

High Stakes

Girls' Education in Afghanistan

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While millions of girls enrolled in school after the fall of the Taliban, donor and government efforts to improve education have slowed down and growing insecurity is rapidly eroding access to schooling for many girls. A new approach from both the Afghan government and donors is urgently required to hold onto the gains that have been made.



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

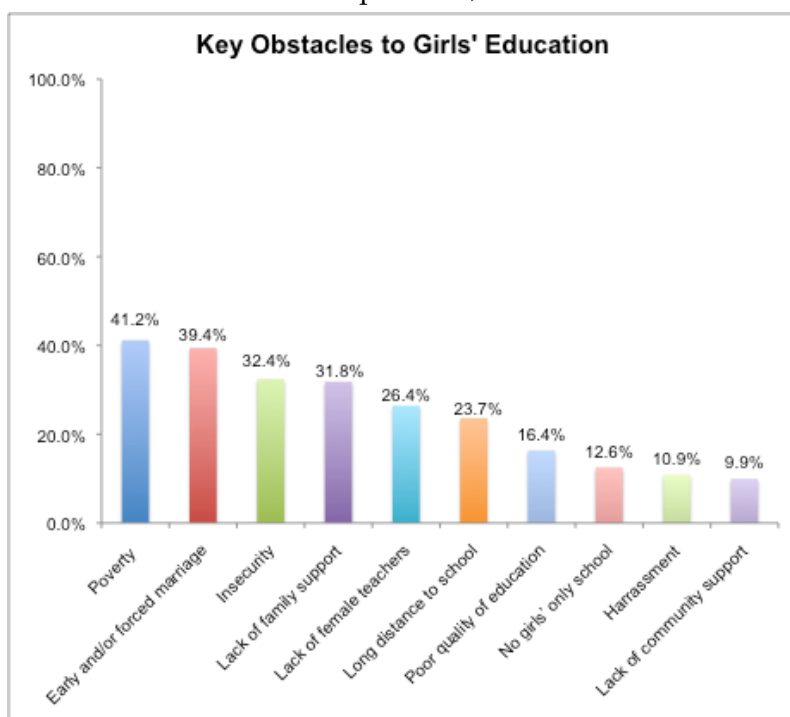
AIHRC	Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ARTF	Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund
AOG	Armed Opposition Groups
IWA	Integrity Watch Afghanistan
MoE	Ministry of Education
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Teams
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WFP	World Food Program

Executive Summary

Female education has faced significant obstacles in Afghanistan, yet there have been enormous gains since 2001. Under the Taliban, the majority of girls' schools were closed and gross enrollment fell from 32% to just 6.4%.¹ In the early years after the fall of the Taliban, education was a top priority for the Afghan government and donors. Much of this donor focus was on getting children back into school, with a particular emphasis on primary level. The Back to School campaign, launched in 2002, significantly expanded enrollment, which has increased nearly seven-fold, from approximately 900,000 in 2000 to 6.7 million in 2009.² For girls, the increase has been even more dramatic: official enrollment figures have increased from an estimated 5,000 under the Taliban to 2.4 million girls currently enrolled.³

Many of the girls enrolled through the Back to School campaign are now completing primary school. Yet beginning in 2006, efforts to improve education in Afghanistan began to slow down. Nearly five years on, those efforts have nearly run out of steam. A new approach from both the Afghan government and donors is urgently required to hold onto the gains that have been made.

The MoE has undoubtedly made laudable progress in improving both the availability and quality of education, but with such a large influx of students over the past few years, it is struggling to keep pace with demand. With donors increasingly focused on stabilization and counterinsurgency rather than development, and with security deteriorating in many areas of the country, the gains made in improving girls' education are in danger of slipping away. Parents and students are eager for high quality education but they are increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress. If there is not significant investment in post-primary education, there is the risk that these students "will be left behind, turned off, perhaps, and cut short in their personal, social and vocational development."⁴



Based on field research, a review of the existing literature and interviews with those working in the field of education, this report looks at the state of girls' education in Afghanistan, what must be done to keep them in school and how to ensure they receive a quality education. A total of 630 parents, 332 teachers, 687 school-aged females and 105 key informants in 17 provinces were interviewed. Research findings include:

- *Female students have high aspirations for their educational achievement. 71.8% of the girls interviewed want to continue their education. Of those who want to continue, 64.1% want to com-*

plete university. Similarly, more than half of parents (50.8%) want their daughter(s) to complete university.

- *Many schools do not have the infrastructure needed to provide a quality education.* MoE data shows that 47% of schools in Afghanistan still have no building.⁵ This significantly varied across research sites, and was particularly pronounced in rural areas: 8.3% of those interviewed in Balkh said their school had a building while 75.0% of those in Kabul did.
- *Poverty was seen as the single biggest obstacle to girls' access to education.* 41.2% of those interviewed named poverty as a major barrier to girls attending school. Linked with this, 39.4% of interviewees stated that early or forced marriage was a major obstacle to girls' education.
- *The number of available female teachers is insufficient to meet demand.* More than a quarter (26.4%) of the individuals interviewed named the lack of a female teacher as a major obstacle to girls' access to education. More than two-thirds of teachers (68.4%) reported that their school does not have enough teachers. Of these teachers, more than half (54.6%) stated that they need only female teachers, 27.3% said they need both male and female teachers, 12.3% said they only need additional male teachers and 5.7% were unsure.
- *Availability of education is insufficient to meet demand.* Of those interviewed, nearly a quarter (23.7%) saw distance as a major obstacle to girls' access to education. Distance, along with attendance in mixed classes or interaction with male teachers, becomes increasingly problematic as girls approach adolescence, when cultural norms regulating their behavior become more restrictive.
- *Decision-making around whether or not girls go to school, and for how long, is complex and extremely varied from province to province and even household to household.* There is also a complex relationship between demand factors (such as community attitudes and economic constraints) and supply factors (such as school buildings and qualified teachers), indicating that simply addressing one part of the equation and not the other will not necessarily result in increased attendance of girls in school.

In order to improve both access to, and quality of, education that girls receive, this report makes a number of recommendations to the Afghan government, donors and aid agencies working on education:

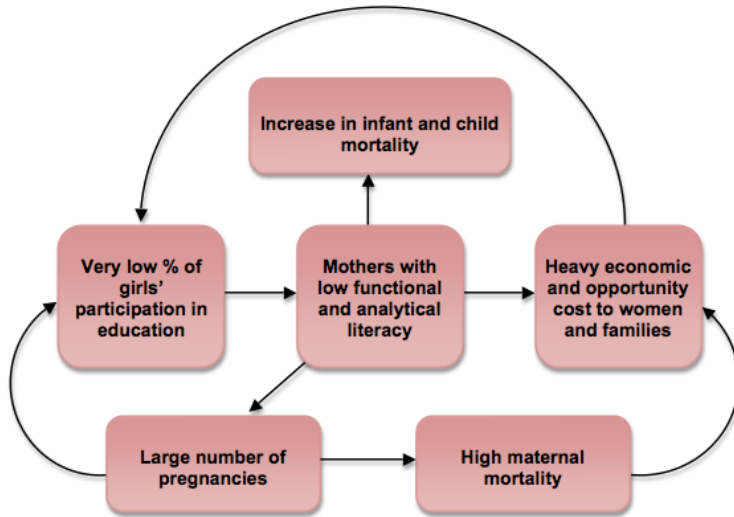
- *Increase the number of female-friendly, well-equipped schools for girls, especially in rural or remote areas.* Proximity must be a primary criterion in establishing new schools. Nonetheless, it will take time to establish more schools. Both interim solutions, such as providing transportation to far away schools and ensuring existing schools have adequate water and sanitation facilities, as well as long term solutions must be pursued.
- *Increase the number and quality of female teachers, especially in rural or remote areas.* Teacher training programs must be scaled up to address the shortage of qualified female teachers. Incentive programs

should be reviewed and expanded to enable more qualified female teachers to mentor existing teachers in remote locations.

- *Focus on improving safety and security of schools, particularly in conflict areas.* Schools must be treated as de-militarized safe zones. Armed opposition groups (AOG) should stop attacks against schools and the Afghan government, donors and aid agencies must do more to understand the nature of threats against schools and work in ways to minimize such threats.
- *Improve monitoring of schools and accountability at both the local and central level.* The MoE has virtually no systematic monitoring tools and limited capacity to monitor school performance and conditions, especially in remote or insecure areas. But improved monitoring, particularly participatory mechanisms that involve parents and community members, could not only enhance trust but reduce corruption and save money.
- *Pursue locally based solutions and involve parents and communities in decision-making and implementation wherever possible.* Given the radically uneven development of the education system across Afghanistan, solutions to getting more girls in school must address local dynamics. This includes establishing new schools with community support and supporting Village Education Committees to decentralizing decision making within the MoE.
- *Redouble efforts to improve the quality and accessibility of secondary and higher education, with an enhanced focus on learning outcomes.* Increase the number of female secondary and high schools, and develop plans to upgrade existing schools to ensure they have adequate materials, such as laboratories and libraries.
- *Refine approaches to targeting and review MoE policies to ensure that they are gender sensitive and address the diverse needs of Afghan students.* Systematically evaluate which kinds of interventions work best and in what contexts to address various demand side factors, such as poverty and community attitudes. Review MoE policies to ensure that they are gender sensitive and address the needs of both male and female students.
- *Expand efforts to increase adult literacy and provide opportunities for out-of-school learning, especially for young mothers.* The National Education Strategic Plan includes literacy and informal education for adults and out-of-school children, but this approach must be revised to address the needs of adult learners, especially young mothers. Planning should be decentralized to respond to local needs. More financial resources must also be devoted to such programs, which comprise just 1% of the education budget.
- *Ensure that girls' access to education is not sacrificed in political settlement(s) with AOG.* All possible measures must be taken to ensure that the gains made in increasing girls' access to education since 2001 are preserved, and girls' access to education continues to improve as negotiations with AOG proceed. The Afghan government, the UN and donors must be vigilant to ensure that girls' access to education is not traded away. Indeed, the future of Afghanistan depends on it.

Introduction

In a country where nearly half of the population is under the age of 15, education should be a top priority for the government, the UN and donors.⁶ For women, the situation is particularly urgent. Only 6% of Afghan women aged 25 or older have ever received any formal education and just 12% of women aged 15 or older are literate.⁷



Adapted from "Keeping the Promise: Five Benefits for Girls' Secondary Education," 2006.

