School Education in Afghanistan: Overcoming the Challenges of a Fragile State

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ABSTRACT (244 words)

This chapter provides a descriptive account of the current landscape of the schooling systems in Afghanistan. It documents a brief historical overview of the evolution of the education systems and the turbulent phases in this process as political, social and cultural conflicts pose inescapable challenges to an effective system of schooling, particularly for girls. It outlines the formal levels of schooling from pre-primary to senior secondary levels and the preparation for entrance into higher and technical and further education. Informal and community-based schooling, including religious schools are particularly important in provincial settings. Among the challenges for educators are the ongoing conflict and power struggles between stakeholders including the Government, religious bodies and community based organisations, to shape the curriculum and schooling system in one of the world's poorest nations. Access to education for families and communities especially in regional and remote provinces remains a major issue exacerbated by poverty, insecurity and corruption, attacks on schools, distance, dangers of travel, economic factors, concerns over the quality of education and teacher training as well as cultural traditions that particularly inhibit the education of girls. Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, even with the problems of statistical verification, the number of students

attending schools, has risen dramatically. However, Afghanistan remains a fragile state with rising conflict between key powerbrokers, with the Taliban again asserting its hold on sections of the country and impacting the provision of education as a basic human right for all.

Keywords: School education; Teacher education; Curriculum; Educational challenges; Educational transition; Education in conflict situations

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan, a rugged landlocked country strategically located at the intersection of the Silk Road between Europe and Asia, has been a nation impacted by invasions from foreign moguls and empires for thousands of years. Afghanistan is made up of several diverse ethnic groups including Pashtun as the largest, Tajik and Hazara and minorities groups such Uzbeck, Turkmen, Nuristani and Baluch, each with a sense of fierce independence and loyalty to their ethnic traditions. Despite entrenched differences amongst the ethnic groups, this fierce spirit for independence has engendered a long standing resistance to foreign invaders including the Persians, the Greeks under Alexander the Great, the Mongols under Genghis Khan and in more recent times the British and the Russians (Baiza, 2013). However, this constant state of upheaval and geo-political turmoil has left an indelible social, political and economic mark on Afghanistan. The last 50 years have been impacted by an even more intense level of conflict with the Soviet invasion of 1979 which created a communist state; the rise of the mujahideen to counter the Soviet influence which subsequently evolved into the fundamentalist Islamist state ruled by the Taliban (1996-2001) (World Bank, 2018). The US and NATO forces' intervention to oust the Taliban between 2001 and 2014, while successful in establishing a transitional period towards democracy and a new constitution, did not create a state of peace or ease the burden of conflict on the people of Afghanistan. The withdrawal of NATO forces while welcomed by many, has also increased the volatility of the situation, with even schools and hospitals are targets of bomb attacks, as the Taliban seeks to regain supremacy or at the very least have a seat at the table in governing the nation. This turbulent past has had a major impact on the Education systems in Afghanistan.

This chapter is designed to provide a descriptive account of the current landscape of the schooling systems in Afghanistan. It documents a brief historical overview of the evolution of the education systems and the various, at times, turbulent phases in this process as political, social and cultural conflicts pose inescapable challenges to an effective system of schooling, particularly for girls. These challenges relate to continuing conflict and societal power struggles between stakeholders including the Government, religious bodies and community based organisations to shape and define the essential elements of the curriculum and schooling system for children and young people. It provides insights into the challenges that exist for families and communities not only in the key cities such as Kabul but also in regional and remote

provinces where access to schooling is impacted by poverty, insecurity concerns, educational quality concerns, as well as cultural traditions affecting the education of girls.

Despite the many challenges that Afghanistan faces today and considering the problems with statistical verification, the number of students attending schools, particularly boys, has risen dramatically. It is also important to note that young people and parents continue to value the benefits of education and many parents do acknowledge the importance of education for both genders (Blum et al. 2018). However, the reality is that many children, particularly girls, do not have access to schools or educational resources to enable them to have a quality education. This is despite the fact that Afghanistan has introduced specific articles related to education within its various Constitutions (see Appendix 1) and is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MODERN EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Education and training in Afghanistan before the beginning of the 20th century was provided by special instructors at home, in mosques, in informal schools linked to mosques, in madrassas and through informal apprenticeships and on the job training (Samady 2001). The modern education system was instigated by Amir Habbibullah (1901 – 1919) through the establishment of the first truly modern secondary school in 1903, the Habibia School, in Kabul province. At this time the first teacher's college was also established (Dar- al- Malimin) (Sadat 2004). In 1904 the Afghan Amir also established a school for the children of the largely Pashtun aristocracy and for the military, which became a military college known as Harbiya. The primary school system was expanded in 1915 and teaching and textbooks were provided free in these schools (Dupree 1998). In 1919, after the end of the third Afghan war and the independence of Afghanistan, King Amanullah continued reforming the education system. He set up the Ministry of Education, and introduced Article 68 of the Constitution which made primary education compulsory for all citizens of Afghanistan (Sadat 2004).

King Amanullah also established eight modern foreign-language schools, five of which were for boys and three for girls. In the 1920s primary schools began to be set up in key cities with the assistance of nations such as Germany, France and Egypt. In 1921 the first girls' high school (Masturat) was established (Sadat 2004). German, French, English, Turkish and Indian teachers were invited to teach in these schools for boys and girls (Dupree 1998, Sadat 2004). In 1924,

two vocational schools were opened, Maktab-e-Hukkam for administrative instruction, and the School of Fine and Applied Arts (Sadat 2004). Education was still a new phenomenon for the country and there was no higher education system established. Therefore, the top graduates went abroad to Germany, France, and Egypt in order to pursue their higher education. A small percentage of female students went to Turkey for their higher education (Sadat 2004).

By 1930, 13 institutions and 1,590 students, mostly belonging to the upper elites were in existence. The advancement of education was often stalled because of conflicting attitudes to schooling between the king's desire to modernise and conservative powerbrokers (clergy, feudal landlords, and tribal chieftains) who resisted the introduction of secular schools and schools for girls. King Amanullah's strong stand against conservative customary practices resulted in internal conflict and his deposition in 1929 (Dupree 1998; Sadat 2004; Giustozzi 2010). According to Dupree (1998), the era of Amanullah Khan resulted in the education system being divided into parallel streams, one the traditional religious, the other modern and secular. From this time onwards, the interplay of influence of one over the other system intensified and oscillated, depending on political developments, and the divide was often wracked with tensions (Dupree 1998; Giustozzi 2010).

After the overthrow of Amanullah Khan, Nadir Khan (1929-1933) who came to power with the support of religious leaders, abandoned many of Amanullah's reforms although he expanded schools for girls as separate entities across the country. The most progressive era for education commenced in the late 1940s as government expenditure (Government expenditure on education came to 40% of the national budget) and donor involvement in education increased leading to the setting up of more primary schools and even two secondary schools for girls (Sadat 2004). In an overview of Education in Afghanistan, by 1950 "there were 368 primary, secondary and vocational schools, and one teacher training school with a total of 95,300 students" (Samady 2001, p.14). The enrolment of children in primary education was 6% of the corresponding age (6 to 12 years) in an estimated population of 11 million people.

Recent history

In 1960, a significant development in public education took place . As a result of social pressure, secondary schools were established in all districts, in some areas, even without adequate facilities. In addition, primary education and teacher training programmes expanded with bilateral and multilateral assistance (Samaday 2001; Giustozzi 2010). According to Article 34

of the new constitution adopted in 1964, education became a right of every citizen. Education was to be provided free by government. Primary education was compulsory for all children in areas where government had established the required facilities and the government was responsible for the construction of suitable facilities for education and the supervision, administration and oversight of educational activities (Samady 2007). There was a greater sense of freedom for women with the wearing of the veil becoming voluntary and the end of purdah (seclusion) so women could partake in public life and engage in education and work (Dupree 1998).

