUCTION**

The people of Afghanistan continue to place a high value on education [Oxfam 2006 ; Mansoori 2007]. Even the extremely poor households have elevated expectations from education as a way out of poverty and, rather than requiring their children to work, they send them to school in the hope of a better future.

Ministry of Education of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan believes in Education as a foundation for stability, reconstruction and development of this war-ravaged country [Minister of Education Dec. 2008]. The vision of the ministry is to provide quality education to all children of Afghanistan and turn education into a foundation for economic recovery, democratization and social development [National Education Strategy 2006].

To improve access and quality of education, substantial reform initiatives that have been undertaken by the Ministry of Education in the areas of curriculum development, teacher education, technical education, literacy, structural system and human resource development, financial and information management, have been undertaken in the past seven years.

However, inspite of important achievements, numerous daunting challenges still prevent millions of Afghan children from reciving quality education. Particular constraints caused by insurgency attacks or threats and factors associated with refugee and returnee status, remain largely untackled.

This paper provides a snap shot review of the accomplishments in various areas of education in Afghanistan and attempts to highlight some Gaps of serious consequences and finally makes recommendations for bridging the key gaps. Gaps and challenges caused by or associated with emergency situation and those crucial for a smooth transition from emergency to a state of sustainable development are specifically highlighted.

Gaps identified are analysed in four thematic areas of :

- Legal framework for education,
- Access to education,
- Quality of education, and
- Sustainability of reform and development activities

The overall purpose of this paper is NOT to provide concrete prescriptions for curing the very complex challenges, but to invite discussions around this majorly neglected topic.

## **2.0 LEGAL AND POLICY ASPECTS**

### **2.1 Accomplishments :**

According to the Afghan constitution, the Ministry of Education is tasked to provide education as the basic right of all the children, free of charge. Furthermore, education from grade 1-9 is compulsory for all girls and boys:

*“Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be offered up to BA level in the State educational institutes free of charge by the State.”* (Article 43 of the 1382 Constitution, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan).

Same is echoed in the Education Law of 1387 (2008) where equal rights for all children to education are guaranteed.

Commitment of the Afghan government to the international community, stated in the Afghanistan Compact of London 2005:

*“By 2020 all children in Afghanistan, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education.”*

*“By 1389 (2010):*

- *Net enrolment rate for boys and girls in primary grades will be at least 75% and 60%, respectively,*
- *Female teachers will be increased by 50%,*
- *A new curriculum will be operational in secondary schools,*
- *70% of teachers will pass a national competency test, and*
- *A national annual testing system for students will be in place”*

### **2.2 LEGAL AND POLICY GAPS:**

While there is no policy that excludes any Afghan child from equal learning opportunities, the actual measures in place to provide equal opportunities, accessible schools, qualified teachers and protect children from circumstances that takes away their rights of children, are not adequate to address the complex challenges associated with the emergency situation in Afghanistan.

Approximately five million school-aged children have no access to school or lost access to school or forced by circumstances to quit education. No provisions and alternatives exist for children who lost access to school due to school closure by insurgent attacks and/ or threats. On another important front, no clear legal and policy arrangements exist to ensure meaningful capacity development and institution-building necessary for a smooth transition from the state of emergency to a situation where reform and development activities do not collapse but become part of the system and sustain for a foreseeable future.

## **3.0 ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

### **3.1 Accomplishments :**

Over the past 7 years, school enrollment increased from 900,000 in 2001 to over 6 millions (35% girls) in 2008.

While most of the Afghanistan schools were destroyed or heavily damaged during the violent conflict of 1978-2001, around four thousands schools were rehabilitated and newly constructed since 2003.

To provide education opportunities for older out of school children, an Accelerated Learning program was established in 2003, which assisted around two hundred children, mostly girls to completed grades one through three through accelerated programs and then join the public school system. This initiative is being continued in the form of community-based single-classroom, village based schools targetted at children in most remote areas. In 2008, the Community-Based Schools were providing education to around 158,482 students.

To improve the learning environment, speed up the school reconstruction, and create a sustainable medium for community participation in education, the School Management Commitees (Shura) scheme was initiated in 2005. As of March 2009, around 4000 School Management Committees have been established to manage School Grants that are aimed for improving schools facilities and other requirements. School Grants are projects that not only facilitate a partnership between schools and communities but also make schools more accountable and transparent.