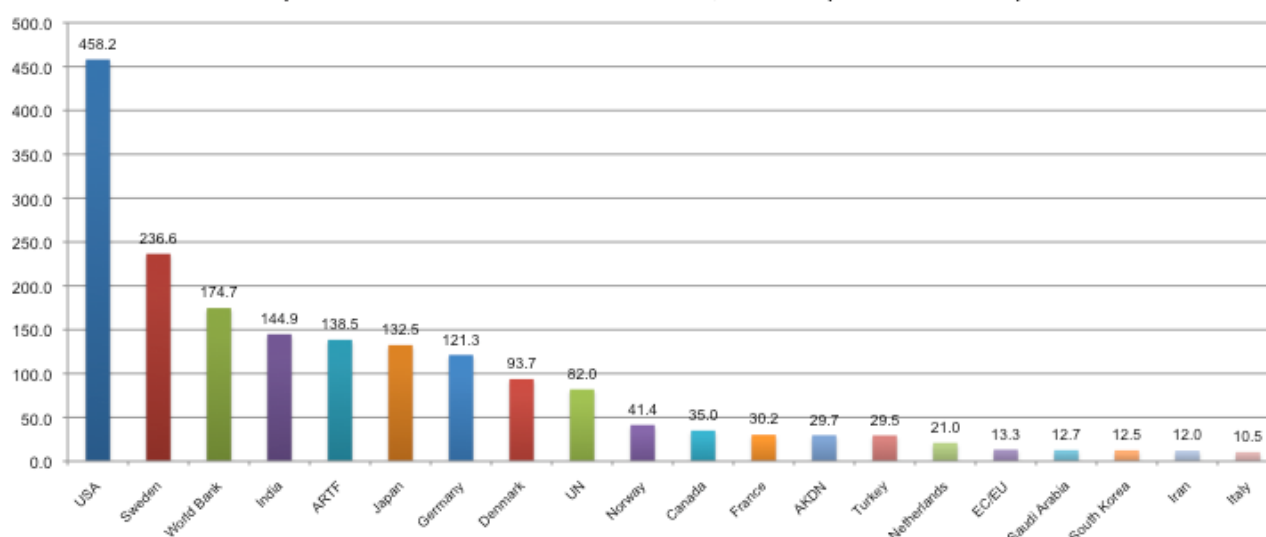
Whether or not the Afghan government succeeds in keeping girls in school, and for how long, is a critical question. A growing body of global research demonstrates that the more time a girl spends in school, the more likely she is to grow to be healthy, well-nourished and economically empowered when it comes to her well-being as well as that of her children. Afghanistan suffers from one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world; yet studies estimate that infant mortality drops by between 5 and 10% for every extra year that girls stay in school.⁸ Studies have found that secondary education for women can also improve civic engagement and even reduce rates

of domestic violence.⁹ Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world, and needs a literate, skilled population. Research has found that "primary and secondary education produce high returns in terms of wage growth, whether for men or for women."¹⁰ Furthermore, a World Bank study of 100 countries found that increasing the share of women that have completed secondary education by 1% increases per capita income growth by an average of 0.3%.¹¹

The Back to School campaign, a joint Afghan government and UN-led initiative launched in 2002, has made enormous gains in increasing the enrollment of both boys and girls in school in Afghanistan. Donors have contributed approximately USD 1.9 billion to rebuilding the education system since 2001, including building schools, hiring teachers and developing curricula. As a result, the availability of education has undoubtedly improved across Afghanistan.

But with such a large influx of students over the past few years, the MoE is still struggling to keep pace with demand. Planning structures and government capacity at the Kabul level have improved, but there is little evidence that these plans have systematically translated into positive outcomes at the community level.¹² With many of the girls enrolled through the Back to School campaign now completing primary school, more must be done to ensure that they continue their education. Yet, until now, much of the donor focus has been on quantity (increasing the number of students enrolled and teachers on MoE payrolls) rather than on quality (such as measuring learning outcomes, increased monitoring and improving secondary education). Girls' enrollment drops significantly at the secondary level

Top 20 Donors to the Education Sector, 2001-09 (in USD millions)



Source: Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Finance * The UK government contributes to the education sector through their annual contribution to the ARTF.

and post-primary education has not received the attention required to ensure that students receive a high quality education.

Yet donor and government investment in education is certainly not the only factor that affects whether or not girls go to school. Decision-making by families about whether girls attend school and, if so, for how long, are complex and extremely varied across Afghanistan. Multiple factors, such as distance, poverty, perceived quality of education, and security, interact to influence such decisions. There is also a complex interplay between demand and supply factors, indicating that simply addressing one part of the equation while neglecting the other will not necessarily result in increased attendance of girls in school. While building more schools, improving efforts to train female teachers and ensuring that teachers are paid on time are important, such measures alone will not sufficiently address the problem. Family and community attitudes, spreading insecurity and economic factors play a critical role in shaping girls' access to education.

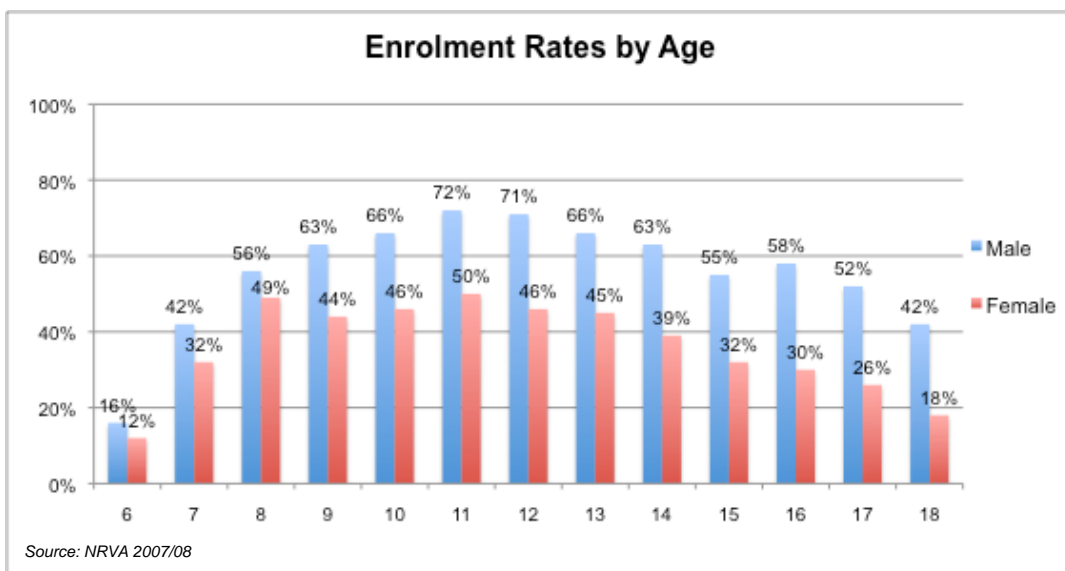
This report is divided into two main sections. The first section provides an overview of field research on girls' access to education conducted in 17 provinces, drawing on existing studies and literature to help provide context. It addresses girls' aspirations and achievements, as well as the obstacles to girls' education, in Afghanistan. The second section outlines recommendations to the Afghan government, major donors, the UN and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for improving both girls' access to, as well as the quality of, the education.

Research Findings

This section focuses on experiences and perceptions of female education in Afghanistan, based on field research in 17 provinces but also drawing on the existing literature and data from the MoE to provide context. The field research was conducted from May through July 2010 in five provinces in the north of the country (Badakhshan, Balkh, Kunduz, Takhar and Samangan), three in the east (Khost, Kunar and Nangarhar), one in the south (Kandahar), two in the central highlands (Bamiyan and Daikundi), four in the center (Ghazni, Kabul, Pansjir and Parwan) and two in the west (Badghis and Herat). The research included structured interviews with 687 school-aged females, 630 parents and 332 teachers. Gender segregated group discussions with adults were conducted in each location, as well as semi-structured interviews with key informants (including MoE and other government employees, shura or community council members, mullahs and others).

As with any research, there are a number of limiting factors. Selected provinces were scattered across Afghanistan to provide a reasonably diverse, though not complete, picture of the range of education conditions across Afghanistan. Additionally, it should be noted that the composition of school-aged females interviewed during the field research does not reflect some key national characteristics. The majority (82.7%) of school-aged females interviewed regularly attended school, in contrast to the majority of girls in Afghanistan who still do not attend school. Of those girls interviewed who attended school, the majority attended secondary and high school (71.9%), whereas the majority of Afghans girls enrolled in school are concentrated at the primary level. However, interviewing older students who have been in school for longer enabled a greater understanding of how education access and quality has changed over time and a more sophisticated understanding of the challenges. A further description of the methodology and challenges are elaborated in Annex A, and a summary of the field research results can be found in Annex B.

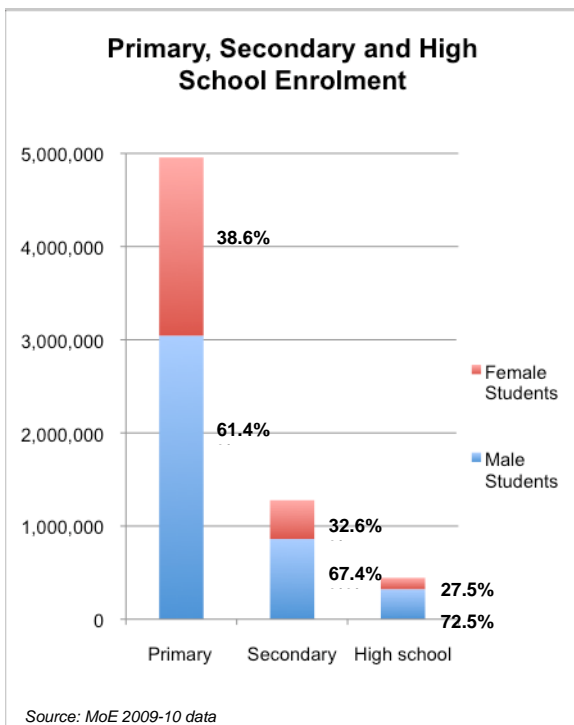
School Enrollment and Attendance



According to the most recent National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA, 2007/08), 60% of all boys were enrolled in primary school and 42% of all girls - up from 43% and 29%, respectively, in 2005.¹³ While there has undoubtedly been significant progress in enroll-

ing girls in primary school, their enrollment sharply drops at secondary level. Enrollment for both girls and boys appears to peak at age 11 (around 5th grade) and then steadily declines.

While 1.9 million girls are enrolled in primary school (grades 1 through 6), 416,854 are enrolled in secondary school (grades 7 through 9) and 122,480 in high school (grades 10 through 12). As girls get older, the gender gap also widens, from 0.63 at the primary level to 0.48 and 0.38 in secondary and high school, respectively.¹⁴



MoE data indicates that there is also a significant gap between enrollment and actual attendance, suggesting that far fewer than the 2.4 million girls enrolled in school regularly attend classes. MoE data shows that 19% of all enrolled children are classified as either temporarily absent, absent for most or all of the year, or “permanently absent.” MoE policy allows students classified as “permanently absent” to stay on school enrollment lists for up to three years without those students having attended school during that time. In 2009, 22%, or approximately 446,682, of female students were either absent from school for the year (temporarily absent) or classified as permanently absent, while 11%, or 799,822, of male students were temporarily or permanently absent.¹⁵

Desired Achievement

Of the school-aged females interviewed during the field research, 71.8% want to continue their education, 9.9% do not want to continue and 18.3% are unsure or do not know. However, given that the majority of girls interviewed in the field research were currently attending secondary or high school, this cannot be seen as proportionally representative of girls’ aspirations across Afghanistan. Notably, there was a significant difference in the aspirations of girls currently attending school and those not attending school.