In 1973, when Mohmmad Daoud overthrew the king and established the Republic of Afghanistan, he also issued a new constitution. In Article 10 of the Constitution (1976), special attention was given to education and particularly technical vocational education "To ensure and to generalize compulsory primary education, to expand and develop general and vocational secondary education and higher education free of charge, in order to train and form academic and technical cadres to serve the people" (Constitution Society, online). Students, both boys and girls, were sent overseas for higher education and training, so that by 1974, 1500 students were leaving to study abroad on a yearly basis. By 1978, the number of schools had risen to 3,825 with over a million students and 40,000 teachers. In addition to formal schools, madrassas or traditional religious schools also continued to function, though numbers are uncertain. These schools were largely supported by their communities (Dupree 1998).

From 1978 onwards, the civil war began to cause extensive destruction of schools and educational infrastructure. However, wherever possible, schools remained open and girls could still attend classes. This changed in the 1990s, as education for girls and women became restricted. Between 1995 and 2001 the Taliban closed girls' schools and banned girls from attending universities, except for the Medical Universities, because the Taliban were also in need of female doctors (Samday 2007; Giustozzi 2010).

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM – STRUCTURE AND TYPES

Participation in education across the regions of Afghanistan has been erratic and statistics are difficult to verify. As has been noted above, the decades of conflict and the rise of the Taliban regime in the late 20th Century destroyed the education system. Girls' schools were closed, and the curriculum was altered to include a heavy emphasis on religious subjects that took up 50 percent of the teaching time (Giustozzi 2010). Insecurity, lack of access to data and reliability

of data collection, particularly in regional and remote areas, has made data collection and verification of statistics extremely problematic in many places. Therefore, although the authors have endeavoured to verify all statistics, the stated data may not reflect the reality on the ground, particularly with regards to the education of girls.

Despite this, there is no doubt that since 2001 there has been steady progress in rebuilding the education sector. While exact statistics vary, it can be said that numbers have grown substantially. There were one million students enrolled in schools in 2001, including a small number of girls. By 2018, there were 8.9 million students enrolled in schools (this includes all students in primary, secondary, professional, teacher training, vocational and religious schools), of whom 3.4 million students were girls (CSO 2018a; MoE 2017). In the general education sector in the same year, around 8.5 million students were enrolled in schools of which 39 percent were girls (MoE 2017). However, an estimated one million or 12 per cent of students enrolled in general education schools were permanently absent, but they were kept enrolled in school registers for three years to encourage their return (Rasmussen & Kelly 2016; MoE & UNICEF 2018).

Even with this progress, there are still more than 4.5 million children who do not attend schools. of which between 2.3million and 2.6 million are primary aged children and 854,000 - 984,000 are lower secondary school aged children that are out of school. (CSO, 2018b; MoE & UNICEF, 2018). Of these, 60 percent are girls (MoE & UNICEF 2018, p.19; HRW 2017; MoE 2016, CSO 2018b,p.164). Reasons for dropping out or not attending school include economic circumstances, cultural issues, health, lack of security and distance from schools. It is important to mention, it is not the direct costs of education that keeps children, in particular boys away from school, but the need for children to work and assist the family financially. Culture, lack of security and distance have the most impact on urban and rural girls. For primary school children, particularly in rural and remote areas, schools are often located up to 5kms away from their residences. Given the lack of security, access to schools is a major issue (Rasmussen & Kelly 2016), particularly as attacks on schools have increased since 2014 (UNHCR 2018).

The following chart compiled from the most up to date reports from the Afghan governement's statistics department (CSO) and international organisations provides an overview of the various school types, age related grades and enrolement numbers.

Summary of School types, Age and Enrolment numbers in Afghanistan

School Type	Student age group	Grades	Language of instruction	Enrolment	Provider
Pre-school	3 months- 6 years	Pre-school	Dari & Pashto	1.5 m mosque-based 50,000 formal pre-school	Mosques (informal) MoE & MoLSAMD
Primary Schools	7-12 years	1-6	Dari & Pashto and mother tongue in areas speaking other languages	5.8 million	MoE
Lower Secondary Schools	13- 15	7-9	Dari, Pashto, and foreign languages	1.7 million	MoE
Upper Secondary Schools	16-18	10-12	Dari, Pashto, and foreign languages	947,241	MoE
Private schools (General Education)	7-18	1-12	Dari, Pashto, and foreign languages	405,269	Private Sector
Islamic Education Public& Private	Mostly school age children	1-12	Dari, Pashto, Arabic	13354 Private 329,762 Public	MoE and Private Sector
CBE Classes	Not age specific	1-12	Dari and Pashto	550,000	NGOs, MoE and local community

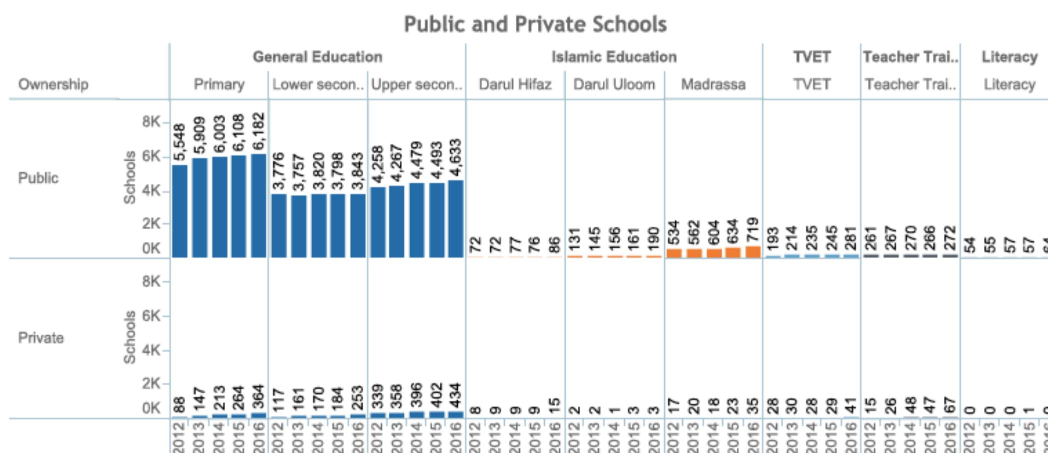
Source: CSO 2018b, p. 150, EMIS 2017, CBE Policy 2018

The type of schools that Afghan children can attend are: government schools, community-based schools (mainly supported by NGOs), madrassas or religious schools and private schools. The choice of school type depends on the economic situation of the families, the quality of teaching (in the case of public and private schools), distance from schools, tradition and culture, conflict and movement. Families who can afford to pay for a private school prefer to send their children to private schools as the quality of teaching is perceived to be better. Moreover, family movements, due to conflicts or nomadic life, influences the type of school children attend. Finally, cultural and traditional values, especially with regard to the education of girls, also affects the choice of school (HRW 2017; Rubin & Rudeforth 2016).

The demographic representation below taken from a World Bank (2018) report provides an overview of educational statistics in the private and public education sectors from 2012-2016

and enables a comparison of educational statistics in Afghanistan from 2012-2018.

Appendix Figure 3 - Number of schools by ownership and enrollment by ownership, 2012-2016



Source: EMIS: Education Management Information Systems in World Bank (2018 p. 63)

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General Education

The General Education sector consists of pre-school, primary education, secondary education which includes lower secondary and higher secondary levels. The number of schools increased from 3,400 in 2001 to 16,108 in 2015, of which 16,046 are reported as functioning schools (MoE 2017; CSO 2018a). Schools in Afghanistan are usually gender segregated, with boys and girls studying separately. This rule is particularly enforced from grade 10 onwards. Although girls and boys study in separate schools, the lack of school buildings often leads to girls and boys attending separate shifts at the same school. Only 16 percent of schools in Afghanistan are exclusively for girls (HRW 2017). The number of teachers in General Education were 183,053 in 2017-18, out of which 64,652 were female teachers (CSO 2018a). However, the exact extent of the above achievements and accuracy of the statistics, as has been noted earlier, remain somewhat uncertain.

