

ENHANCING ACCESS TO EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN AFGHANISTAN



BARNETT RUBIN and CLANCY RUDEFORTH

CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The world faces old and new security challenges that are more complex than our multilateral and national institutions are currently capable of managing. International cooperation is ever more necessary in meeting these challenges. The NYU Center on International Cooperation (CIC) works to enhance international responses to conflict and insecurity through applied research and direct engagement with multilateral institutions and the wider policy community.

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Every school has its own story.

- Dr. Amir Mansory, Afghan educator, 2015

PREFACE

This paper examines practices of the Afghan Taliban in relation to the provision of education in Afghanistan. In particular, it focuses on the Ministry of Education's (MoE) general curriculum, which includes mathematics, sciences, social studies, languages, arts, and culture. Schools run by the MoE (*maktabs*) also provide several hours per week of Islamic education, though less than religious academies or *madrasas*, whether state-run or private. Hence the general curriculum is not "secular." This paper uses the term "general" education or curriculum to distinguish what is taught in *maktabs* from what is taught in *madrasas*. In official statements, the Taliban refer to general education as "modern" education.

The paper is intended to inform further thinking by the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) and others about how to realize the GoA's vision of providing "equitable access to quality education for all."¹ The study does not purport to be a comprehensive analysis of Taliban practices. Its value may consist mainly in the primary accounts of people living in Taliban-influenced and Taliban-controlled areas. The associated analysis attempts to place those accounts within a framework useful for future efforts to improve the situation.

Research involved discussions held over several months in 2015 and 2016, including with local educators, community members and NGO personnel operating in Taliban-influenced areas, as well as with former Taliban leaders, current Taliban members and intermediaries, GoA and MoE representatives, United Nations staff at various levels, local and international journalists, and Afghan political analysts. Local interviewees were selected on the basis of the authors' interest in an area and intermediaries' ability to identify informed people from those areas. Focus was placed on provinces in southern, southeastern and eastern Afghanistan, as well as the northern province of Kunduz, which was subject to heavy fighting during the research period. These interviews were semi-structured and designed to build rapport for future efforts to enhance access to education, in addition to addressing thematic questions. Current Taliban views from extremely insecure areas were mostly obtained through intermediaries, who corresponded with armed group members in Afghanistan and Pakistan in person, and by telephone and email, then provided written and oral reports to the authors.

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We would like to thank regional and Kabul-based staff from the MoE, UNICEF and international NGOs, as well as individuals from private educational initiatives, who spoke openly about a very sensitive topic in exchange for a promise of anonymity.

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Two Afghan friends, who cannot be named, showed incredible kindness and gave endless time and effort to support the research, including by arranging discussions with a wide range of informed people from across the country.

Finally, we would like to thank the people who travelled from and through insecure areas to share their experiences. We sincerely hope their efforts will lead to carefully designed programs that enhance access to quality education for all Afghans.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this study are those of the authors alone.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

While in power, the Afghan Taliban closed girls' schools and restricted other forms of non-religious education. Today, that same movement has issued policies supporting education as a "basic human need," including for girls "within the scope of Sharia and Afghan traditions." The Taliban now sometimes prefer to control schools rather than to close them, at least partly in response to the massive demand for education that has developed in Afghanistan over decades of war. However, the Taliban continue to deny and disrupt service provision, including education, in many parts of the country. A gap remains between Taliban policy and practice, and important questions remain about the leadership's will and ability to address that gap.

More generally, the delivery of education, like other public services, remains highly fraught in areas subject to conflict and protracted crisis. Insecurity, government corruption and dysfunction, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient personnel inhibit wider access to education. The situation will become more problematic if the conflict intensifies, the Taliban fractures, and/or other armed groups exert greater influence. But opportunities to enhance access exist: sensitive non-state provision backed by nuanced dialogue and mediation can increase prospects for effective education in both stable Taliban-controlled, contested and other insecure areas.