### **3.1 The Case of Closed Schools:**

Schools and children going to school have been one of the primary targets of the insurgency in Afghanistan. Important to note is that schools have always been seen as symbols of the state (government in power) and have, throughout the three-decade-long conflict, been primary targets of the armed oppositions.

According to the Deputy Minister Sidiq Patman (February 2009), *“there is no day that goes by when a school related security incident is not reported to the Ministry of Education.”* Since April 2006, a total of 238 schools have been razed to the ground and a total of 290 school children, teachers, administrators and support staffs have been brutally murdered by insurgents. As of March 2009, more than 650 schools were closed down by insurgent attacks or threats that took away the right to education away from around 500,000 children in four southern provinces of Afghanistan [Security Unit of the Ministry of Education].

Attacks on a girl school in Logar province in 2007 where **five** girls and teachers were gunned down; Acid Spray on school girls in Kandahar in 2008 and murder of female teachers in Zabul, Urozgan, Kandahar, Helmand, Laghman, Kunar and Nangarhar over the years ; are examples of horrors that not only spread fear in the tiny minds of innocent children but also demonstrate the real danger faced by children particularly girls and their teachers in certain parts of the country.

### **3.2 The Case of Refugees, Internally Displaced and Returnees:**

As of December 2008, there were still over two million Afghan refugees living in Pakistan and Iran. Major camps for Afghan refugees in Pakistan such as the Cheraat, Paby, Angoor Ada, Swabi, Naser Bagh and Kacha Gari, which were supplied with basic schools and health services, were totally demolished between in 2005 and 2006 [Private communication from an Afghan refugee who still lives in Pakistan]. Scores of refugee families saw no options but to return to the ruins of what used to be their villages, where no basic facilities or services such as school existed. Many examples of such returnees have been reported to the Ministry of Education from provinces of Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar, Khost, Paktia and Paktika. Others had to relocate within Pakistan to areas where education is not easily accessible to their children.

Forced repatriation of the Afghan refugees from Iran took many Afghan families to the dreadful situations of the internally displaced camps in the provinces of Hirat, Nemroz and Farah, where schools are hardly available.

Moreover, a limited number of Afghan children are admitted to Iranian public schools [Report from the visit of the Second Vice President of Afghanistan to Iran in December 2008].

Families from Pashtoon ethnicity who had to leave their homes and villages in the North of the country, during the nine years of ethnically dominated civil war (1992 to 2001) and immediately after collapse of the Taliban regime (October 2001), either immigrated to Pakistan or formed camps of internally displaced in larger cities such as Mazar-e-Sharif, Kabul, Nangarhar and Hirat. Dwellers of these small camps, for many years, did not receive much attention and support, resulting in members having to turn to begging on the streets or other demoralizing activities. It is unfortunate that no arrangements are in place to provide education to children from these families.

The case of a group of ethnic Pashtoos who returned to Khwaja Bahawodin district of Takhar province in the summer of 2008, caught media's attention. Around 500 families who returned to Khwaja Bahawodin district, were harshly rejected access, by the Non-Pashtoon host communities, to the rubbles of once their homes and what was left of their gardens and farming land. They were even deprived of drinking water, let alone provision of education services.

### **3.3 OTHER GAPS IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION:**

#### Community Gap:

Efforts to protect schools through community mobilization evolved from hiring at least one security advisors per district (2006-2008) and recruiting at least one religious leaders from each province to the recent recruitment of Social Mobilizers, yet to be launched. Still community's potential for protecting schools, teachers and pupils have not been fully explored.

#### Gender Gap :

Currently only around 35% of the children enrolled in primary schools are girls. Moreover, girls enrollment rates were lower than those for boys in 2008. Girl's access to education is restricted by : a) the distance to schools, in some rural areas; b) traditional and cultural constraints on female education ; and c) lack of female teachers in most rural areas, itself a product of the same cycle of female educational deprivation.

Furthermore, Majority of the twenty-nine percent female teachers are concentrated in major urban centers. Fifty-one percent of all female teachers and 70% of female high school teachers are based in five big cities of Kabul, Balkh, Hirart, Baghlan and Jowzjan. Ninety percent of the 364 districts have no female high school and 13% of them (48 of 364) has no female teacher at all.

#### Facility Gap:

Not limited to less secure parts, only less than half of children get education in proper facilities. Millions of children, even in secure areas, tolerate extremes of heat or cold under tents, trees or open sky, which in many cases seriously hinders their learning.