Afghanistan's formal education system includes primary school (grades 1-6), lower secondary school (grades 7-9), upper secondary school (grades 10-12) and various types of vocational training institutions (teachers and vocational schools) operated by Ministry of Education (MoE). In general, student aged between 7-12 years attend primary school, 13-15 years attend lower secondary education and 16-18 years are in upper secondary education (MOE & UNICEF 2018; MoE 2017). In primary schools from grade 1-3 there is no examination, the teachers grade students based on their own evaluation. From grade 3 onwards there are two examinations annually: the first examination is after 4.5 months (Charnemmaha) and the second

is the final examination of the year (Salana). Passing this last exam enables students to be promoted to the higher level. Although a certain age group is considered for each level of schooling, it is not unusual for older children to attend primary school. The reasons for this is the interruption of education for many due to internal displacement resulting from conflict, drought, nomadic lifestyles and migration.

Preschool

The modern preschool, based on international standards is more evident in urban areas. Preschools in Afghanistan operate from 3 months to 6 years. From 2008, the Ministry of Education (MoE) became responsible for providing all preschool education to children. However, it currently only provides preschool for children of 5-6 years of age. Preschools for younger children are now the responsibility of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) (UNESCO 2015; Sherzad 2017; CSO 2018b).

Access and participation in preschools depends on the socioeconomic condition of families and the preschool options available. Preschools are currently provided by mosques, private schools and donor funded programs, such as the programs offered by BRAC, IRC, Save the Children, Aga Khan Foundation and UNICEF. Mosque based preschools are the most prominent and it is estimated that the majority of Afghan children are attending some kind of mosque-based program (UNESCO 2015). Participation in preschool education is similar for both boys and girls (1.0 percent of 3-4 year old boys versus 1.1 percent of girls of the same age group) (MoE & UNICEF 2018).

Primary Education

Primary school education runs from grades 1 to 6 and children typically begin school between the ages of 6 and 8 years. Education is compulsory and free in all public schools. The objectives are to provide children with a common basic understanding of their culture, basic principles of Islam, reading and writing and basic mathematics to prepare them for lower secondary education (Sherzad 2017;UNESCO 2015). Enrolments in primary education have been expanding rapidly since 2002. In 2018, an estimated 5.8 million students were enrolled in primary schools across the country (CSO 2018a). Primary school attendance rates vary between urban and rural areas. In urban areas, 78 per cent of children attend school, while in rural areas it drops to 50 per cent. Among non-participants, girls are over-represented in comparison to

boys (MoE 2016; Rasmussen & Kelly 2016). The primary school completion rate is estimated at 31 per cent, with girls' completion rate at 21 per cent and boys 40 per cent. The completion rate for girls in rural areas is also much lower.

Secondary Education

Secondary education in Afghanistan consists of two three-years cycles, lower secondary (Mutawasita) and upper secondary (Lycee). Lower secondary education is from grade 7 to 9. In 2018 the total number of students enrolled in lower secondary schools was 1,744,305 (CSO 2018a; MoE 2017). Based on Article 17 of Afghanistan's education law, primary and lower secondary education levels (grades 1-9 and student aged 13-15) are known as basic education. At the end of lower secondary level, students have two options: to continue with upper secondary level or to attend technical vocational schools, with the majority of students continuing at the upper secondary level (Sherzad 2017).

The upper secondary education cycle consists of the three school years, grades 10 to 12 for student aged 16-18 years. In 2017, the total number of student enrolled in high schools throughout the country was 947,241 (MoE 2017; CSO 2018a). In upper secondary education, students have the choice of pursuing three years of academic study that might lead to university, or studying subjects such as agriculture, aviation, arts, commerce, and teacher training in Technical and Vocational Education. On successful completion, students receive a grade 12 level diploma.

Islamic Education

Traditionally, education in Afghanistan has also been delivered through a system of loosely inter-related informal institutions, of which the most widespread is the village mosque school. To this day, it remains the most prevalent form of early or basic education at the local level, particularly in remote rural and provincial areas (Burde et al. 2015). Islamic education is composed of Madrassa (pre-school and primary level), Darul Huffaz (mid-level or lower-secondary level), and Darul Uloom (upper-secondary level) schools. In 2018, there were a total of 1003 Islamic education centres, 329,762 students attending and 7,751 teachers (Sherzad 2017; MoE 2017).

As noted earlier, a major role of Islamic education in Afghanistan has been the provision of mosque-based preschool education, with mosques the largest providers of preschool education

in Afghanistan. Alhough mosque-based education has been shown to have advantages for the later transition to primary education and for later educational attainment (Burde et al 2015; Burde & Linden 2012), the education provided beyond elementary religious conduct is generally limited. In 2013, more than 1.2 million children were attending mosque-based preschools in Afghanistan, compared to 40,000 in non-mosque based preschools (Rasmussen & Kelly 2016; UNESCO 2015).

Informal mosque schools

Local community level mosque schools, referred to as *mesjids* (Karlsson & Mansory 2018) are informal local education institutions that are supported by their local communities and not by the central government. Instruction is informal, primarily in religious teachings, and instructors are generally not formally trained (Burde & Linden 2012; Burde et al. 2015). In rural and provincial areas, a mosque school or mosque-affiliated village school may represent the only option for preschool and early childhood education and the only pathway into later formal schooling. Hence, these informal schools play a key educational role in remote and rural areas (Burde et al. 2015). Being embedded in the local society, mosque and village schools are trusted by parents, and as they by definition, do not require travel outside the local community, they are more likely to be well attended as they do not pose the security problems associated with travel to formal schools at greater distances (Burde et al 2015).

Madrassas

Madrassas in Afghanistan are primarily unofficial educational institutions, where boys and men (to a lesser extent girls and women) may acquire a more comprehensive and advanced Islamic education. Historically, madrassas have been autonomous institutions, varying widely in reputation, sectarian affiliation and the comprehensiveness of the education they offer. Generally they are unaffiliated with the central government. However, throughout the twentieth century, starting with the reign of Amunullah 1919-1929, attempts were made to bring madrassas within the system of government regulation and control, a process mostly resisted by the informal Islamic education system, with the majority of institutions remaining unregistered and hence largely outside government regulation up to the present day (Karlsson & Mansory 2018). While it is a legal requirement that madrassas be registered, and the Ministry of Education has some 1200 public and 200 private madrassas on its register, the majority of madrassas remain unregistered (Khousary 2018). As Afghanistan has relatively few more advanced madrassas of a recognised stature (Durr 2016), many of the institutions registered as

madrassas with the Ministry of Education may be relatively small or minor religious schools not much above the level of village mosque schools.

Religious education is traditionally offered by mosques throughout Afghanistan, and these mosques, especially the fees for a mullah and all other costs related to the furnishing and heating the mosque, are covered by the communities. It is believed that during the rule of the Taliban the madrassas in the mosques were heavily influenced by the Taliban, who indoctrinated hate and intolerance among the students. Consequently, through the establishment of modern madrassas, the MoE has sought to reduce the Taliban's influence and increase oversight of the madrassas (Sherzad 2017; CSO 2018a).

Established Madrassas are able to offer the more comprehensive Islamic education required for a minor degree. This degree is granted after nine to twelve years of study of a range of subjects, focusing on religion but also including jurisprudence, logic, rhetoric, history, literature and related subjects. Only a few institutions in Afghanistan offer a major degree required to continue the study of Islam and Islamic Studies at a university level (Durr 2016). Male graduates potentially can go on to serve as specialists in Islam, as jurists, scholars and instructors (Karlsson & Mansory 2018). The extent to which such informal Islamic education is valued in contemporary Afghanistan across both rural and urban populations can be seen in the number of girls and women, 40,000 in 2015, attending an increasing number of female-only madrassas. That year there were 104, rising to 120 in 2016, according to figures from the Ministry of Haji and Religious Affairs (Khousary 2018). Significantly the Taliban have established their own autonomous non-government registered women's madrassas.