TALIBAN POLICY AND PRACTICE TOWARD EDUCATION, PAST AND PRESENT

In 1996, soon after the Taliban captured Kabul and proclaimed the establishment of the Islamic Emirate, Mullah Omar decreed that provision of education for girls was temporarily suspended due to security concerns. The suspension was not lifted in the five subsequent years of Taliban rule, although its enforcement was never absolute. When the Taliban re-emerged as an insurgency in 2004-05, the movement displayed hostility toward schools run by the Ministry of Education (MoE), or *maktabs*, which they viewed as agents of foreign influence. However, since about 2009, Taliban policy has not formalized hostility toward education. Until a surge in violence in 2015, the movement had also steadily reduced direct attacks against schools, teachers and students.

Today, Taliban policies and practices with respect to education remain inconsistent. The Taliban have released several statements in support of education in recent years, and several teachers working in Taliban-influenced areas have described a relative improvement in education delivery since 2011. This comes partly as a result of Taliban monitoring of teacher attendance. The Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, reported in 2012 that children of Taliban members attended rural *maktabs*. And yet, in districts under Taliban control, availability and quality of education remain poor. Restrictions on girls' education are still widespread. Direct attacks against educators and schools are no longer systematic, but they still happen. The Taliban sometimes use school closures as a bargaining tactic to exert control over the education sector, or as leverage over unrelated issues. Both the Taliban and Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) continue to use schools as military bases in some areas.

Local Taliban are more likely to support education if they perceive that they have some control over the curriculum, the distribution of MoE funds, teacher hiring and placement, monitoring of attendance and performance, and health and security arrangements at and around places of learning. This perceived control is usually the result of local political settlements between the Taliban and

education providers, mediated by elders and religious leaders (*ulama*), as well as unofficial negotiations between the MoE and Taliban leadership. The MoE has established a department of social mobilization to organize communities for this purpose.

INTERVENTIONS TO ENHANCE ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Actions designed to increase access to education in problematic areas have been tried at local, national and sectorial levels. Direct state delivery of education can turn schools into targets for the armed opposition. Since 2007, community-based education (CBE) programming, in which NGOs funded by the MoE provide education in private homes and community settings, has led to higher enrolment. CBE is now a feature of the education landscape in Afghanistan, and is widely accepted by the Taliban. The success of CBE suggests that it is possible to provide general education in both insecure and stable Taliban-controlled areas. CBE expansion to other remote and insecure areas is a worthy strategic goal of the MoE.

Many international and local organizations have also enhanced access and improved service delivery in insecure areas of Afghanistan through dialogue with the Taliban and other armed groups. A careful expansion of this effort – which is currently hampered by organizational and legal restrictions on access to and communication with armed groups – could significantly improve access to education. Constructive dialogue will require the ongoing involvement of elders, *ulama*, and other influential individuals who typically engage with local Taliban on behalf of education providers and their communities in general. These actors may be able to address family attitudes as well as more practical obstacles to education access.

EDUCATION AND POLITICAL SETTLEMENT

Many people in Afghanistan and elsewhere are concerned that a political settlement that ends the armed conflict by incorporating the Taliban into the political system might also incorporate some of the Taliban's most objectionable policies. These could include limitations on education, specifically the education of girls. While nothing can be ruled out, there are ways to structure a negotiation and peacemaking process to reduce the risk of such an outcome.

There is nothing in the current Afghan Constitution that contradicts the Taliban's public policies on education. If the Taliban recognize the same state authorities as other Afghans and are no longer at war with them or foreign troops, they will have little reason to try to use control of schools as a political tool to gain power at the Government's expense, or to forcibly close schools for bargaining purposes. They may well launch campaigns against elements of the curriculum or school administration, but those will be part of the political process. The peace process, therefore, mainly presents an opportunity to cement a growing nationwide consensus on education and to improve its future by removing the constant threats of war and insecurity that have for too long undermined education in Afghanistan.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

While in power, the Afghan Taliban closed girls' schools and restricted other forms of non-religious education. Today, that same movement has issued policies in support of education as a "basic human need," including for girls, "within the scope of Sharia and Afghan traditions."² Despite the apparent contradiction between past practice and present doctrine, the Taliban have not publically admitted that their past policies were in error. The Taliban's current practices on education are likewise inconsistent.