Of those girls not currently attending school, 10.1% want to go to school, 16.0% do not and 73.9% are unsure or do not know. When asked about this, many of the girls who are unsure or do not want to continue formal schooling expressed some desire to continue their education, even if they felt it was unfeasible. As a young woman from Badghis told researchers, “Education is good for women and I wish I could go back to school, but we are poor. I don’t want to go to school anymore because I have to help my family. But if we get in a better economic situation and I do not have to work as much, I would like to join a literacy class.”

But of those girls currently attending school, 84.7% want to continue, 8.6% do not want to continue and 6.7% are unsure. Perhaps unsurprisingly, students’ desire to continue their education increases the longer they are in school. Of high school students, 94% want to continue their education; of

secondary school students, 81.6% want to continue; and of primary school students, 66.2% want to continue.

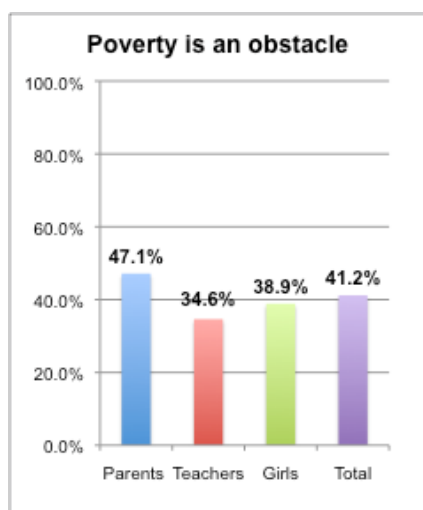
Of the girls who want to continue their education, 64.1% want to complete university, 19.3% want to study only until finishing high school, 2.0% want to study only until finishing secondary school, 1.2% want to study only until finishing primary school and 13.4% are unsure or do not know. Again, girls' desire to continue studying increases as they get older. For example, 77.6% of high school students stated that they want to complete university.

Parents expressed similar expectations. More than half (50.8%) want their daughter(s) to complete university, 19.4% want them to study only until finishing high school, 11.9% want them to study only until they get married, 8.3% want them to study only until finishing secondary school, 1.4% want them to study only until finishing primary school and 11.9% are unsure. However, it should be noted there were significant differences across the provinces surveyed. For example, 82.5% of parents in Bamiyan want their daughters to complete university while only 5.4% in Khost do and only 20% of school-aged females in Takhar want to complete university while 90.6% of those in Kabul do.

This reflects perhaps both the variety of attitudes towards education and the uneven access to education across Afghanistan, particularly in the case of higher education. The number of women enrolled in university across the country has grown by 43.6% since 2007, yet access remains uneven. While women make up 34.9% of the student body in Herat, they comprise 3.6% of students in Kandahar and 0.3% in Khost.¹⁶

Nonetheless, girls and their parents are highly ambitious when contrasted with the reality that less than half of girls make it past primary school. In 2009, 19.9% of government university students were female - up slightly from 17.4% in 2007.¹⁷ Even though many parents and their daughters share the same desire to complete their secondary or university education, they are often constrained by a combination of poverty (and the related opportunity costs of schooling), distance, security and fear of negative social pressures.

Poverty



Poverty was named as the single biggest obstacle to girls' education, according to 41.2% of those interviewed (47.1% of parents, 34.6% of teachers and 38.9% of school-aged females). Some 9 million Afghans, or 36% of the population, are not able to meet their basic needs.¹⁸ As so many households struggle to make ends meet, the education of their children must be seen in the context of larger economic considerations.

In most families, children are an integral part of the household livelihood strategy either through providing support to income generation activities (farm work or work done within the home, such as carpet weaving), by seeking formal employment, begging or other means. As the head of a women's shura in Herat told researchers, "When families have financial problems, they usually force the girls to work

on farms and that is like having a full time job so they cannot go to school. Most girls who drop out here do so because of their family's poverty." The Afghan government estimates that one in five children, the majority of them male between the ages of 6 and 17, are employed.¹⁹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, net primary and secondary enrollment of poor children (50% and 13%, respectively) is lower than that of children not categorized as poor (53% and 18%, respectively).²⁰

School feeding programs or the distribution of food through schools was widely supported among interviewees as a way of addressing barriers related to poverty. In 2002, as part of the Back to School campaign, the World Food Program (WFP) began providing support to over a million students in the form of take-home rations. It currently funds a variety of school-based feeding interventions, including distributions of biscuits or cooked midday meals for 1.4 million children and take-home food rations for an additional 1.4 million children.²¹

But the sustainability of these programs is questionable, as is their impact on child chronic malnutrition. The targeting of such programs is difficult, given that such a high proportion of children live in poverty. While some have instead advocated for the universal introduction of a midday meal, which has contributed to a rise in girls' attendance in some parts of India, others have argued that take-home food rations are more effective because they provide a tangible incentive to household decision-makers.²² But given the lack of research on the impact of various initiatives in Afghanistan, it is difficult to tell which interventions are most effective in increasing attendance over the long term.

Several interviewees recognized the problems with such incentive programs. For example, many noted that attendance seemed to swell on the days when oil or other food was distributed but would immediately decrease afterwards. However, most interviewees felt that the benefits far outweighed the drawbacks. When asked about whether they created a sustainable increase in girls' attendance, many felt that the need for such programs will decrease over time. According to one female student in Badakhshan, "WFP programs are good. They get parents to send their daughters to school, especially in poorer families. But when I'm a mother, we won't need them anymore. We will know the value of education because we have been to school, and we will send our children without anyone offering us things."

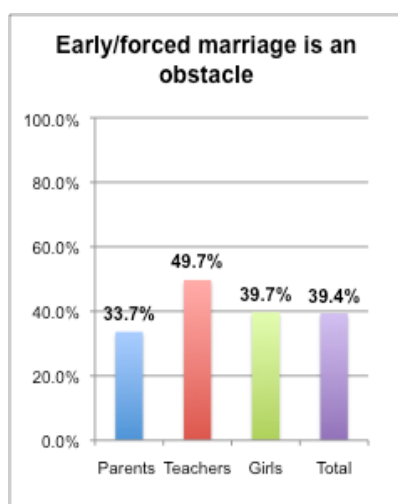
Additionally, there are often informal user fees that can deter poorer parents from sending children to school. Many schools surveyed in the field research charged end-user fees, generally for the purpose of supporting extra teachers, raising funds for a new school building, and other costs related to keeping schools operational. This echoes findings from research conducted by Oxfam in Daikundi in 2006, where 85% of schools charged end-user fees, and from the Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC) in 2004, which estimated the average annual cost in Kabul of sending a child to first grade was 350 afghani (USD 8), to fifth grade 1,000 afghani (USD 22) and to ninth grade 1,700 afghani (USD 37).²³

Such fees are often an additional economic burden on top of ancillary costs associated with education, ranging from uniforms and stationery (note-

books, pens, pencils and so on) to transport and pocket money, which place additional pressure on poorer families. According to the students interviewed, 71.3% said that their school does not provide stationery, meaning that parents must bear such costs, in addition to the costs of uniforms and, often, textbooks.

As one parent in Samangan told researchers, “One of the problems is that the government is not supplying all the necessary books to the students, therefore, they have to purchase them outside...and some families can’t afford to pay for all these things.” According to a 2009 survey conducted by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), this appears to be a greater pressure point for boys than girls: 4.6% of girls pointed to this as a reason for drop out and 9.6% of boys stated that this was a reason for drop out.²⁴ And while it alone may not be a significant factor in whether or not girls go to, or stay in, school, ancillary costs can exacerbate other factors in the process of decision-making about school attendance.

Early or Forced Marriage



In the case of girls, marriage may also be seen as a way to alleviate economic pressures in that it creates household income in the form of a bride price. But often when girls get married, they do not continue their education. Linked with this, 39.4% of interviewees stated that early or forced marriage was a major obstacle to girls’ education, though this perception was more common among teachers (49.7%) than it was amongst students (39.7%) or parents (33.7%).

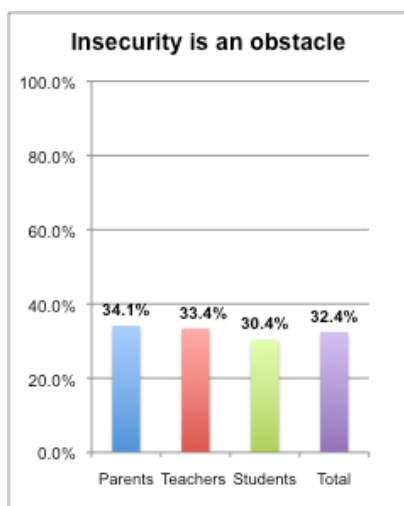
While it is important to remember that early marriage is a practice that is determined by a complex mix of social and cultural factors, economics often play a role as well. As one high school principal in Herat explained, “Since people are poor and dowries are very high, girls are forced to get married when they are young. The general perception is that it is enough for girls to only learn how to read and write and more than that is really unnecessary.”

Researchers encountered several instances in the field research where girls who were married successfully negotiated permission to continue their studies, either through formal schooling or literacy and vocational classes. But more often than not, girls were unable to continue their schooling after marriage or motherhood. There was often the expectation that once married, girls would assume new roles as wives and mothers, with little time to attend school. As a mother from Samangan commented, “Girls get married, and then they have more responsibilities to undertake, such as raising their children. At this point, I think taking care of their families is much more important than attending school and if they do go to school, people will misjudge them and say bad things.”

Motherhood also presented a significant obstacle to girls continuing their education. As one teacher in Khost commented, “There is no facility at the school where they can keep their children, which hinders their ability to come. It will be an extra burden to someone else in the family to watch the child, and then the family may not support the girl to go to school.” Many

mothers who had dropped out of school tended to agree, feeling that they could not manage to attend formal schools given family expectations and childcare obligations. However, many talked about enrolling, or the desire to enroll, in informal education or literacy classes along with other mothers, and where they might be able to bring their children along or childcare could be provided.

Insecurity



Insecurity is seen as the most significant obstacle to girls' education after poverty and early/forced marriage. Nearly a third (32.4%) of those interviewed named insecurity as one of the biggest challenges to girls attending school (34.1% of parents, 33.4% of teachers and 30.4% of school-aged females).

As the conflict has spread, it has eroded access to basic services such as education. As one father in Kandahar told researchers, "The suicide bombings and shootings lately have forced us to keep our children home. I hope we can send them back soon, but the situation is too difficult right now."

Schools have also been increasingly targeted by AOG or other extremist elements. In 2009, there was an average of 50 attacks on schools each month – though the number of attacks rose to 250 during the elections in August, when schools were used as polling stations.²⁵ While direct attacks on schools have grown significantly since 2005, threatening night letters and intimidation appear to be even more common and have dire consequences, often resulting in teachers leaving their jobs and parents keeping their children home out of fear for their safety. According to the MoE, 34% of schools in Helmand remain closed due to insecurity, as do 61% of schools in Zabul.²⁶ As one mother in Kandahar commented, "The girls here don't go to school because of traditions and insecurity. There are no separate schools for girls and the government cannot establish them as they say that no government employee in this area is safe and it is feared that they will be abducted. Even if there were teachers, we would not send our children to school as we can't keep them safe and they may be killed for even just going to school."