Community-Based Education Programs

The majority of the Afghan population (71.2%) live in rural areas, are generally poor (58.5 % of the rural population), abide by more traditional values and only 29.6% of them have an education compared to 53.7% in urban areas (CSO 2018b, p.112 and p.173). In addition, their poor economic situation, poor governance, lack of security and travel distances makes the provision of and access to education for many in rural Afghanistan very difficult. As a result, community-based education programs, have been set up by several major overseas donors to facilitate access to education for children, especially targeting girls. One example is a program financed and operated by NGOs under government supervision. The Community Based Education (CBE) program offers "classes" rather than schools, often located at home,

consisting of a single class of 25 to 30 students. CBEs are designed to provide access to education in remote communities where there are no nearby schools. Many CBEs offer an accelerated study program that combines two years' worth of curricular material into a single year to help children attend a state school upon completion of a CBE. This program specially seeks to engage young women whose education was interrupted due to conflict or a lack of access to female teachers and other socio-cultural barriers (HRW 2017; Rubin & Rudeforth 2016; Rasmussen & Kelly 2016).

CBE classes use the same curriculum as public schools, including the same textbooks. There are differences in the number of classes covered by these programs, with some going through to sixth grade and others ending after third, fourth or fifth grades. Many CBEs prefer to run classes for girls that are taught exclusively by female teachers (HRW 2017). Significantly, CBE classes have been accepted by the Taliban (Rubin & Rudeforth 2016). In 2007, the establishment of CBEs led to an increase in student enrollments of up to 42 % in some villages. CBE remains an effective alternative delivery method in areas where the MoE has very limited access. For example in 2015, when public schools were closed by the Taliban in conflict-afflicted districts of Kunduz province in northern Afghanistan, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) was able to keep CBE courses open for both boys and girls (Robin & Rudeforth 2016; Rasmussen & Kelly 2016).

Although CBE classes are seen as an effective alternative for girls' education in remote and rural areas of Afghanistan, coherence and continuity with donor support remain important issues. The MoE has developed a CBE policy that identifies three pathways for the handover of CBE classes to the government including when: 1) A new MoE primary school opens in a village; 2) An outreach class or satellite school linked to an MoE hub school is available in a village; and 3) The CBE class closes down and students are transferred to the nearest hub school for grades 1-3. To date, the main focus of the MoE has been on responding to CBE closures, which has led to a significant decline in CBE student numbers. Almost all girls and most boys below grades 5 and 6 have dropped out of school where a CBE closure involved a transfer to a school more than 3 kilometres from their village (Rasmussen & Kelly 2016).

Private Schools

Private schools are a new phenomenon in the modern Afghanistan school system, especially after the Taliban rule. Afghanistan now has a variety of private schools, consisting of general

education, Islamic education and technical and vocational schools throughout the country. Private schools must be registered with MoE, follow the MoE curriculum and are monitored and supervised by the MoE (HRW 2017; Rasmussen & Kelly 2016). The language of instruction in private schools is mostly in Dari and Pashto, but a few use English as the language of instruction after the 6th grade (Rasmussen & Kelly 2016). Government statistics show there are 1,306 general private schools from primary school to high school, 63 Islamic schools from Madrassas to Darul Uloom and Darul Hifazs, as well as 28 technical and vocational institutes, 19 technical vocational schools and 78 teacher training centres across the country (MoE 2017). Although the quality of education varies among private schools, it is generally assumed that their education quality is better than in public schools (Giustozzi 2010). Distance from the school is also a reason for the popularity of private schools. In areas where public schools are located more than a few kilometres away from where people live, families that are able to pay prefer to send their children to a private school nearby.

THE CURRICULUM

The MoE school curriculum from grades 1-12 is divided into eight learning areas: Islamic studies; languages; mathematics; natural sciences; social sciences; life skills; arts,practical work & technological education; and sports. These eight areas are each further divided into specific subjects for specific grades. Students in grades 1-3 study eight subjects, from grades 4-6 there are 11, between grades 7-10 there are 17, and in grades 11 and 12 there are 16 subjects (MEC 2017, p. 48-49).

The 2004 Afghanistan Constitution in Article 45 stresses the need for a unified education curriculum based on Islamic values and national principles. In addition to the Constitution, The Afghanistan Education Law of 2008 in Article 30 emphasises a unified curriculum, and grants the authority to the Ministry of Education to develop the education curriculum and teaching materials. Article 31 obliges the MoE to establish an academic board to develop and oversee the curriculum (MoE 2008). Afghanistan's national curriculum has always been a point of discussion and debate among experts because of its poor quality. The most recent Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC) (2017) report also expressed concern that the Afghan National Curriculum does not provide students with the knowledge and skills required for the 21st Century. The report considers that the curriculum is overcrowded, and “there is a short duration of the school year, and often, shortened periods when students were actually in school”

meaning students are overburdened, key content cannot be covered, and actual class teaching time is less than half that compared to other countries in the region (MEC 2017, p.50).

Languages of instruction

The official languages of instruction in public educational institutions, according to Article 16 of the Constitution and Article 32 of the Education Law are Dari and Pashto. All educational institutions (public and private) must teach in one of the official languages of the country. In areas where the majority of the population speaks a third official language (e.g. Uzbeki, Turkmeni, Balochi, Pashayi, Nuristani), the third language can also be part of the school curriculum.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION

The march of the global technological revolution in education in the 21st Century has met one of its greatest challenges in Afghanistan. The lack of infrastructure, both civil and technological, and the rugged and remote landscape has meant that the penetration and reliability of internet access is very poor. It is interesting to note that efforts to introduce learning beyond the classroom go back to 1969, when an Education Radio and Television (ERTV) network was established to broadcast educational programs in Afghanistan. During the civil war and especially during the Taliban regime, the ERTV was destroyed and broadcasts were shut down. After the fall of the Taliban, UNESCO in 2003 with financial support from the Italian government revived ERTV, worked on the capacity building of its staff, and the development of TV and Radio programs (UNESCO 2007, p.9). Currently, ERTV is an active provider of education programs and trainings for students across Afghanistan. The programs include tutorials and videos on different subjects, awareness raising on health, social and environmental issues and also news and information on important dates and deadlines (such as the Kankor exam) (ERTV 2019).

In addition to the ERTV, there have been efforts by different donors to invest in providing ICT education to higher education students as well as for remote and rural illiterate population. An Asia Foundation report states that the penetration of the internet is meant to have reached 15% by 2018 (Anderson 2017). However, smart phone usage is much more extensive and this is seen as a way to improve technology and learning in the classroom. The mobile literacy program by UNESCO (Hanemann 2019) and One Laptop per Child project (OLPC 2019) implemented in the Nangarhar province are examples of these initiatives. The Asia Foundation

recently developed an Android based app 'with age appropriate workbooks to improve primary level reading skills' for trial in some 90 classrooms' (Anderson 2017, p.1).

In terms of the curriculum a computer subject was added to the curriculum of the upper secondary level (MoE Curriculum). The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT) is committed in its national Information Communication Technologies policy (2015-2024) that ICT will be expanded to primary school level. The use of ICT for distance education will also be expanded, since the majority of the population of the country is living in remote and rural areas. In addition, ICT will also be implemented in education management and training (MCIT 2015, p.19).