At issue is the MoE's "General Education" curriculum, including mathematics, sciences, social studies, languages, arts, and culture. Teachers employed by the MoE deliver the curriculum in *maktabs*. In remote or insecure areas, teachers paid by the MoE but employed by partner organizations, including UNICEF and international NGOs, deliver the general curriculum in community centers and homes under the MoE's "Community Based Education" (CBE) program.³ CBE has become a feature of the Afghan educational landscape, and is widely accepted by the Taliban.

Service delivery in Afghanistan depends on security and political control. UNAMA staff members have observed that the GoA may enjoy differential access in the same district for various functions: security, education, health, infrastructure, construction, maintenance, and so on. GoA and Taliban personnel may both be present in the same district in different ways, and their relationships may include elements of cooperation as well as conflict.

A 2015 study by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), 'The Political Economy of Education and Health Service Delivery in Afghanistan',⁴ based on field research in Wardak, Badghis, and Balkh provinces, analyzed service delivery as a resource in struggles over local political influence. These local struggles are embedded within broader struggles for power. Among the outcomes are sectoral bargains, being "specific strategic interactions of actors and their interests within the education sector,"⁵ and local political settlements at the district and district-cluster levels. The primary accounts in this report illustrate the importance of local centers of influence, particularly elders and religious leaders (*ulama*), often as part of a School Management Council (SMC), or *shura*, in negotiating and enforcing local political settlements over education.

The Taliban now sometimes prefer to control schools rather than to close them, at least partly in response to the massive demand for education that has developed among Afghans of all backgrounds over the recent decades of war. Public opinion in Afghanistan, including in rural areas, demands more education, and opposition to education generates local resistance. In 2016, in a joint NYU-UC Berkeley randomized field experiment survey, 96.7% of Afghan respondents thought "sending children to formal school is good." The same research indicated that 95.5% of the respondents thought "educating the boys increases their household status." The number was slightly lower for girls' education, but nevertheless a large majority at 88.4%.⁶ Many Afghans demand education based on religious obligations. 97.3% of respondents to the same survey said "sending girls to school is doing what the Quran and Hadith teach"; 99.1% said the same for boys.⁷ In response to popular demand, the Taliban seemingly want to demonstrate that they can supply services like a legitimate government.

The struggle for control of education revolves around three main issues: funding (including control over personnel), curriculum, and access to education by girls. The Taliban demand that the MoE should provide money to them in districts where their armed groups exclude government security forces, so that they can control hiring and curricular decisions. MoE regulations require that the Ministry pay teachers' salaries directly through the Ministry of Finance. Taliban generally do not demand the elimination

of secular subjects – rather, they demand an increase in the time spent on religious education. One senior MoE official stated that in relation to the core curriculum – sciences, literacy and numeracy – the MoE and Taliban elite “are in agreement.”⁸ Taliban commanders sometimes deny or restrict access to girls’ education, however, citing the local security situation, lack of female teachers, or absence of adequate sanitary facilities at the school. Surveys show that these are precisely the conditions that prevent parents who support education in principle from sending their daughters to school. Taliban commanders and administrators also sometimes threaten to close schools by force if their demands are not met on issues unrelated to education.

PART 2: PAST TALIBAN POLICY AND PRACTICE TOWARD EDUCATION

The contradictions and inconsistencies in current Taliban policy and practice toward education arise, at least in part, because of differing historical experiences with education among the various audiences the movement is simultaneously trying to address. Rural southern Pashtun populations, for example, have very little historical experience with girls’ education.⁹ There has been considerable opposition to educating females (especially females in their ‘marriageable’, post-pubescent years) due to patriarchal structures in society. In the Pashtun-dominated southern provinces of Zabul and Uruzgan, only one girl attends primary school for every ten boys.¹⁰ It seems some Afghan families consider the right to education to be similar between the sexes, but believe just a few years’ schooling to be sufficient for girls. The Taliban’s position toward girls’ education – both current and historical – is not nearly as controversial among some of the movement’s southern constituent communities as it is for most Western audiences.