"It's a combination of traditions and insecurity [that prevent girls from attending]. If we had security, we could build schools, train teachers and talk to the parents to change their minds. But when they are afraid and we cannot offer them much support because of insecurity, it is difficult to get them to change their ways."

- MoE official, Kandahar

Such attacks and threats may also have a ripple effect, causing schools in the surrounding area to shut down or attendance rates to drop. Where schools do not close altogether, each incident influences decisions by parents and students whether to continue to attend school and can influence the general perception of whether it is safe for girls to continue to go to school. Given greater social restrictions on girls' movements and the increased targeting of girls' schools, this affects girls more significantly than boys.²⁷ As a parent in Kunduz told researchers, "Insecurity is getting worse and has generated fear among families. So when we heard about poisoning incidents in some schools, this really affected us and many parents decided to take their girls out of school."

While data has improved in recent years, there are still a number of gaps in information and analysis that limit the ability to fully understand the origins of threats to schools and what can be done to prevent them. Several

entities regularly gather information about threats against, or attacks on, schools, including the MoE, UNAMA and UNICEF, but none of these mechanisms systematically record the funding source for schools, such as PRTs, major international donors or the MoE, or whether they are “branded” as such. For example, a 2009 survey supported by the MoE, CARE and the World Bank found that communities believed schools were more likely to be attacked if they were built by a PRT or have a significant relationship with the PRT. The study also found that communities felt that schools are more protected when community members are involved in the building and operation of the school.²⁸

Yet it is difficult to determine to what extent this perception is borne out in reality. There is a dearth of analysis comparing security of schools with significant community ownership to other schools, as well as a lack of research on other conflict-related factors that could inhibit school attendance or the wider impact that threats or attacks might have on attendance. However, anecdotal evidence from the field research supports the theory that community involvement in schools often increases the perception of their security. As a teacher in Badghis told researchers, “Since our high school maintains contact with students’ parents, they tend to be very supportive and cooperative with our school. They know we have to work together to make sure students are safe in and out of school.”

“We have made some progress through meeting with parents to convince them to send their girls to school, but now security is getting worse. We have trained more teachers and get more support from the MoE but if security is bad, attendance goes down. Then what can we do?”

– Female teacher, Balkh

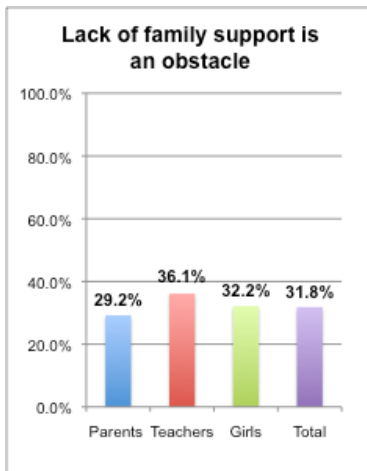
The prospect of AOG taking control in insecure areas, and the likelihood of them instituting restrictions on girls’ access to education when they do so, has also affected decision-making about attendance.²⁹ As a female teacher in Khost related, “Some girls go to school but the situation is too uncertain. We are near the border [to Pakistan] so no one knows what will happen with security and what the consequences will be, and many are afraid to send their girls to school.”

It is important to remember that AOG attitudes towards girls’ education are varied across the insurgency. Field research indicates that some communities in insecure areas were successfully able to negotiate girls’ access to education with the relevant AOG. Others were not, or were too afraid to even attempt to do so. As a result, girls stopped attending formal schools and were forced to either attend “secret” schools or discontinue their education altogether. However, research with Taliban commanders in southern Afghanistan suggests that “they would seek to restrict girls’ access to secondary and higher-level education; limit women’s opportunities for certain types of jobs or public roles; strictly enforce social codes affecting women; curtail their access to public spaces; and require a mahram [male family member or chaperone] to accompany them” in public spaces as part of any peace agreement.³⁰

While direct attacks on education or conflict-related factors comprised some of the security concerns interviewees raised, there were other significant security concerns including harassment and local conflicts. Whether or not a school has significant privacy, such as an outer wall, was a frequently raised issue, as was the distance between girls’ homes and the school. As one teacher in rural Parwan commented, “In our village, the schools are very far. Girls are harassed on their way to school so a lot of families don’t send their girls, or they go after the boys who harass the girls. Local conflicts are widespread in our area and men often use arms to

resolve them. In the past two months, three girls have dropped out because of these conflicts.”

The Role of Families and Communities



Family attitudes are widely seen as critical to determining whether or not girls go to school, and for how long. 31.8% of those interviewed (29.2% of parents, 36.1% of teachers and 32.2% of school-aged females) stated the lack of family support is a significant obstacle to girls' education. Similarly, a survey conducted of drop-outs in 2009 by AIHRC, found that parents not supporting girls to continue their education was the single biggest reason for them leaving school (reported by 25.7% of drop-outs).³¹

The majority (55.0%) of parents interviewed in the field research sent at least one of their daughters to school. 19.5% reported that their daughter(s) used to go to school but dropped out, 14.2% reported that their daughter(s) never went to school and 11.3% reported that their daughter(s) had not reached school age.

But just because parents sent one daughter to school, it does not mean they sent all of their daughters or sons to school. This is in line with a 2006 study conducted by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) which found that “there are many variations on this general pattern and in some cases siblings who do attend school serve as tutors to their brothers and sisters who do not.”³² For example, 18.3% of parents interviewed who reported having one daughter who either dropped out of school or never attended school, also had at least one daughter currently attending school.

However, the parents interviewed appeared slightly more likely to send their male children to school than their female children: 77.6% reported sending at least one son to school, 12.1% reported that their son(s) used to go to school but dropped out, 9.0% reported that their son(s) never went to school, 11.6% reported that their son(s) not reached school age and 4.4% reported not having a son.

But who makes the decision within the family, and who outside the family exerts significance influence on such decisions, varies from village to village and household to household. While economic factors play a significant role in this decision-making process, social pressures and local norms regulating female behavior often also play a critical role. As the AREU study summarized, “If a daughter is enrolled in school, the fear of being shamed by extended family members in other households, neighbors and others is widespread. ‘People talk,’ and often this is too humiliating for members of a household – both male and female – to bear.”³³

The harassment of girls on their way to and from school, closely related to the issue of distance, is another factor that often influences family attitudes. Harassment, kidnapping, elopement and cases of sexual assault appear to have a dramatic effect on attendance. Researchers reported several instances where issues related to the notion of girls' honor led to violent conflict, abduction and even murder. When faced with such risks, it is easy to

see why many families might make the decision to keep their girls out of school.

Community attitudes can also play a critical role in shaping the parameters of girls' access to education. 9.9% of those interviewed (11.6% of parents, 7.8% of teachers and 9.5% of school-aged females) named lack of community support as a significant obstacle to girls' education while 4.6% pointed to community or cultural beliefs (4.0% of parents, 6.0% of teachers and 4.5% of school-aged females). But the role that community members play often depends on the dynamics within each community. Where community structures were strong, interviewees felt that influential individuals, such as mullahs and elders, played a key role in shaping girls' access to education.

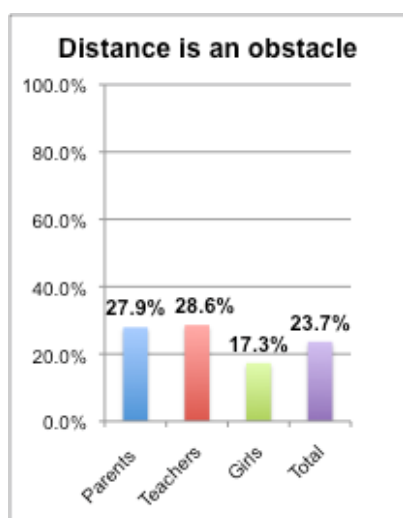
“The problem is that families don’t support the girls. Most people in our area are farmers and when the girls get married, they are supposed to work on the farm as well. They can’t even handle that, let alone also studying at the same time. But if the girls don’t get married when they reach a certain age, people will judge them and say bad things.”

– Mother, Samangan

However, the perception of this influence is less strong in areas where community structures are fractured or power-holders are seen as weak or mistrusted. In Kandahar, researchers were told of families that were threatened by individuals in their community and warned not to send their girls to school. However, in Bamiyan, shura members encouraged researchers to talk to parents of out-of-school girls in the hopes that they could be convinced to send them to school. And in Pansjir, parents and students reported that mullahs preach against girls going to school but are not influential enough to convince parents to keep their daughters home.

Given the importance of parents trust in, and community support of, local schools, many interviewees emphasized the importance of school officials engaging with communities. A teacher in Parwan told researchers, “There should be dialogue, monthly meetings, between the families and the school. The school authorities need to communicate problems to the parents and also encourage them to send their daughters to schools. There are families who ignore these issues and disallow their girls to further their education so we need to make contact with them and communicate the importance of education and its benefits for the children and families.”

Physical Access to Education



According to a 2010 national survey published by Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA), 88% of Afghans interviewed reported that they had access to primary and secondary education – more than any other public service – and access is increasing.³⁴ There are approximately 12,514 schools in Afghanistan, according to the MoE, up from 7,650 in 2004.³⁵ Yet, of those interviewed in the field research, nearly a quarter (23.7%) still see distance as a major obstacle to girls' access to education (27.9% of parents, 28.6% of teachers and 17.3% of school-aged females).

The progress made in establishing schools has been extremely uneven across the country, with female students in rural areas particularly disadvantaged. For example, in one community surveyed in Dai-kundi, female students reported travelling three hours each way to reach the closest school. Part of the problem is that despite the fact that 83% of schools are in rural areas, urban schools serve a disproportionate share of the student population – 35% of students as opposed to 65% of



Girls walking to school in Badakhshan province.

students in rural schools.³⁶ According to a survey of recent drop-outs conducted as part of the NRVA, only 12% of girls in urban areas named distance as the reason for drop out while 37% of those in rural areas did.³⁷

A study of community-based primary schools in Ghor found that enrollment dropped by 16% for every mile (or 1.6 kilometers) that children have to travel to get to school and test scores fell by 0.19 standard deviations.³⁸ Girls were found to be particularly sensitive to distance: enrollment for girls decreased by 19% per mile while boys' enrollment only fell by 1%; and girls' test scores dropped by

0.24 standard deviations per mile while boys' fell by 0.15 standard deviations. The study also found that greater accessibility to schools "virtually eliminates" the gender gap in attendance, reduces gender disparities in test scores by a third and increases the enrollment of all children.