Challenges in implementing ICT in Education

The recurring pattern in Afghanistan policy and administration is that the aspirations and goals might exist within the policy frameworks, but the reality of the implementation process is vastly different. Although MoE has also signed an MoU with MCIT for expanding the use of ICT in education and MCIT has a funding commitment for implementation of the MoU (MoE 2016, p. 28), the real challenge is to have ICT implemented in Afghanistan schools. The major problem is the lack of required infrastructure and the level of insecurity which negatively affects the implementation. Electricity and internet access, which are crucial for implementing ICT in schools, are still very basic, even in major cities and in the majority of Afghan's rural provinces and remote areas. Even in the capital city of Kabul, a very small number of the schools have computer laboratories and can teach computer studies in both theory and practice. Some schools teach computer studies only in theory. Enabling ICT education, installing computer laboratories and computer classes or e-learning classes in remote areas of the country is unlikely to be achieved in the near future and is likely to take at least another decade of infrastructure improvement to achieve the goals of the MoE (Anderson 2017).

ENABLING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR ALL

Gender and Education: Girls' Participation in Schooling

The participation of girls in education in Afghanistan is an issue mired with complexity. Not only do girls face various challenges that affect both genders such as conflict, poverty and the need to provide for the family, and lack of access to schools, but they also face the cultural implications of a deeply conservative society when it comes to their rights to seek education,

to live independently and to choose their own life's pathway. In the years of Taliban rule, when school enrolment rates decreased, and many schools were destroyed, the enrolment of girls decreased dramatically from 32% in 1995 to 6.4% in 1999 (UNESCO, 2000 cited in Acks R, Baughman K, & Diabo R 2015). The end of Taliban rule in 2001 enabled international bodies to focus on rebuilding civil society in Afghanistan. The Bonn Agreement of 2001 negotiated through the United Nations provided funds for the reconstruction of schools. UNICEF's Back to School Campaign which began in 2002, together with other projects from major international and local non-government organisations (NGOs) also contributed to the reconstruction of schools and a large increase in school attendance, especially among girls.

The surge in school attendance achieved after 2001 has slowed as the security situation has worsened. According to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report "The World Bank reported that from 2011-12 to 2013-2014, attendance rates in lower primary school fell from 56 to 54 percent, with girls in rural areas being most likely to be non attenders. Government statistics indicate that in some provinces, the percentage of students who are girls is as low as 15 percent" (HRW 2017, p.2). This same report noted that discrepancies in statistics presented by different organisations including the MoE and NGOs are often a consequence of these organisations wanting to provide positive feedback to donors, although remoteness and difficulties in gathering data are also factors.

Challenges in the Education of Girls

Reports state that overall parents provide positive responses when asked about the education of girls, including parents and adolescents in the most fragile and deprived provinces of Afghanistan. One study found that "over 90% of both fathers and mothers expected their children to complete at least secondary education and, in general, their expectations were comparable for boys and girls, with a slight preference for school completion given to boys over girls (98.90% vs. 96.92%,)" (Blum et al. 2019, p.2) . The adolescents in this study had different perceptions about how their parents view their education with 88% of boys and 69.5% of girls saying that their parents would support them emotionally and financially to pursue their education (Blum et al. 2019, p.4).

Another important challenge for the education of young women is early marriage. Over a third of young women marry before the age of 18 years although Afghan law regulates early marriage to a minimum age of 16 years or 15 years with a father's or legal guardian's consent (HRW

2017). According to HRW, this law is rarely enforced. Early marriage has an impact on health and it often deprives girls of an education as they take on the responsibilities of being a wife and mother. An interesting finding is that "Fathers showed greater support for marriage after secondary education completion than mothers (51.01% vs. 27.73%)"(Blum et al. 2019, p.4).

A report by Burridge, Rahmani and Payne (2016) on the aspirations of young women seeking higher education noted that they saw security and personal safety as key issues. Parents are reluctant to send girls to school and to university, particularly if they live far away from the educational facilities. Street harassment by men and lack of sanitation facilities were also noted as hurdles to school and university attendance. Other factors that stop educational progress among young women include financial constraints, cultural and family attitudes and lack of female teachers in schools (Burridge, Rahmani & Payne 2016).

Overcoming the challenges of providing educational opportunities for girls and women in Afghanistan is a major issue for the Ministry of Education and civil society organisations and indeed families. While Afghanistan is a signatory to various UN Conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women which it ratified in 2003, progress in the area of girls' education has been irregular and difficult to achieve (Acks, Baughman, Diabo, 2015). Changing traditional cultural mindsets which challenge men's roles in society is not something that Afghanistan faces on its own. However, it is important to note that while efforts to counter these mindsets is crucial, it needs to be done with a level of cultural sensitivity and managed by Afghan society itself – rather than imposed by pressure from above, by well intentioned western protagonists. Weaving this delicate balance of enabling women and girls to exercise their right to education and making their own choices about their future requires government action to allow more women to be the decision makers within government institutions (Burridge, Payne, Rahmani 2016).

Education of Children with Disabilities

The welfare of children with disabilities or accessibility issues is of major concern for any nation but more so in a country burdened by the impact of war, poverty and lack of infrastructure. The situation is Afghanistan is certainly amongst the worst globally and it is impacted by the lack of available resources and negative cultural perceptions of those who suffer from a disability (Anderson 2016). Policies and frameworks about accessibility exist in government documents including the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP III) (MoE

2016). The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) has one of its primary responsibilities for developing programs for the welfare of the families of martyrs and disabled (MoLSAMD, 2019) and working within the Afghanistan National Youth Policy (MoIC 2013). This includes supporting programs that increase children's access to education as well as combatting child labour (MoLSAMD, 2018). The reality is, however, that the definitions of disability and statistics vary. The NESP III policy shows the number of people with disabilities is estimated at 800,000 or 2.7% of the population. Yet other reports place the statistics at a much higher level. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) notes that 1.5 million people in Afghanistan are visually impaired (Asia Foundation, 2016). So, with the inclusion of all people with different levels of disability, the figure rises to 15% (WHO 2011). Without engaging in a discussion on discrepancies in the statistics, the level of assistance to children with disabilities is very low. The NESP III states "According to Accessibility Organisations for Afghan Disabled (AAOD), ninety-five percent of children with disabilities do not attend schools due to the lack of a supportive school environment. Enrolling these children and providing a productive education for them is a major challenge" (MoE 2016, p.17). This is one area that requires a major focus for future governments in Afghanistan.

Regional Inequities in Educational Provision

The provision of education in regional areas including General Education, Islamic Education, TVET, TTC, and literacy programs is less reliable than the cities. Increasing conflict and school attacks since 2014 has resulted in around 931 school closures. The majority of these closed schools are located in three volatile provinces of Zabul (148 closed of which 133 are for General Education), Kandahar (154 closed of which 143 are for General Education), and Hilmand (166 closed of which 154 are for General Education). Provinces with stable security condition such as Bamiyan and Kapisa have all their schools open, while other stable provinces such as Panjshar, Laghman, Nuristan, SarePul and Daikundi only have a few schools that are not operating (MoE 2017).

A survey conducted by Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA 2018) in 10 provinces of Afghanistan showed the fragile security condition and that attacks in these provinces and a lack of communication and connection between community and schools often results in the closing of schools. In addition, the survey also highlighted that in some provinces, schools are having physical infrastructure problems which affects the sustainability of school operations. Among the major infrastructure problems highlighted are a lack of school maintenance (leaking roofs,

broken doors, furniture and windows), lack of availability of standard classrooms, poor access to water and sanitation, and lack of boundary walls in schools. Of the 17,859 schools across the country only 9,362 schools have a dedicated building, the rest operate in tents or in the open air (MoE 2017). In a country with the conservative traditional values and a very fragile security situation, these conditions negatively affect participation of children in schools, especially of the girls.