## **4.0 QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

To provide education to the flood of children since 2002, thousands of teachers were recruited, most of whom, unfortunately are not qualified and distribution of female teachers keeps rural areas of the country unserved or at least underserved. Likewise, to put textbooks in the hands of millions of children who showed up to schools, several hasty steps were taken that affects quality of teaching and learning in all schools. Even worse, majority of the over 11 thousand schools around the country still have insufficient textbooks.

### **4.1 Accomplishments :**

Several reform efforts are underway to enhance quality of existing teachers and produce larger numbers of qualified teachers. Presently, a District Teacher Training Program (DT3 also named National Program on In-Service Teacher Training-NPITT) is underway to provide series of training and follow-on supports to teachers and school administrators; and establish professional development networks.

To increase production of more qualified teachers and expedite the upgradation of existing teachers who have an education of grade twelve, the number of Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) was increased from nine in 2002 to 37 in 2008. As a result of this expansion, the number of student-teachers reached 32800 in 2008 (41% female) which is four times more than 2006; and the annual graduation from In-service and Pre-Service program from 80 (in 1380), jumped to 4939 (in 1386/2007) and 8,500(58% female) in 2008.

Two schemes to provide incentive to girls who enrol in and complete their education at TTC and to faculty who teach at TTCs in more disadvantaged provinces, are being carried out in 25 and 18 provinces, respectively.

Following the Teachers Standards and new Pre-Service Teacher Education Framework, and supported by the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), detailed syllabi and brand new textbooks and supplementary resource materials have been developed for the two-year TTC program. Also, a special curriculum for female graduates of grade nine was developed to train them as teachers of the lower primary.

Since the spring of 2003, a new school curriculum has been developed for primary grades. A new curriculum for secondary is under development. Since 2004, around 61 million school textbooks have been printed.

### **4.2 TEACHER RELATED GAPS :**

Over 8000 teachers from around 300 schools closed down by insurgencies, could not be reached and therefore could not be provided with training and professional development support. Attempts in Kandahar and Khost to bring teachers to safer places at the centers of provinces in 2007-08, were faced with serious challenges.

Similarly, around 4000 teachers from less secure districts could not be registered between May 2008 and January 2009. Registration and Literacy Assessment of teachers, which took from one to two months in secure provinces, took up to six months in less secure provinces such as Zabul, Urozgan, Helmand and Paktika.

According to the members of the Teacher Education Department who led administration of the assessment in security-challenged provinces of Urozgan and Zabul : *«there were weeks that we will be sitting at the center of the province waiting for teachers to come from particularly insecure provinces, and no one will show up or one or two individuals will come. Due to fear of insurgents, teachers could not come to the center of the province in groups. They had to either come one or two at a time to reduce the risk of being killed for participating in a government- led registration and assessment exercise.»* As a result, many teachers who could not show up, not only did not receive the monthly top up of 26 USD, but also took the risk of being removed from the payroll.

Moreover, half of the 15000 teachers who have no formal education work in eight insecure provinces, where they have limited opportunities for professional development and educational upgradation.

#### **4.3 DISASTER MANAGEMENT GAP:**

Teachers and school officials have no training in properly dealing with insurgency attacks; risks of mines and bombs and even natural disasters. Education as such is missing in both the school curricula and teacher training programs. Teachers, school officials and students with no preparations are left helpless when faced by such calamities.

#### **4.4 PSYCHOSOCIAL GAP:**

Despite continued exposure to extremes of violence and aggressions, especially in insurgency-affected districts, no policy and programs are in place to assess and address the dire psychosocial consequences of daily traumas on teaching and learning. Except for a group of faculty from the Teacher Training Colleges who, thanks to the German International Cooperation-GTZ, were provided with rounds of training and practicum on psychosocial assessment, over 150,000 teachers and school administrators, while have been suffering from lingering distress, and especially those still exposed to daily insurgency attacks and threats, have no access to adequate knowledge and skill-building opportunities on detecting major psychosocial problems or how to cope with them.

Programs to provide necessary support and orientation to teachers and students do not exist within the education system. Community-based resources that offer help to emotionally affected and war-traumatized individuals are hardly available.

### **5.0 SUSTAINING THE DEVELOPMENTS**

Afghanistan is not only suffering from inadequate response to protracted emergencies but also is threatened by lack of sufficient provisions for capacity enhancement and institutionalizing of the recovery and reform activities so they can sustain.