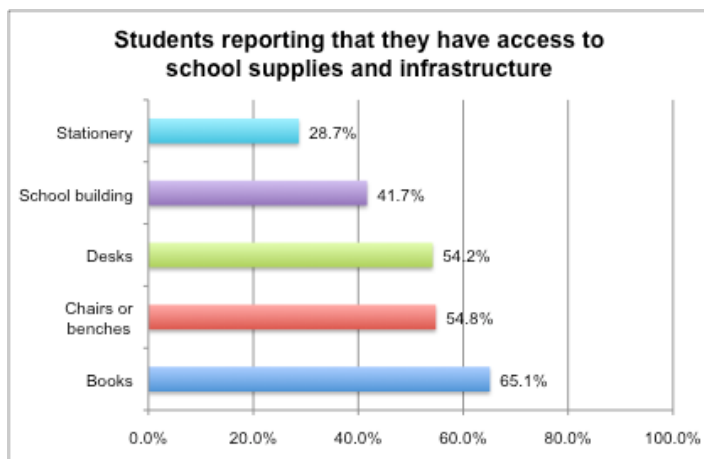
Yet it is difficult to determine "how far is too far" when it comes to school distance across Afghanistan, particularly given that the issue of distance relates to notions of female honor, which has varying interpretations across communities, and the local security situation. Tied to this, harassment of girls on their way to and from school by men and boys was seen by one-tenth of those interviewed (10.9%) as a major obstacle to girls' access to education (14.8% of parents, 9.0% of teachers and 8.3% of school-aged females). Female students, who are less likely than parents or teachers to report either distance or harassment as an obstacle, are more likely to recognize how the issue of distance was linked to tradition, community norms and other factors. As one student in Parwan told researchers, "Distance is just an excuse for conservative attitudes."

Distance becomes increasingly problematic as girls approach adolescence, when worries about them travelling long distances everyday are compounded by cultural norms that dictate that such activities are likely to bring dishonor or shame upon their families. 12.6% of interviewees (17.0% of parents, 10.2% of teachers and 9.6% of school-aged females) named the lack of a girls only school as a significant obstacle to girls' education. As a recent school drop-out from Kunar commented, "This is a border area, and so the government is very weak on education here. The distance is too far and parents think it is not good for older girls to be seen travelling so far. Plus, there are no female teachers, so while many boys go to school parents do not send their girls."

Access to schooling decreases as girls get older. According to the MoE, there are 5,124 primary schools but only 3,634 secondary schools and 2,702 high schools. While in practice many schools may have both girls and boys attending, MoE data shows that the proportion of girls' schools decreases as the level of schooling increases. 39.1% of primary schools are designated as female only, but this drops to 33.2% and 28.1% at secondary and high school level, respectively.³⁹ According to AIHRC, 80% of districts lack girls' high schools.⁴⁰ Additionally, community-based schooling efforts have largely focused only on the primary level and few community-based secondary or high schools are in operation.

"There is only one high school in the entire district. Students can't come from far away villages and there is no transportation. So girls quit after secondary level, get married and have children. Even if they want to return, there is no place at the school where women can keep their children, so they stay at home."

– School principal, Herat



Distance also complicates access for children with disabilities, with school attendance for children with disabilities almost half that of children without disabilities.⁴¹ Additionally, Kuchis, a nomadic ethnic minority group, are disproportionately affected by distance, particularly girls. 58% of the female Kuchi drop-outs surveyed in the NRVA list distance as the primary reason for them no longer attending school.⁴² Distance may also inhibit parental involvement in schools, as parents are less likely to be

active in their child's school if it is far away.⁴³

Quality of Education

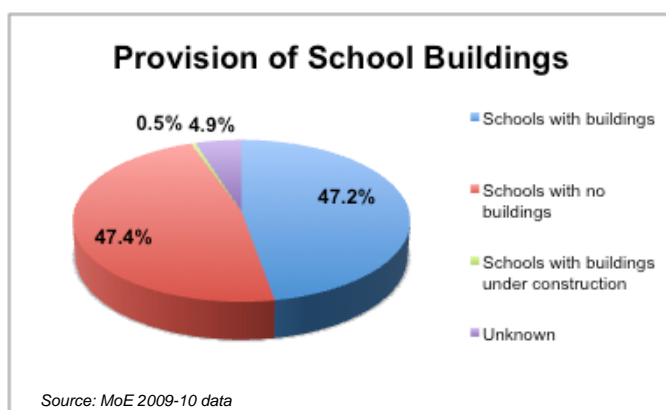


A mixed gender school in Daikundi province with no building.

Despite the gains made since 2001, quality of education was a significant concern among those interviewed. While many felt it had improved, 16.4% of those interviewed still named education quality as a major challenge to girls' access to education (21.7% of parents, 11.4% of teachers and 13.8% of school-aged females). Perceptions of whether a child is getting a "good" education can ultimately influence whether or not they attend at all. Weighed together with other factors, particularly household economic concerns, perception of education quality can be decisive. A 2008 review of the education system warned that "the growing numbers of dissatisfied and disappointed students and parents erode support for education as a national priority; uneven access and inequitable allocation of scarce resources underscore the populace's worst fears about government institutions."⁴⁴

While "quality" can encompass a number of factors, the following section broadly breaks quality down into three categories: school conditions, the quality and accessibility of teachers, and learning outcomes.

School conditions



While 2,281 schools have been built in the past two years alone, MoE data shows that 47% of schools in Afghanistan still have no building.⁴⁵ Slightly lower than the national average, 41.7% of female students interviewed said their school had a building. This significantly varied across research sites, and was particularly pronounced in rural areas: for example, 8.3% of those interviewed in Balkh said their school had a building while 75.0% of those in Kabul did.

A related problem is adequate water and sanitation. UNICEF estimates that three out of every four public schools do not have safe sanitation and 40% lack access to safe drinking water.⁴⁶ This par-

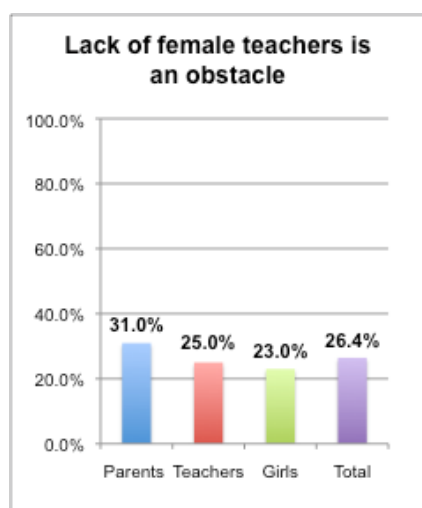
ticularly affects girls, in that they are less likely to attend school if they do not have access to private sanitation facilities.

Beyond infrastructure, one of the most basic problems encountered by students is access to appropriate learning materials. Only 65.1% of the students interviewed said that their school had sufficient books. This echoes findings from a 2009 AIHRC survey, which reported that 50% of students said that they had one book for each subject, 44% said that they didn't regularly have one book for each subject and 6% said that they had no books at all.⁴⁷

While the uneven distribution of resources is in part due to poor planning and the highly centralized structure of the MoE, field researchers also encountered numerous allegations of corruption both in the distribution of resources and access to educational services. These ranged from "ghost" teachers on MoE payrolls to books being distributed to schools in some districts where officials had paid a "fee" but not to others in which no "fee" was paid.⁴⁸ As one school principal in Kunduz told researchers, "Things work on the basis of connections and bribes, from text books to test results and teachers. Many teachers are not qualified to teach. I have seen cases where students who have studied under a teacher for three years weren't even able to write their names."

The IWA survey found that 11% of Afghans interviewed reported that corruption had prevented them from accessing primary or secondary education and 21% reported being prevented from accessing higher education.⁴⁹ While this indicates significantly less corruption in the education sector than was reported in many other sectors, such as justice and the police, they are still deeply concerning.

Qualified teachers



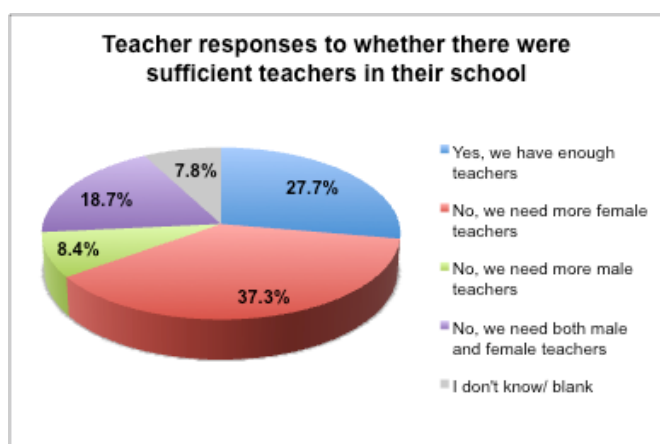
Lack of qualified female teachers can be a significant obstacle to girls attending school, especially as they get older. More than a quarter (26.4%) of the individuals interviewed named the lack of a female teacher as a major obstacle to girls' access to education (31.0% of parents, 25.0% of teachers and 20.0% of school-aged females). This was slightly higher among girls attending school than among school-aged females as a whole, with 25.2% of school attendees reporting that the lack of a female teacher was a significant obstacle.

According to a survey of drop-outs conducted in 2009 by AIHRC, 14.7% of girls reported the lack of a female teacher as the reason for them leaving school.⁵⁰ As one mullah in rural Kabul told us, "The lack of qualified female teachers creates a lot of problems. Families, especially poor families, are not willing to send their daughters to school because they think it is a waste of resources and time, and they don't want them to have male teachers so this becomes the reason they do not send their children to school."

While progress was swiftly made in enrolling students after the fall of the Taliban, efforts to hire, train and retain teachers have struggled to keep up with enrollment. In 2008, 5.8 million children were enrolled in school, up from 4.9 million in 2004. Yet between 2004 and 2008, the number of trained

teachers only slightly increased, from 121,000 to 142,000.⁵¹ There are now approximately 6.7 million students enrolled and just 149,634 teachers on MoE payrolls.⁵²

Correspondingly, the teacher to student ratio has increased from 1:38 in 2007 to 1:43 in 2009.⁵³ Yet this varies significantly across the country, from 1:97 in Daikundi to 1:29 in Badakhshan and Baghlan. Currently, 45,141, or 30%, of all teachers are female.⁵⁴ This makes the national ratio of female teachers to female students approximately 1:53. However, the distribution of female teachers is highly uneven with an estimated 80% of female teachers working in or around urban areas.⁵⁵ For example, 66% of teachers are female in Kabul (with a female teacher to female student ratio of 1:3) but just 3% of teachers are female in Khost (a ratio of 1:416) and 1% in Paktika (1:784). Given that 37.1% of all female teachers are located in Kabul, where 12.2% of female students attend school, this is hardly surprising. If Kabul province is excluded from the national average, the female teacher to female student ratio increases to 1:83.



When teachers were asked whether or not there are enough teachers in their school, more than two-thirds (68.4%) responded that there are not. Those who responded that they do not have enough teachers in their school were then asked what kind of teachers they need. More than half (54.6%) need only female teachers, 27.3% need both male and female teachers, 12.3% need only additional male teachers and 5.7% are unsure.

A lack of professionally qualified teachers is also an issue. Teachers employed by the MoE are required to have completed high school yet this requirement

is not always adhered to in practice, particularly in the case of teachers on short term or temporary contracts. Of the teachers interviewed, 9.6% completed only primary or secondary school, 44.6% had completed high school, 35.8% completed teacher training and 9.9% completed university. Again, this varied significantly across provinces. For example, 40.0% of teachers in Takhar reported that they completed only secondary school while 45.0% of teachers in Parwan completed university.