ROLE OF THE STATE AND NON GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

The national government of Afghanistan has a centralised jurisdiction over the educational frameworks and policies implemented within the 34 provinces through its various Ministries and policy arms. Each province has its own government and a governor appointed by the President. Provinces are subdivided into districts and subdistricts with officials appointed by the Provincial heads. The Directorate of Local Government was created in 2007 to strengthen the association between local and state entities (Hahib 2013), although progress has been slow to influence local community councils and tribal assemblies. In addition, efficient operation of governmental structures is tempered by levels of nepotism and corruption (World Bank, 2018).

Governance and administration

The education sector is one of the most complex sectors in Afghanistan with many stakeholders, both public and private, involved in administration and management. The main ministries involved in administration and governance of this sector are the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled (MoLSAMD). There are few other ministries that are also involved because of their area of specialization and needs: Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Aviation and Transport, Ministry of Information and Technology, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense (World Bank 2018; MoE & UNICEF 2018).

The Ministry of Education has the major responsibility for General Education (public and private), Community Based Schools (CBE) and Islamic education. In addition, the MoE also supervises technical and vocational colleges (TVET) and teacher training colleges (TTCs). The Ministry of Higher Education manages and supervises universities. MoLSAMD shares responsibility with the Ministry of Education for the management and administration of

preschool education, technical vocational colleges and national competence and development programs (World Bank 2018).

The budget for the education sector in Afghanistan is controlled by MoE and MoHE. Between 2010-2015, the international donors and development partners contributed 40 to 50 % of the education budget. Some of the external funding was allocated and spent through the national budget and administered by the Government of Afghanistan while some was directly disbursed to projects. However, off-budget spending (NGO funds) that go directly to projects is declining because donors are now channelling funds through the national budget for the education sector (World Bank 2018, p.57). In 2018, the budget allocated for the education sector was 2.4% of Afghanistan's GDP. This also included the 40% contribution from donors to Afghanistan's national education budget. In addition, donors also funded projects based on their areas of interest directly as 'off-budget' fund allocations for education.[1] The education budget in Afghanistan is significant, but taking into consideration the level of needs and increasing enrolments, the budget allocated for this sector is insufficient to meet demand. In addition, the high level of dependency on donor support also puts the sustainability of current achievements in education in danger.

Non Government Organisations (NGOs)

After two decades of educational deprivation, the initial Back to School campaigns post 2001, were undertaken by the Afghan government in collaboration with major non government entities including USAID, The Word Bank, United Nations agencies such as UNICEF, as well as international NGOs and major philanthropic organisations including Save the Children and the Aga Khan Foundation. Various nations, particularly those who participated in the NATO intervention are also major contributors to educational programs (Rasmussen & Kelly 2016). The largest of these educational programs are adult literacy courses and CBE courses. These education programs are under the control of the central government but are an alternative method of educational delivery that works independently from the central government and makes it possible to fill some of the gaps in the current system (MoE & UNICEF 2018). As a result of this influx of funding, primary and secondary education experienced rapid expansion of student enrolments and subsequent graduations, followed by a greatly increased demand for higher education (Hayward 2015).

LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

The Constitution, together with the Education Law of Afghanistan (2008), established the legal framework of the education system in Afghanistan. In addition, the National Education Strategic Plan, 2017-2021(NESP III) (MoE 2016) also provides the basis for the education system. Improvements set out in the NESP III center on three core components: (1) quality and relevance; (2) equitable access; and (3) efficient and transparent management (MoE & UNICEF 2018). The main aims for the MoE are to increase primary attendance and improve secondary school enrolments. Given that only 21% of girls and 43% of boys attend school in rural areas, there is a major focus on regional access, especially for poor and disadvantaged children. The Ministry also aims to streamline its own operations, improve efficiency, program management, data collection, reporting and links with donors (MoE 2016).

Afghanistan has also signed many other international agreements which makes the government obliged to provide access to education for all its children and adults. In 2004, in the Berlin Conference protocol, Afghanistan adopted 'The Way Ahead: Work plan of the Afghan Government' in which the Afghan government committed itself to " Ensuring that all girls and boys complete compulsory education (9 years) and have opportunities to continue at higher levels, with special attention paid to the inclusion of girls who have been prevented from access to education" (MoE and UNICEF 2018, p. 60). In addition, Afghanistan is a signatory to the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), among which is Goal 4: "Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning". Afghanistan has also signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). However there remains a gap between the aspirations and reality in the implementation of these conventions. And while the MoE has set out clear goals in its National Education Plan (NESPIII) (MoE 2016), it acknowledges that implementation in the current context is still fragile and uncertain. This is reinforced by a Human Rights Watch report (2017) which notes that although children, both boys and girls, should complete class 9, "the government has neither the capacity to provide this level of education to all children nor a system to ensure that all children attend school" (HRW 2017, p. 2).

FORMAL TEACHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The formal education of teachers involves either a 4-year bachelor's degree or a two-year diploma course completed over four semesters. Teacher training colleges (TTC) operate under

the supervision of the Ministry of Education's (MoE) Teacher Education Department (TED) in Kabul. As of 2012, there were 42 TTCs (at least one in each Province) and 153 TTC Satellite centres that have been established to respond to the increasing needs of teachers, in particular female teachers (Samady 2013). The TTCs run in-service programs for serving teachers, where teachers with a lower education qualification can also take part to upgrade their qualifications (MEC 2017).

Access to both degree and diploma courses is granted through the national *kankor* exam. Teacher education is not a popular and well respected field of study in Afghanistan, especially for boys. Students who gain the lowest scores in the *kankor* exam are often directed to various Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) or education faculties across the country. Since the chances to get a job with a two year diploma is very limited, students who are directed into TTCs, following graduation often try to join the education faculties of a University for another two years to gain their Bachelor's degree in their field. The journey from TTCs to a Faculty of Education is, however, not easy and not always possible. But students with an influential or rich family background, do stand a better chance of success (MEC 2017).

University teacher training courses

Teacher education faculties often have six departments or fields of study including natural sciences, social sciences, vocational education, special education, languages and literature. Currently the leading institution for teacher training is the Shaheed Rabbani Education University (SREU), one of the four largest and oldest public universities in Kabul. SREU is the only higher education institution producing Masters and Bachelor graduates in education and is arguably the key teacher training institution in Afghanistan (Taheryar 2017). However, SREU is under-resourced by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) compared to the other major public universities in Kabul (Tarheyar 2017), in part due to the lower status of teaching and teacher training vis-à-vis traditionally valued degrees such as medicine, law or engineering, or more newly prestigious degrees post-2002, such as political science, economics or computer science (Ali 2015; Sherzad 2017).

Number of Teachers and female teachers

Teacher numbers increased dramatically immediately following the 2002 change of government and subsequent establishment with international support of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. They increased from over 20, 000 in 2001 to over 158, 000 by 2008-2009,

according to EMIS statistics (Bazia 2013). By 2017, there were 202,733 teachers employed by the MoE across Afghanistan, with 135,003 male and 67,730 female teachers. The number of female teachers varies considerably across urban and rural areas. For instance, in major cities such as Herat there were 8,202 female and 7,497 male and in Balkh 6,958 female and 5,129 male teachers. In the capital, Kabul city, the number of female teachers was 19,639 compared to 7,604 of their male counterparts. But in the outskirts of the city and in rural areas of Kabul province there were only 1,703 women compared to 4,076 male teachers. Also, in areas of ongoing conflict and in less developed provinces, where the presence of female teachers can impact positively on the education of girls, the number of female teachers is much less than male teachers. For example, in Paktika there were only 58 female teachers, in Uruzgan 138, Noristan 178, and in Khost 188 (MoE 2017; MEC 2017; Samady 2013).

There is a shortage of trained female teachers needed to deliver quality teaching to girls in rural and remote provincial areas (Roehrs 2015). To address the need for female teacher in rural Afghanistan, especially in remote and conflict affected provinces with more traditional values, the MoE has provided scholarships to teacher training centers to encourage the students from these provinces to attend teacher training. In addition, through the US AID Global Partnership for Education (GPE) program, it has provided higher salaries and incentives, encouraging qualified female teachers from urban areas and other provinces to go to rural areas.