## **5.1 The Problem of Capacity :**

In spite of variable involvement of government civil servants in reform activities that are led by international and national consultants, ad hoc trainings, and short-term training- and orientation- visits to more developed countries, MoE capacity to take over reform initiatives without losing direction or quality, is not evident. Progress on system building and institutional capacity development is dangerously lagging behind.

## **5.2 Short-lived Reforms :**

Several reform initiatives were launched that either collapsed, slowed down or lost direction. Examples are follows:

a) Curriculum Reform: Supported by multiple donors (e.g., UNICEF, USAID, UNESCO, and DANIDA), curriculum development reform was launched in mid-2003 that led to development of the National Curriculum Framework, detailed quality syllabi and reasonable textbooks for grades one, two and (some textbooks) for grades four and five. Due to discontinuation of technical support from the Teacher Training College, Columbia University, NY, this reform got slowed down and eventually collapsed in 2005. Recovery attempts in 2006 and 2007 included taking Afghan textbook authors on intermediate-term visits to Jordan and Iran, not only caused loss of the foundational work, but also created confusion and questionable quality of textbooks for the remaining grades.

b) Teacher Education Reform: Supported by multiple donors (UNICEF, USAID, DANIDA and German Government), a Teacher Education Program (TEP) was launched in the spring of 2004 that led to establishing of a national In-service structure, development of In-service training packages and assessment tools; collapsed in 2005 due to difficulties in transferring funds from Kabul to provinces through the government system. To remedy the situation a National Program on In-Service Teacher Training (NPITT also referred to as DT3) was launched in 2007 where an in-service package was sub-contracted to national and international NGOs to implement. Even though, implementation of this program in 11 provinces took off in the same year, procurement processes for the remaining 23 provinces took sixteen long months and yet to begin.

Similar is the case of Community-based Schools, which are currently run by NGOs. Despite an MoE policy urging integration of these services to public school system, progress on such integration is not apparent.

c) Structural and Civil Service Reform: Led by the Civil Service Reform Commission, a merit-based recruitment for key MoE positions was implemented but stopped at least two times in 2005 and 2006. Several temporary units were established, closed down and re-established at different points in time between 2003 and 2006. The best example is the Grant Management Unit (GMU) established in 2003, closed down in 2005, but partially replaced by a unit called Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP) in 2006. In late 2006, while EQUIP continued to coordinate WB-supported projects, another Grant Management Unit was re-established. At the same time, a structural reform of the entire ministry was initiated in the fall of 2006 to revise the vision, mission, functions and structure of the ministry on all levels. This stage of reform led to a new structural system and led to development of the first National Education Strategy for Afghanistan. Presently, the structural system is undergoing yet another revision stemmed from the change in the leadership of the Ministry of Education in the fall of 2008. As of March 2009, GMU is integrated to the the Planning Department but EQUIP continues to function as a parallel supporting unit and might remain in the role of an external unit at the ministry for at least two to four more years.

### **5.3 The Transition Gap:**

It should be recognized that transition to a sustainable system and integration or discontinuation of temporary structures and down-sizing of the international consultants (and integration of national ones), have always been part of the planning and designing discussions. However, “easy said than done,” actual progress toward achieving this important objective is hard to pin point. A scary example is the multi-million NPITT-DT3 program that is being implemented by NGOs through around 4000 trainers who are hired for periods of two to three years. While NGOs deliver much needed trainings and follow-on school-level support, the temporary structure of around 4000 trainers will not be there to continue the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers (CPD) nor there are sufficient arrangements to train government employees who can later take over. Unfortunately, the design of NPITT lacks such provisions.

## **6.0 A SUMMARY GAP ANALYSIS**

Afghanistan has come a long way in the past seven years in re-establishing its education system with the mandate to providing a quality education to ALL children. Leaving behind years of repressive regimes and moving towards a democratic society, this country has taken important steps towards recovering from one of the most destructive and protracted wars.

However, a deeper examination of the situations brings out serious gaps in dealing with on-going or newly emerging emergencies and daring challenges in sustaining and institutionalization of existing efforts.

Factors and circumstances behind the Gaps in access of children to their basic right of education could be summarized into following groups:

### **6.1 Schools Closed Down by Insurgencies:**

This factor affects girls and boys living in less secure parts of the country and are affected by violent attacks on schools, teachers or students.