However, many of the interviewees responded that the quality of their teachers has improved in recent years, indicating that teacher training initiatives have made some progress. As a village elder from Kunar commented, "We don't have many qualified teachers and it is hard to find female teachers but the NGOs and government have done training for them at the school and in the district center, which is the main thing that has improved the quality of education over the past few years."

Yet many individuals indicated that despite progress in training teachers, the quality of female teachers, especially at secondary and high school level, remained inadequate. The Afghanistan Compact states that by 2010, 70% of teachers will have passed a competency test. It is unclear what such a competency test would focus on or how many teachers would pass. In a 2005 survey in northern Afghanistan, 200 primary school teachers were asked to take the same exams as their students. Only ten passed.⁵⁶

But teachers do face significant challenges. Many do not get paid on time, with some reporting salary lapses of up to eight months. While their salaries have been upgraded in recent years, the pay scale ranges from 6,000 to 24,000 afghani per month (USD 132 to 531), depending on education and experience. Teaching is reportedly often seen as a career, especially by those in urban areas, for those who have completed high school but failed the university entrance exam. Many Afghans who have completed university prefer to take higher paying jobs, and many more qualified teachers opt to work for international organizations or private schools.⁵⁷ Many of the teachers interviewed in the field research felt that their salaries are too low and admit to holding second jobs. According to many of the parents interviewed, teachers having second jobs contributes to absenteeism but is seen as almost inevitable given the low salaries and persistent bottlenecks in salary distribution by the government and NGOs.

Learning Outcomes

There are very few indicators that measure whether students are actually learning in schools. There are currently no output indicators tracked by the MoE, such as student learning achievement. Each student takes an exam at the end of the year that is recorded by the MoE, but these exams are not standardized and usually devised by individual teachers. The university entrance exam is perhaps the only standardized test in the Afghan education system, but taking the test is voluntary. In schools with large student attendance, there may be several shifts during the day meaning that some students may receive as little as two hours of schooling per day. A teacher in Kunduz commented, “We have two shifts, which means that we cannot go through all of the things they need to learn or cover everything we need to in the short time allocated to each subject.”

However, many of the factors discussed above – student to teacher ratios, availability of text books and so on – indicate that while the quality of education has improved in recent years, it remains very poor. A study of learning outcomes was carried out by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) in 2010, devising a curricula-based test for a small sample of male and female students in grades three and six. The study found low levels of average achievement (an average score of 52% for grade three students, and 53% for grade six students), though girls seemed to do slightly better than boys, and students in community-based schools scored higher (an average score of 68%) than students in other schools.⁵⁸

One measurable learning outcome for which there is some available data is literacy. According to the NRVA, there has been a “remarkable surge in literacy” among younger age groups over the past few years. Literacy for girls aged 12 to 16 is 37%, and 62% for boys. For every age group above 25, the female literacy rate is less than 25% of the male literacy rate. However, it jumps to 63% in the youngest age group. Girls are starting to catch up and “in no previous living generation has the [literacy] gender gap been so small.”⁵⁹ However, the data also shows that the margin of progress for girls in urban areas is significantly larger than in rural areas. While the literacy of girls in urban areas is 85% that of boys, it is only approximately 30% of boys’ literacy rates in rural areas.

“Some of our teachers are students themselves and have no formal experience. Book distribution usually takes months, with cases where books reach schools mid-year. Girls’ attendance has dropped and it’s getting worse. In 2003, people were so interested in sending their daughters to school but that’s not the case anymore.

*– Female teacher,
Daikundi*

Given the challenges currently facing the education system, some may argue that it is too early to focus on learning outcomes. However, simple learning outcome indicators may help to refine MoE and donor policies, pinpoint gaps or uneven outcomes for girls and boys, and ensure that the Afghan government is able to focus more effectively on the quality of education as and when it gains the capacity to do so. A concerted focus on learning outcomes can also improve the confidence of parents in the education system by parents, as they may be more likely to support their children attending school if they can see tangible results.

Recommendations

Through interviews and focus group discussions, individuals were asked open-ended questions about what they felt should be done to improve access to, and the quality of, education for girls. While the full range of proposals made by individuals in the course of the research cannot be reflected here, the following set of recommendations aims to address the major themes raised by those interviewed.

Increase the number of female-friendly, well-equipped schools for girls, especially in rural or remote areas.

Efforts to establish more schools, especially in rural or remote areas, must be expedited. They must include adequate water and sanitation. Proximity must be a primary criterion in establishing new schools. Establishing distance benchmarks in India helped ensure that all primary school-age children had access to education in many areas of the country. Indian government education guidelines mandate that there must be a primary school within 0.62 miles (one kilometer) of every home, and one secondary school for every two primary schools.⁶⁰ Accessibility varies significantly across Afghanistan, which is in turn complicated by low population density in many areas of the country. However, such minimum standards of accessibility may help to even out access to education, especially in rural or remote (but relatively secure) areas.

Efforts to roll out and standardize community-based schools at the secondary level can also help improve access to post-primary education. Another possible solution is combining schools. According to the Director of Women's Affairs in Khost, "The number of girls attending school has gone up because the district department of education has decided to combine female primary, secondary and high schools in more remote areas, something that has been very effective in attracting more girls to attend schools."

Nonetheless, it will take time to establish more schools. When asked how these problems should be tackled, many of the individuals interviewed recognized this and proposed practical interim solutions, including improving existing schools (through such measures as building surrounding walls and upgrading water and sanitation facilities) and the provision of transport for students where distance was an issue. For example, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) provides transportation, in some cases with financial contributions from community members, in several of the research sites. Families benefiting from these services felt this critical to enabling older girls' access education, while those in neighboring villages who had heard of AKDN's transport scheme were eager to obtain similar support for the girls in their village.

Increase the number and quality of female teachers, especially in rural or remote areas.

Teacher training programs must be scaled up to address the shortage of qualified female teachers. Incentive programs should be enhanced and

"Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit."

– Universal Declaration of Human Rights



A teacher reads aloud to students.

expanded to enable more qualified female teachers to work in remote areas and mentor existing teachers in such locations. Teacher preparation classes, scholarships for further study and community support for schools and teachers can also act as incentives, as well as improve the quality of teaching. Developing teaching aid materials and training focused on pedagogical methods can also help teachers to develop the skills they need to support student learning. Training should also be gender sensitized to ensure that all teachers understand the different obstacles faced by male and female students, and to prevent perpetuation of gender stereotypes.

Over the long term, more must be done to increase girls' secondary school enrollment and to ensure that secondary education leads to better income-earning opportunities, relevant skills development or placement in a university. University curricula and the quality of professors should be improved alongside greater support for scholarship programs and job placement schemes.

Improve monitoring of schools and accountability at both the local and central level.

The MoE has virtually no systematic monitoring tools and limited capacity to monitor schools, especially in remote or insecure areas. School "report cards" could be an effective first step to give a top line indication of access to, and quality of, education. Both the Afghan Ministry of Health and the Indian Ministry of Education has made such tools a cornerstone of their monitoring efforts. The collection of data on school conditions, student and teacher attendance and other key criteria could be contracted out to a UN agency or NGO, who could then involve community members in the collection process.

Monitoring involving the community could not only enhance trust, it could cut down on corruption and save money. In 2006, Oxfam estimated that having community members monitor teacher attendance could help alleviate the problem of "ghost teachers" and save the MoE 600 million afghani (approximately USD 13.2 million) a month.⁶¹

Pursue local solutions and involve communities in decision-making and implementation wherever possible.

Given the radically different attitudes towards, and conditions of, education across the country, initiatives to get more girls in school must address local dynamics. This applies to both supply and demand factors. New school buildings should be cheap and simple for a community to maintain. Community-owned are likely to be better protected from damage or harm. Where schools are far away and alternative transport does not exist, communities should be involved to identify local solutions, such as renting a car or identifying adults to take turns walking children to school.

“The future of Afghanistan depends on what and how it invests in the education sector today.”

– World Bank, “Managing Public Finances for Development,” 2005

However, the MoE, like many other Afghan ministries, remains highly centralized, inhibiting the government’s ability to respond to local needs. The ministries that work on education issues, such as the Ministry of Finance as well as the MoE, must be able to coordinate with one another as well as with their respective line ministries. Some administrative and budget functions could be delegated to the provincial or school level to increase the efficiency of MoE interventions and enhance MoE responsiveness to local demand. Provincial and district level officials must have a stronger voice in key processes like budget preparation, based on sound data and analysis of the needs on the ground. Improving monitoring and accountability also means giving the line ministries more influence and responsibility.

Focus on improving safety and security of schools, particularly in conflict areas.

Schools and education programs must be treated as de-militarized safe zones. The Afghan government, the UN, donors and NGOs must do more to understand the nature of threats against schools and work in ways to minimize such threats. Armed groups should stop attacks against schools recognizing that such activity only contributes to the further impoverishment of communities over the long term.

Parents and communities should be empowered to engage with schools and teachers. While not definitive, there is some evidence to suggest that such participation can lead to safer schools or at least improved perception among communities that it is safe for children to go to school.

International Military Forces, including PRTs, and Afghan National Security Forces should take all care necessary to avoid any association with schools that could lead to an increase in targeting, and attacks by, opposition groups.

Establish and maintain strong links between schools and parents.

Communities and parents should be encouraged to participate in school management, such as monitoring teacher attendance or forming a committee to oversee the upkeep of the school. Village Education Committees, already operational in some areas of Afghanistan and often supported by NGOs, are a critical tool in increasing local involvement and support.

In Ghazni, Village Education Committees have worked with parents to raised funds for the salaries of teachers with university degrees or other technical qualifications for math and science. In Khost, the community contributed USD 10,000 to establish a lower secondary school for girls while donors provided the remaining USD 80,000 required. While such initiatives are commendable, they may not be possible in many communities, especially poorer areas. Such committees could perhaps more widely be utilized to help monitor teacher attendance or other accountability issues and report their findings to the MoE.

Redouble efforts to improve the quality and accessibility of secondary and higher education.

The demand for secondary education is increasing, and urgent steps must be taken to ensure that female students have access to high quality education after primary school. Key measures to improve access include increasing the number of female secondary and high schools, and developing plans to upgrade existing schools to ensure they have adequate materials (such as laboratories and libraries) and safe spaces for physical education or extracurricular activities.

Gradually increase the focus on learning outcomes.

In many conflict or post-conflict settings, the focus is often on “access first” and “quality later.” But quality must be integrated, as much as possible, into efforts to improve access. World Bank research finds that strategies to improve quality are most successful when they are integral to overall education work, rather than an add-on process, stating that such processes are “as important in temporary learning spaces under trees or canvas as they are in established systems.”⁶²



Refine approaches to targeting and review MoE policies to ensure that they are gender sensitive and address the diverse needs of Afghan students.

Systematically evaluate which kinds of interventions are most effective, in different contexts, in addressing demand side factors, such as the formation of parent teacher associations or food-for-school programs. Given the levels of poverty, together with the costs of sending a child to school and the opportunity cost of potential earnings lost, improving and

systematizing the provision of incentives is critical.