TRANSITION FROM GENERAL EDUCATION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

In considering the outcomes of the formal general education system in Afghanistan, it is necessary to consider two different measures, one quantitative, the extent of access to the system, and the other more qualitative, the effectiveness of the system in producing desired outcomes for the individual graduate and the wider society (Daxner & Schrade 2013). A fundamental demographic feature of contemporary Afghanistan is the disproportionate youthfulness of the population, with 63% of the population under the age of 25 (CSO 2018a), creating a proportionate demand for education. Post-2002, this demand increased with the recognition of the value of education by the Afghans, particularly the value of higher education as a key pathway to social and global mobility (Baiza 2013). There is also a very high rate of youth unemployment, which strongly incentivises youth to seek higher education (Milton 2018). The Afghan secondary education does not adequately prepare students for employment, therefore, seeking a seat in higher education becomes a priority for students (Sherzad 2017, p. 16). Attempts by the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Higher Education to have better

alignment between the education system and the requirements of the employment market have been limited due to lack of coordination with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which is responsible for graduate employment (Hayward 2015).

Access to Higher Education

Afghanistan uses the *kankor* (variously, *kankur*, from the French *concors*) examination system, held between December and February each year, as the culmination of a general education, and the primary pathway to a subsidised seat in the public higher education system. The results of the *kankor* serve as the primary measure of educational attainment (Sherzad 2017). The actual examination is composed of 160 multiple-choice questions, of which almost half are on mathematics and the physical sciences, enjoying a higher weighting compared to questions on social sciences and national languages (Ali 2015; Sherzad 2017). The *kankor* is problematic in assessing the ability of candidates who will not be studying mathematics and/or physical sciences. Further, inadequate ICT systems complicate the administration of the test and issues of transparency in assessment of the candidates. Thus, for matching candidates to appropriate fields of study it becomes a problematic mechanism (Daxner & Schrade 2013). In the 2018 Kankor examination, only 58% of the candidates completing the examination gained entry to universities or institutes of higher education (Bamik 2019; Ali 2015).

A feature of this system has been that the demand for higher education seats has been outstripping the supply, especially for subsidised seats in the more prestigious public universities (Milton 2018). For example, in 2014, 250,000 students applied for some 57,000 public seats (Ali & Roehrs 2014), and in 2015, this increased to 300,000 applicants for 55,000 seats. The seats had a lower cap in 2015 due to the adverse effects on quality as a result of attempts to expand the number of seats each year (Ali 2015). Since then, the number of candidates applying has declined, with 146,000 candidates competing for more than 66,000 public seats, with over 53,000 seats available presumably for candidates with low scores and a further 1,150 candidates to be placed in religious schools or government madrassas (MoHE 2018a).

Effectiveness

The relatively rapid expansion of higher education, since 2002, has resulted in significant quality issues in a sector that was already severely affected by previous periods of conflict. Hence, there is a danger of discontent among unemployable graduates (Hayward 2015), notably at two levels - after completion of secondary graduation and tertiary graduation. The pressure

of competition for seats, the high-stakes win-lose structure of the *kankor*, combined with the high social status of higher education in Afghanistan, and in particular those disciplines that confer an honour such as a title (Daxner & Schrade 2013; Ali 2015) has led to serious irregularities in the administration of the *kankor* and the assignment of higher education seats. In 2013, a major review process was instituted after serious instances of disruption of the examination in provincial centres, including intimidation or "armed intervention" by local powerbrokers, and a gross inflation of scores shown in particular provinces (Hayward 2015). Despite attempts to improve the security of the process with the support of the Afghan National Police, irregularities have continued, and attempts to address these by annulments of results from given areas (Hayward 2015) have resulted in further candidate unrest, including demonstrations over the destruction of examination papers and arbitrary mass annulments (Ali & Roehrs 2014).

The government has introduced a number of measures, such as a biometric system for the identification and registration of candidates in 2018, as an across-the-board solution to malfeasance and other irregularities (MoHE 2018b) and set admission quotas for candidates from remote provincial areas to address imputations of disadvantage. In practice, there are still tensions between the changing needs of the employment market in Afghanistan and the course offerings in public higher education (Baiza 2013), where a focus on the more traditional disciplines has created an over-supply of graduates in these areas (Milton 2018; Ali & Roehrs 2014). An increasing number of students transfer to the Technical and Vocational Education and Training sectors (TVET) in order to complete their education. It is not within the remit of this chapter to deal with the TVET sector; however, it should be noted that this is an expanding post-school sector existing within the public and private education spheres and many of the providers are international NGOs, funded by overseas donations.

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION FOR ALL IN AFGHANISTAN

The nature and extent of the challenges faced by the Education system in Afghanistan have been outlined in the various sections above. The complexity of these challenges are ongoing in the context of continued political and religious conflict and disruption. Many of these challenges are further impacted by issues related to transparency and quality assurance which are recurring themes in many sectors, whether it relates the accuracy of educational statistics related to schools or the capacity of access to higher education.

The Need for Transparency

Among the challenges in implementing education policy in Afghanistan, in what remains a fragile state, is to consider the relationship between a ‘traditional hierarchical patronage-based system’ (Hayward 2015, p.11) and the effects of the influx of external funding for education, especially during the period 2002-2014. Among the main aspects to consider are the role of the Ministry of Education (MoE), external donor funding, impact of corruption and nepotism, monitoring difficulties, misreporting of education data, concern over ‘ghost’ students, teachers and schools, incomplete school construction programs (Adili 2017) and poor curriculum support and development (Bjelica 2017).

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is central to the discussion, as the largest civil employer in the country, with 262, 000 of the 400 000 employees in the civil service, most of them teachers (Bjelica 2017, p.2). Also, it has been the primary beneficiary of a large number of ‘quick-impact’ donor projects during the intervention period (Daxner & Schrade 2013, p.26), and in parallel as what has been described as a ‘huge reservoir of patronage’ (Guistozzi 2010, p.2). As a result, much of the focus of ministerial operations and capacity building has been on producing policies to meet donor requirements ((Baiza 2013) and implementation has lagged significantly behind policy development. Although many of these policies and planning documents (e.g. strategic plans) seem to be perfectly rational and provide the backbone and framework for the way forward, little has been done to implement them on the ground (Daxner & Schrade 2013).

As has been noted earlier, there are issues of a lack of transparency in much of the educational statistics, and inherent difficulties in conducting independent monitoring and inspections, thereby affecting data-driven policy implementation (Karlsson & Mansory 2018; Hayward 2015, Adili 2017; Bjelica 2017). A particular problem, again not necessarily limited to Afghanistan, has been the extent of corruption that has developed at all levels within the system. For example, the ‘informal’ charges levied for accessing public education at a school level (Guistozzi 2010). The Special Inspector General for Afghan Infrastructure (SIGAR) conducts investigations and as one exampled showed, only 38 percent of the teachers listed as working at the school were present in the school (Adili 2017, p.8) and in another independent study, the number of schools provided was not accurate (Ali 2013, p.1).

In the key area of teacher recruitment (see section on formal teacher training), nepotism and favouritism has led to the employment of unskilled teachers or absentee teachers. This is identified by all stakeholders as a significant obstacle to improving educational quality in Afghanistan (Bjelica 2017, p.2-3). This is particularly problematic where an estimated 75 % of teacher training graduates cannot secure employment (Bjelica 2017, p.3).

Government policies and teacher quality

An important aspect of the effectiveness of Afghan government policies and practice is educational quality (Daxner & Schrade 2013), specifically the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching conditions and teacher quality were in general very poor by the early 2000s, as a result of the previous decades of conflict. Since then, an ongoing difficulty for teachers remains the routine danger from conflict across the country, including the continuing attacks on schools. According to Save the Children and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack report (2018), there were 870 recorded attacks on schools that year. Teachers, like all Afghans, are affected by ongoing insecurity and instability, with some more remote rural and provincial areas facing routine daily difficulties and dangers of travel.