### **6.2 Refugees, Internally Displaced and Returnees :**

No specific and systematic arrangements are in place to address the access and quality of education for children of families who still live as refugees in Pakistan and Iran or in internally displaced camps within Afghanistan or those return to their villages and homes.

### **6.3 Other Factors and Circumstances :**

#### Unavailability of Schools :

Around five-million school-aged children are out of school including those whose families and communities are supportive of education for boys and girls, but have no school to go to, especially in rural and remote areas or in camps for refugees and internally displaced peoples or those among returnees from such camps.

#### Distance from School :

Studies of drop outs and anecdotal data indicate distance from school a specially impeding factors in access and retention of girls in schools [Karlsson and Mansoori 2007].

#### Shortage of Female Teachers :

As majority of the 29% female teachers live and work in major urban centers, and most of the female teachers in remote and insecure areas have the lowest levels of qualification, families hesitate to send their girls to school [Oxfam 2006 and Karlsson and Mansoori 2007].

#### Low Quality of Education :

According to Karlsson and Mansoori (2007), parents perception of questionable quality of education makes it hard for them to prefer going to school to the help children can provide around the house or labor work that can assist the financially struggling families.

#### Very Low Socio-economic Status :

Compounded by shortage of female teachers and perceived low quality of education, families who are severely affected by extremes of poverty, do not afford to send their children to school. This is more true for street working children and female-headed families.

#### Minority Status :

Children whose mother tongue is not the same as the language of instruction and that of the majority of teachers (and other pupils in their school), feel distressed when they do not fully understand the language of the teacher and/ or the textbooks. Especially when they are discriminated against, based on their linguistic or ethnic identity. So are children with mild or moderate disability who are challenged not only by access problems but also by cultural barriers (many families see no use for children with disability to get any education) and acts of discrimination from teachers and other students.

Mobile Lifestyle : Children of the Nomadic Kuchis who are on constant seasonal move, do not access education at all or face major disruptions that in many cases leads to discontinuation of schooling

## **7.0 BRIDGING MAJOR GAPS**

While efforts are underway to establish more schools ; construct proper school facilities ; train and upgrade teachers ; improve quality of the textbooks and train and recruit more female teachers, not much has been done for children who are deprived by insurgency-related school closure, children who are faced with insurgency attacks and other disasters or children who live in or return from refugee and internally displaced camps. So is the gap of transition from emergency to sustainable development. Following recommendations could be a timely beginning for addressing these policy and service gaps:

### **7.1 Establish a Task Force :**

To address the policy and legal gap, a taskforce to deal with challenges caused by or associated with emergency situations need to be established to include key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, UN agencies, donor community and international and national partners of the Ministry of Education.

### **7.2 Prevent Closure and Re-open Closed Schools:**

Religious leaders, elders and community influentials should be mobilized for negotiating with anti-government elements to re-opening the closed schools and prevent closing of more schools.

### **7.3 Establish Protective Measures:**

Establish protective environment for children and teachers at schools (ex. Escorting children to schools etc).

### **7.4 Urgently REhabilitate Damaged Schools :**

Provide urgent support to rehabilitate schools that are damaged or destroyed by insurgencies.

### **7.5 Provide Alternative Education Opportunities:**

Explore and consider establish home- or Mosque-based schools, that will dilute the symbolic state of school as a government institution. However, use the Ministry of Education curriculum.

Arranging dormitories in safer parts of a province to house older children who are willing to live away from their families. This measure has been successfully experimented in some provinces and need to be evaluated and extrapolated to other provinces and districts.

There is some discussions of changing the name of school (Maktab in Dari and Showonzai inPashto) to the Arabic equivalent of Madrasa.

Mobile schools is another model that has been used with some nomadic Kuchies of Afghanistan. This model need to be evaluated and considered as one of the solution options.

### **7.6 Provide Distaster and Risk Management Training :**

Training and orientation on disaster risk management need to be incorporated into school and teacher education curricula. This training needs to be aimed at preventative education as well as skill-oriented risk management, to prepare the teachers, school officials and students for evacuations, running to safety, calling for emergency help etc.

### **7.7 Arrange Safety Rooms :**

Safety rooms have been successfully utilized by international organizations in Afghanistan and need to be studies for feasibility in public schools.

### **7.8 Provide Peace and Psychosocial Education :**

Psychological and social consequences of chronic exposure to horrific events and distressing situations, need to be addressed through wide-spread and systematic peace and psychosocial education to teachers and students.