The MoE should also gender-sensitize education policies to ensure that it meets the different needs of girls and boys, poorer students and students in remote or rural areas. There are some significantly different push factors for female and male drop-outs in Afghanistan, and without taking into account the different circumstances of girls and boys, it will be difficult to make significant progress in increasing their enrollment over the long term.

Support young wives and mothers to continue their education through participation in both formal schooling and informal education programs.

The government, the UN, donors and NGOs must support new and innovative programs aimed at educating young wives and mothers. Working with community elders and mullahs to get them to encourage wives and mothers to continue education and to raise awareness in families and communities about the benefits of educated wives and mothers is essential.

For girls already married, supporting informal education linked to health, farming and other day-to-day duties that give women some access to education and improved literacy while also supporting their household duties, can help improve literacy and reduce poverty at the household level.

Make adult literacy and learning needs a central part of poverty reduction.

In most families, children are an integral part of a family's livelihood strategy either through providing support to income generation activities, by seeking formal employment, begging or other means. Improving girls' access to education requires finding creative ways to get and keep vulnerable children in schools. More needs to be done to evaluate the effectiveness of school-feeding and other incentive programs aimed at keeping children in school. Innovative ways must be sought to link education of rural and poor children with livelihood support and adult literacy programs.

Many parents who are illiterate or have never attended school may be reluctant to send their own children. Of course, the reverse can also be true: having first-hand experience of the challenges presented by a lack of education or illiteracy, some parents may be even more determined that their children do not face the same obstacles. However, a study of developing countries by the International Food Policy Research Institute found that making household heads literate in the bottom per capita consumption quartile raises rural primary school enrollment by 18%.⁶³

The National Education Strategic Plan includes literacy and informal education for adults and out-of-school children in one of its eight priority programs. but the current approach must be revised to address the needs of adult learners and planning should be decentralized to respond to local needs. More technical and financial resources must also be devoted to adult literacy programs, which comprise just 1% of the education budget.

Ensure that girls' access to education is not sacrificed in political settlement(s) with AOG.

It is important to recognize that AOG attitudes toward education are varied across different strands of the insurgency, and there are indicators that some strands of the insurgency are less opposed to girls' education. But all possible measures must be taken to ensure that the gains made in increasing girls' access to education since 2001 are preserved and the situation of girls' education continues to improve as negotiations with AOG proceed. This may include safeguards and guarantees specifically written into individual peace agreements or donor conditionalities on funding after international forces withdraw. But the Afghan government, the UN and donors

must be vigilant to ensure that girls' access to education is not traded away. Indeed, the future of Afghanistan depends on it.

Annex A: Methodology

Desk research

An extensive literature review was conducted to help ground field research findings and inform the recommendations. Quantitative data was provided by the MoE and analyzed to help provide a broader picture of education conditions in Afghanistan.

Key informant interviews

Interviews with 106 key informants conducted in both the field research locations, including MoE employees and other government officials, donor agency officials, shura members and school staff.

Field research

Together, 16 organizations designed and conducted the field research. Structured interviews were conducted with 1,649 respondents (630 parents, 332 teachers and 687 school-aged females) selected randomly, from January through April 2009 in 17 provinces.

Gender-segregated group discussions were also conducted at each interview location. The domains of inquiry focused on: 1) individual experiences of the past three decades of conflict, 2) perceptions and experiences of the current conflict, and 3) recommendations for key national and international power holders with regard to the conflict.

Male and female researchers were assigned in each province to gain community acceptance and ensure that respondents felt comfortable speaking openly. Field researchers were also given training on conducting individual interviews and group discussions.

Once field research was complete, the questionnaires were translated and submitted to the lead researcher at Oxfam for analysis. A series of workshops was held to help analyze the more qualitative aspects of the data using a framework analysis approach. Participants included field researchers as well as individuals not previously connected with the research. With regard to quantitative analysis, certain elements of the individual questionnaires were entered into a database and statistical analysis was performed. Additionally, desk research and interviews were conducted with over fifty experts to help contextualize the findings and deepen the analysis.

Gender

74.4% of respondents were female and 25.6% were male (51.3% of parents were female and 48.7% male; and 65.4% of teachers were female and 34.6% were male). Given that this research focused heavily on women and girls, researchers did not aim to interview an equal number of female and male respondents at each research site.

Age

For school aged females, the average age was 17.1, ranging from 10 to 25. For teachers, the average age was 35.6, ranging from 20 to 76. For parents, the average age was 41.8, ranging from 20 to 71.

Geographic distribution and ethnicity

Research was conducted across 17 provinces in the east, west, north, south and center of the country with 19.2% of respondents residing in urban or peri-urban areas, and 80.8% in rural areas. Selected provinces were: Badakhshan, Badghis, Balkh, Bamiyan, Daikundi, Ghazni, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Khost, Kunduz, Kunar, Nangarhar, Paktia, Pansjir, Parwan, Takhar and Samangan. Although respondents were not asked to disclose their ethnicity, the bulk of research occurred outside of areas dominated by Pashtuns and only included one province in the south of the country.

Given the high level of regional variance in experiences with education, there are several important caveats. Within these provinces, security concerns often dictated which districts and villages were targeted for research. In practice, few sites were experiencing active conflict at the time of the research; those that were experiencing high levels of insecurity were mainly located in Kandahar, Khost, Kunduz and Takhar.

Limitations

No research process is perfect, particularly in Afghanistan, and there are a number of factors in this research that may limit or influence the findings. The sensitive issues raised in this research (particularly around violence or gender norms) are difficult to talk about in any context, but have particular limitations in Afghanistan.

In general, asking questions about perspectives on gender roles or women could inhibit responses, raise suspicions and even create anger. Research of this nature requires a high degree of trust. Even then, respondents sometimes did not feel comfortable discussing issues like sexual violence or harassment.

Although researchers explained that participation was entirely voluntary and that respondents could refuse to answer questions or conclude the interview at any time, Afghan attitudes of hospitality towards the researchers, who would have likely been seen as guests, may have had the effect of making them feel compelled to participate. But it also may have inhibited them from telling the complete truth if they felt it might offend researchers.

The organizations undertaking this research had established relationships with many of the communities and individuals involved in this research. Prior to interviews, researchers explained that the organizations conducting this research were independent from and impartial to the parties to the conflict. Yet the underlying power dynamics of aid organizations asking individuals sensitive questions cannot be ignored.

Researchers also explained that this process was not tied to aid or any other benefits. However, research surveys – in Afghanistan or elsewhere – often have the effect of raising expectations. Just as some may be hesitant to speak freely or candidly, some respondents may exaggerate the negative situation in the hopes of attracting aid. On the one hand, the pre-existing relationships between some of the research organizations and respondents may have enabled researchers to have a higher degree of access and a greater ability to ask sensitive questions. On the other hand, it may have influenced the answers that respondents provided.

Afghan social hierarchy and dynamics, especially among men, often ran counter to the environment researchers tried to create within group discussions. The result was that, in some cases, the voices of the elders and the powerful were most prominent, while others were generally deferential and less vocal. Although researchers facilitating group discussions tried to counteract these dynamics and ensure that all participants felt able to speak, they were not always successful. This meant that in a few cases, one voice came to dominate what was meant to be a group discussion.

Annex B: Summary of Key Findings

School-Aged Females

F1. How old are you?

School-aged females (n=687)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Panshir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
10-15	10	24	9	0	17	15	5	8	13	12	20	17	1	2	8	11	6	178
15-20	24	16	15	30	22	20	31	26	18	27	20	15	19	39	29	52	22	425
20-25	4	0	15	9	2	7	5	8	1	1	0	11	2	2	3	2	12	84
Total	38	40	39	39	41	42	41	42	32	40	40	43	22	43	40	65	40	687

F2. Do you currently go to school?

School-aged females (n=687)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Panshir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
No	11	2	15	12	3	1	10	2	12	14	6	11	2	5	1	1	11	119
Yes	27	38	24	27	38	41	31	40	20	26	34	32	20	38	39	64	29	568
Total	38	40	39	39	41	42	41	42	32	40	40	43	22	43	40	65	40	687

F3. If you currently go to school, what level are you in?

School-aged females who attend school (n=568)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Panshir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
High school	13	12	11	17	18	22	8	18	5	6	7	5	20	17	28	16	10	233
Primary	2	10	6	1	1	4	2	7	5	4	7	9	0	4	0	8	4	74
Secondary	12	16	7	9	19	15	21	15	10	16	20	18	0	17	11	40	15	261
Total	27	38	24	27	38	41	31	40	20	26	34	32	20	38	39	64	29	568

F4. What level would you like to complete?

School-aged females who wish to continue their education (n=493)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
Primary	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	6
Secondary	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	10
High school	11	3	0	5	6	1	8	0	2	12	7	11	0	5	2	11	11	95
University	10	29	9	12	27	21	16	29	6	6	27	9	21	16	30	43	5	316
I don't know/blank	1	2	10	3	5	9	2	2	7	2	1	2	0	3	4	6	7	66
Total	23	37	19	21	38	31	26	32	17	20	38	25	21	24	36	60	25	493

F5. What are the biggest obstacles to girls' education?

School-aged females (n=687)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
No girls' only school	1	0	1	8	8	4	0	0	1	0	19	5	0	0	4	14	1	66
Lack of female teacher	7	9	3	11	14	14	1	0	1	2	27	7	3	1	1	38	19	158
Poor quality of education	3	14	4	0	12	7	7	0	3	2	13	8	0	3	15	3	1	95
Insecurity	2	23	20	4	3	9	11	15	20	17	24	20	7	1	15	4	14	209
Mixed classroom	0	2	0	2	6	3	0	0	0	4	16	1	0	0	0	8	1	43
Harassment	1	2	3	0	5	1	0	9	1	7	8	5	3	1	7	4	0	57
Lack of family support	8	6	0	21	16	9	18	19	10	8	9	15	0	25	7	45	5	221
Lack of community support	0	2	0	2	4	1	6	3	1	5	11	1	0	1	3	2	23	65
Violence from teachers, staff	0	0	1	0	1	1	5	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
Long distance to school	10	3	1	12	25	8	8	9	2	5	5	1	2	7	4	7	10	119
Poverty	10	28	13	19	22	9	25	19	5	15	2	14	12	5	24	12	33	267
Early and/or forced marriage	13	8	1	22	22	19	24	24	12	16	6	10	14	16	25	25	16	273
Community or cultural beliefs	1	0	0	0	2	0	2	4	4	3	1	1	0	0	0	2	11	31
Threats	2	0	2	2	9	0	0	1	7	4	0	0	0	0	10	0	2	39
IEDs, mines, etc	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Suicide bombings	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	7	4	0	13	0	0	28
Kidnappings	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	3	0	2	9
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	3	0	2	9
Total	38	40	39	39	41	42	41	42	32	40	40	43	22	43	40	65	40	687

F6. What kind of materials do you have in your school?

School-aged females (n=687)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamnyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
Books	21	38	14	13	14	8	17	25	11	20	30	24	16	17	29	45	28	370
Stationary	9	30	2	8	7	3	4	8	12	12	2	14	2	4	1	45	0	163
Desk	12	27	11	18	10	6	15	30	11	11	5	25	8	17	38	51	13	308
Chairs or benches	12	27	10	15	7	7	15	30	12	11	6	25	15	17	38	51	13	311
School building	12	20	2	3	11	11	13	30	10	6	8	23	2	15	19	35	17	237
Total	27	38	24	27	38	41	31	40	20	26	34	32	20	38	39	64	29	568

Teachers

T1. What is your gender?