While the numbers of teachers has increased, especially in the immediate post-2002 period, a key issue that remains is the preponderance of unqualified teaching staff (Sherzad 2017). Also, the Ministry of Education has not been able to provide teachers with adequate training, resources or professional support. Another key obstacle to improving the quality and effectiveness of the general education system is the current low pay and status of teaching as a profession in contemporary Afghanistan. During the early 2000s, salaries were relatively low, commencing at US$40 a month (Guistozzi 2010) and slowly increasing to US$100 a month over the following decade (Bazia 2013). More recently, in theory Afghan teachers receive between US$110 and US $225 a month, in practice they may receive substantially less, both as a result of arrears of pay and after having to pay substantial sums to officials or powerbrokers to secure and retain their position as a teacher (Roehrs 2015; Bjelica 2017). In many cases, teacher salaries do not cover basic living expenses, particularly with the high rents in urban areas where schools are located (Roehrs 2015). As a result, many teachers live in poverty, without either the resources or the motivation to improve the quality of their teaching (Roehrs 2015). The current low status of teaching in Afghanistan contrasts with the status of the profession before 1978, when teaching was generally well respected, and as a government job providing job security, regular pay and career advancement (Samady 2001).

Improvement in the quality of teacher training, and hence in the quality of teaching, remains a key challenge for the effective implementation of policies in the system of general education in Afghanistan. This also requires addressing the conditions of teaching so that it becomes a more attractive profession. Both are key means of improving the quality of the teaching and learning students experience in everyday classroom settings.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The Impact of Continuing Instability

Insecurity and instability continues as a major challenge, with a UNICEF report form 2019 stating that in the first half of the year, 36 schools were closed due to insecurity thereby depriving 13,894 children of their education (UNICEF 2019). According to the 2019 Global Peace Index, "Afghanistan is now the least peaceful country in the world, replacing Syria, which is now the second least peaceful" (Institute for Economics and Peace 2019 p.2). This again emphasises the enormous difficulties facing the Afghan Government and its educational bodies in seeking to improve the delivery of educational services throughout the 34 provinces at a time when security continues to be precarious.

In this context educational bodies, teachers and schools need to mediate the differing cultural and religious perspectives within the national curriculum, catering for secular as well are religious teachings in the various school systems. Access to quality educational materials and technology assisted learning is another major challenge, also heightened by the geographic isolation of many regions and the lack of infrastructure and financial resources. Added to this is the need to improve teacher training so that quality teachers enable and encourage creative and critical thinking as the foundation of an effective education system. A further challenge is the importance of providing equal access to education for boys and girls, especially in rural areas, in a country that is one of the poorest in the world and where children often have to work to support families. The education of girls is a particularly pertinent issue that requires urgent attention by all stakeholders as it intersects many of the issues noted in this chapter, including cultural and religious values, family's financial circumstances, distance from schools and the deteriorating security situation. Finally, the one major challenge that continues to hinder the implementation of policies and adversely affects achievement of educational outcomes is the

problem of internal conflicts and power struggles that have paralysed educational progress in Afghanistan for decades.

This chapter has provided a descriptive, evidence based analysis of the schooling system in Afghanistan based on research incorporating reports from the Afghan Ministry of Education, from reputable international nongovernment bodies, United Nations organisations and academic sources that have conducted wide reaching analyses of the complex political, social and economic conditions and contexts in Afghanistan over the last half century, and in particular, since 2001.

It is beyond doubt that the people of Afghanistan have suffered immeasurably from the decades of unrelenting conflict and struggles for political as well as religious supremacy by different powerbrokers, often backed by foreign interests pursuing their own self-interested agendas in this volatile region. It is also beyond doubt that Afghanistan's educational system, from preschool to higher education, has suffered devastating consequences as a result of these socio-political struggles. Despite these circumstances, since 2001, progress has been made in enabling children and young people to attend schools, to access resources and to seek to improve their future prospects in Afghan society. What progress has been made to date is a testament to the resilience and strength of each individual seeking an education and the families and schools that do support them in this quest. However, many challenges are still to be overcome by national and provincial ministries of education and other educational stakeholders in order to deliver quality education as an inalienable human right for all, regardless of gender, location, accessibility and age.

End notes

1. Based on information received from Baluch Noori, Head of Donors and NGOs Coordination Unit Department of Planning and Evaluation | Ministry of Education of Afghanistan |

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Appendix 1: Constitutional Provisions on Education in Afghanistan – historical overview

Year	Constitution Name	Articles on Education	
1923	Nizamnamah-ye-asasi-e-Daulat-e-Aliyah-e-Afghanistan	14,15 and 68	**14:** Every subject of Afghanistan has the right to an education at no cost and in accordance with the appropriate curriculum. Foreigners are not permitted to operate schools in Afghanistan but are not barred from being employed as teachers. **15:** All schools in Afghanistan are under the control, supervision, and inspection of the government which is charged with developing the scientific an national education of all citizens on the basis of unity and discipline but the methods and the teaching of the beliefs and religions of protected and refugee subjects(Hindus and Jews) shall not be interfered with. **68:** Elementary education is compulsory for all citizens of Afghanistan. The various curricula and branches of knowledge are detailed in a special law and they will be implemented.
1964	Constitution of Afghanistan	34	Education is the right of every Afghan and shall be provided free of charge by the State and the citizens of Afghanistan. The aim of the State in this sphere is to reach a stage where suitable facilities for education will be made available to all Afghans, in accordance with the provision of the law. The Government is obliged to prepare and implement a program for balanced and universal education in Afghanistan. It is the duty of State to guide and supervise education. Primary education is compulsory for all children in areas where facilities for this purpose are provided by the state. The State alone has the right and duty to establish and administer the institutions of public and higher learning. Outside this sphere, Afghan nationals are entitled to establish technical and literacy schools. Conditions for establishment of such schools, their curricula and the conditions of learning in such schools are to be determined by law. The Government may grant permission, in accordance with the provisions of the law, to the foreign persons to establish private schools for the exclusive use of foreigners.

1976	The Constitution of The Republican State of Afghanistan	10	To ensure and to generalize compulsory primary education, to expand and develop general and vocational secondary education and higher education, free of charge, in order to train and form academic and technical cadres to serve the people.
2004	The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	43, 44, 17	**43:** Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be offered up to B.A. level in the state educational institutions free of charge by the state. To expand balanced education as well as to provide mandatory intermediate education throughout Afghanistan, the state shall design and implement effective programs and prepare the ground for teaching mother tongues in areas where they are spoken. **44:** The state devise and implement effective programs to create and foster balanced education for women, improve education of nomads as well as eliminate illiteracy in the country. 45: The state shall devise and implement a unified educational curricula based on the tenets of the sacred religion of Islam, national culture as well as academic principles, and develop religious subjects curricula for schools on the basis of existing Islamic sects in Afghanistan. 16: From amongst Pashto, Dari, Uzbeki, Turkmani, Baluchi, Pachaie, Nuristani, Pamiri and other current languages in the country, Pashto and Dari shall be the official languages of the state. In areas where the majority of the people speak in any one of Uzbeki, Turkmani, Pachaie, Nuristani, Baluchi or Pamiri languages, any of the aforementioned language, in addition to Pashto and Dari, shall be the third official language, the usage of which shall be regulated by law. The state shall design and apply effective programs to foster and develop all languages of Afghanistan. Usage of all current languages in the country shall be free in press publications and mass media. Academic and national administrative terminology and usage in the country shall be preserved. **17:** The state shall adopt necessary measures to foster education at all levels, develop religious teachings, regulate and improve the conditions of mosques, religious schools as well as religious centres.