Teachers (n=332)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamnyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
Female	12	16	11	13	19	11	19	20	8	10	4	17	11	14	11	10	11	217
Male	8	4	9	7	2	10	1	2	8	10	16	3	3	6	9	8	9	115
Total	20	20	20	20	21	21	20	22	16	20	20	20	14	20	20	18	20	332

T2. How old are you?

Teachers (n=332)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamnyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
20-29	10	7	2	14	20	11	8	7	5	2	6	5	5	10	7	10	0	129
30-39	4	7	10	4		2	8	7	5	9	5	12	2	3	4	0	6	88
40-49	3	6	5	1	1	5	4	5	2	5	3	3	0	5	7	3	9	67
50-59	2	0	1	1	0	3	0	2	3	4	5	0	7	2	2	5	5	42
60+	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Total	20	20	20	20	21	21	20	22	16	20	20	20	14	20	20	18	20	332

T3. What level of education have you attained?

Teachers (n=332)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamnyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
Primary	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	7
Secondary	0	4	0	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	7	8	25
High School	9	10	4	10	17	16	14	8	9	8	12	5	8	4	2	7	5	148
Teacher Training	8	5	10	6	3	3	5	10	4	10	7	11	5	15	9	1	7	119
University	1	0	6	2	0	2	1	3	1	2	0	2	1	1	9	2	0	33

Total	20	20	20	20	21	21	20	22	16	20	20	20	14	20	20	18	20	332
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T4. What level do you teach?

Teachers (n=332)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
Primary	3	9	0	3	2	1	3	2	2	5	5	9	3	2	0	5	0	54
Secondary	8	5	4	5	7	7	7	7	5	10	4	2	7	1	0	6	3	88
Primary & Secondary	1	3	0	2	2	5	4	3	6	4	1	4	0	3	0	6	0	44
High School	7	3	11	5	4	1	4	9	2	1	10	4	3	12	17	0	17	110
Primary, Secondary & High School	1	0	1	5	6	7	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	0	31
University	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	5
Total	20	20	20	20	21	21	20	22	16	20	20	20	14	20	20	18	20	332

T5. Do you have enough teachers in your school?

Teachers (n=332)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
Yes	4	3	10	9	4	2	6	8	8	3	8	5	6	6	10	0	0	92
No	16	16	7	11	17	18	13	14	8	12	12	15	8	14	10	18	18	227
I don't know/ blank	0	1	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	13
Total	20	20	20	20	21	21	20	22	16	20	20	20	14	20	20	18	20	332

T6. If so, what kind of teachers does your school need more of?

Teachers who answered yes to T5 (n=227)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
Female	7	16	0	1	2	5	12	10	0	8	9	10	6	11	3	18	6	124
Male	1	0	0	6	9	2	1	0	5	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	28
Both	7	0	3	3	6	10	0	3	3	4	0	3	0	2	6	0	12	62
I don't know/ blank	1	0	4	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	13
Total	16	16	7	11	17	18	13	14	8	12	12	15	8	14	10	18	18	227

T7. What are the biggest obstacles to girls' education?

Teachers (n=332)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Panshir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
No girls' only school	8	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	6	3	6	3	0	0	1	1	1	34
Lack of female teacher	8	8	2	2	6	4	1	0	6	8	13	4	2	5	0	6	8	83
Poor quality of education	0	5	4	0	6	1	4	0	0	2	4	8	0	0	2	1	1	38
Insecurity	0	6	9	0	1	9	2	6	13	11	15	8	5	0	4	3	19	111
Mixed classroom	0	0	1	1	2	3	0	0	0	9	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	22
Harassment	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	7	2	5	7	0	0	2	3	1	0	30
Lack of family support	5	6	0	12	6	6	14	15	9	3	4	6	4	11	3	14	2	120
Lack of community support	1	0	0	0	2	0	4	6	1	1	1	0	0	2	1	3	4	26
Violence from teachers, staff	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Long distance to school	4	3	1	12	13	8	7	9	2	0	4	1	5	11	5	2	8	95
Poverty	6	14	5	12	11	3	14	12	1	1	2	6	2	5	9	2	10	115
Early and/or forced marriage	11	11	2	17	12	10	15	17	7	5	9	5	9	10	8	4	13	165
Community or cultural beliefs	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	8	20
Threats	1	1	3	1	3	2	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	20
IEDs, mines, etc	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	4
Suicide bombings	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	6	0	0	13
Kidnappings	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	20	20	20	20	21	21	20	22	16	20	20	20	14	20	20	18	20	332

Parents

P1. What is your gender?

Parents (n=330)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Panshir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
Female	20	20	23	19	19	20	20	20	20	20	19	19	9	19	19	20	17	323
Male	17	20	13	21	21	20	20	21	19	17	21	21	7	19	22	6	22	307
Total	37	40	36	40	40	40	40	41	39	37	40	40	16	38	41	26	39	630

P2. How old are you?

Parents (n=330)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
20-29	1	4	7	4	8	14	3	3	2	4	16	4	2	1	5	2	4	84
30-39	7	5	12	13	10	12	14	15	8	13	12	11	2	7	8	8	9	166
40-49	18	21	11	9	13	10	13	15	21	12	7	10	3	16	20	8	20	227
50-59	10	9	4	9	5	4	6	8	7	8	5	14	6	12	4	6	5	122
60+	1	1	2	5	4	0	4	0	1	0	0	1	3	2	4	2	1	31
Total	37	40	36	40	40	40	40	41	39	37	40	40	16	38	41	26	39	630

P3. What level of education have you attained?

Parents (n=330)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
Informal education	8	8	12	2	3	13	4	5	5	5	21	2	1	12	5	11	1	118
Primary	3	3	4	5	3	5	14	5	6	3	3	7	2	4	4	6	8	85
Secondary	4	7	1	5	1	1	4	7	7	2	5	5	1	1	5	0	7	63
High school	6	11	11	15	4	4	4	4	13	8	4	4	4	4	8	1	9	114
University	2	2	4	5	0	0	2	7	2	4	0	3	8	7	5	0	2	53
No education	14	9	4	8	29	17	12	13	6	15	7	19	0	10	14	8	12	197
Total	37	40	36	40	40	40	40	41	39	37	40	40	16	38	41	26	39	630

P4. Does your daughter go to school?

Parents (n=330)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
Currently attending	30	31	27	38	31	26	28	31	11	11	15	18	15	33	26	21	18	410
Used to attend but dropped out	9	11	3	4	5	7	9	7	14	9	23	9	4	4	4	7	16	145
Never attended	3	4	6	6	2	6	6	4	15	13	5	11	3	3	6	5	5	106
Not yet school aged	2	0	6	3	5	11	4	8	6	9	2	6	1	2	11	2	6	84
Total	44	46	42	51	42	50	47	50	46	42	45	44	23	42	47	35	45	745

P5. Does your son attend school?

Parents (n=330)

Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
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Currently attending	28	25	28	32	31	30	32	37	27	21	31	31	13	36	31	25	31	489
Used to attend but dropped out	3	1	4	5	4	6	7	3	6	5	6	5	3	1	5	4	8	76
Never attended	4	3	0	2	5	3	2	1	4	8	3	4	2	2	6	2	6	57
Not yet school aged	3	6	8	5	3	4	5	4	4	8	4	5	2	4	4	2	2	73
Do not have a son	1	3	2	2	2	3	1	3	2	2	0	2	1	0	1	0	3	28
Total	37	40	36	40	40	40	40	41	39	37	40	40	16	38	41	26	39	630

P6. What is the average educational achievement of girls in your village?

Parents (n=330)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
Primary	1	3	3	0	6	1	6	0	15	17	13	11	1	2	1	1	7	88
Secondary	15	18	5	1	17	15	17	14	14	16	15	11	1	1	14	10	16	200
High School	21	19	28	39	17	24	17	27	10	4	12	18	14	35	26	15	16	342
Total	37	40	36	40	40	40	40	41	39	37	40	40	16	38	41	26	39	630

P7. Until what level would you like your daughter(s) to continue education?

Parents (n=330)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
Primary	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	9
Secondary	3	6	0	0	1	0	4	9	11	4	0	4	0	0	0	1	9	52
High School	13	16	11	5	1	0	13	2	10	11	4	10	0	7	0	13	6	122
University	18	15	14	33	27	25	13	27	4	2	31	23	14	26	24	12	12	320
Not sure	3	2	6	2	2	14	3	1	7	6	5	2	2	2	9	0	9	75
Until marriage	0	1	5	0	8	1	6	1	4	14	0	0	0	3	8	0	1	52
Total	37	40	36	40	40	40	40	41	39	37	40	40	16	38	41	26	39	630

P8. What are the biggest obstacles to girls' education?

Parents (n=330)

	Badakhshan	Badghis	Balkh	Bamiyan	Daikundi	Ghazni	Herat	Kabul	Kandahar	Khost	Kunar	Kunduz	Nangarhar	Pansjir	Parwan	Samangan	Takhar	Total
No girls' only school	9	0	0	5	12	13	4	0	15	13	13	10	0	2	3	7	1	107
Lack of female teacher	17	20	0	15	18	15	4	2	11	12	28	10	9	8	3	14	9	195
Poor quality of education	6	11	5	2	23	14	21	2	1	3	21	15	0	3	8	2	0	137

Insecurity	1	20	13	0	2	7	11	5	33	7	22	30	4	0	27	2	31	215
Mixed classroom	1	2	0	0	11	13	0	0	0	5	9	0	1	0	0	6	1	49
Harassment	0	4	5	2	3	0	4	16	7	11	15	6	4	0	10	0	6	93
Lack of family support	6	10	8	9	3	16	24	21	16	11	14	9	3	10	8	12	4	184
Lack of community support	0	5	5	0	1	0	8	3	11	5	9	3	1	8	4	2	8	73
Violence from teachers, staff	0	1	4	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	8
Long distance to school	12	4	1	17	27	36	7	13	8	3	1	1	11	16	2	4	13	176
Poverty	16	29	15	29	26	38	21	27	13	1	3	14	2	7	33	4	19	297
Early and/or forced marriage	15	8	5	26	19	1	20	27	14	7	13	8	6	12	17	3	11	212
Community or cultural beliefs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	0	3	0	1	0	1	15	25
Threats	1	4	2	1	1	0	1	0	8	1	0	3	0	0	5	0	11	38
IEDs, mines, etc	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Suicide bombings	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	6	2	0	23	0	1	34
Kidnappings	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	4	10
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	37	40	36	40	40	40	40	41	39	37	40	40	16	38	41	26	39	630

Notes

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- ⁸ Paul T. Schultz, "Investments in the Schooling and Health of Women and Men: Quantities and Returns," *Journal of Human Resources*, Autumn 1993.
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- ⁵² Note the MoE figures for teachers across Afghanistan often do not include those whose salaries are directly supported by NGOs, for which there are no accurate estimates available.
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