In 1996, soon after the Taliban captured Kabul and proclaimed the establishment of the Islamic Emirate, Mullah Omar decreed that provision of education to girls was temporarily suspended due to security concerns. The suspension was not lifted in the five subsequent years of Taliban rule. The logic of the 1996 decree would have permitted education to be provided to girls in areas securely controlled by the Taliban. Anders Fänge, former Country Director of the Swedish Committee of Afghanistan (SCA), an NGO that has delivered education in Afghanistan for decades, including during the Taliban reign, recalls that in general discussions about girls’ education, Taliban leaders would revert to arguments that restrictions on girls’ access to education were due to lack of financial resources, and that boys should be given priority.¹¹ Although individual Taliban, including within the leadership, believed girls should not attend school, the Taliban never officially promulgated that view. Some Taliban officials did not enforce the 1996 decree. In rural areas, international NGOs such as CARE International and SCA were tacitly allowed to run *maktabs* for both boys and girls. In 2000, for example, SCA had schools for 170,000 students, of whom 39,000 were girls. Despite these efforts, access to schooling remained very limited across the country, especially for girls.¹²

Post-2001 Taliban opposition toward education has not always reflected opposition to education itself. In many cases, interference has been due to the way the administration of education (particularly before 2009) was bound up in GoA control. Many Taliban have justified attacking education centers because they are symbols of government authority. This is not to say that there is no opposition to general education among some of the ranks, but it means that general education is linked in some minds to an oppressive and unrepresentative government. There are historical antecedents to this: for example, some marginalized communities have prided themselves in sending their sons to a *hujra* (a traditional Pashtun social institution for males), rather than official *madrasas*.

When the Taliban began to re-emerge as an insurgency against the Karzai Government in 2004-05, the movement displayed hostility toward *maktabs*, which they viewed as agents of foreign influence. The first version of the Taliban’s *Layha*, or code of

conduct, published in 2006, instructed field commanders to attack *maktabs* that used the post-2001 curriculum, and singled out girls' schools for attack.¹³ The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) estimated that attacks on schools increased by 65% in 2006,¹⁴ and the MoE reported that more than 500 schools, mainly in southern and eastern parts of the country, were closed due to threats and direct attacks.¹⁵ Until 2005 the schools used the textbooks produced for mujahidin schools by the University of Nebraska at Omaha in the 1980s, which emphasized the importance of jihad and armed struggle against occupation. The Taliban preferred these textbooks to the new ones introduced in 2005 with the support of UNICEF.¹⁶

In 2009 and 2010, revised and expanded versions of the *Layha* omitted the paragraphs hostile to education. The Taliban reduced direct attacks against schools, teachers and students. Instead, they tried to exert influence by controlling the provision of education. Deals between local Taliban and MoE officials led to a number of schools being re-opened.¹⁷ In January 2011, Faruq Wardak, then Minister of Education, announced that the Taliban were "no more opposing education and girls education."¹⁸ In March 2011, the MoE claimed Mullah Omar had issued a decree instructing Taliban fighters not to attack *maktabs* or intimidate students.¹⁹ Such a decree has never been made public.

Our research suggests that in 2011 the MoE and Taliban reached an agreement that provided for minor changes to the core curriculum. It also ceded to the Taliban some influence over recruitment of teachers and monitoring their attendance and performance, including using laptop computers provided by the MoE. The Taliban may even collect some payments from MoE officials for these services.²⁰ The MoE reportedly modified the curriculum to increase the time spent on religious education, and modified contemporary history textbook passages considered controversial.²¹ Some Taliban claimed control of the institution as a result of this sectoral bargain.²² One MoE official noted that Taliban monitoring led to a reduction in 'ghost teachers' (funds appropriated for MoE teachers who do not exist or do not attend school). According to Giustozzi and Franco, "Taliban commanders in the field often openly talked about an agreement between the Taliban leadership and the MoE to reopen all schools in exchange for the MoE's generalized adoption of a new curriculum."²³ The MoE has not publicly admitted the existence of the 2011 sectoral agreement. Giustozzi and Franco report that there were differing opinions about the agreement among the Taliban field commanders: some more conservative commanders were opposed, but others favored education and supported the agreement.

Several teachers working in Taliban-influenced areas have described a relative improvement in education since 2011, partly as a result of Taliban monitoring of teacher attendance.²⁴ As the AREU's 2015 study on service delivery concluded: "However politically controversial, sectoral bargains appear to be especially crucial for service delivery in remote areas, and, more generally, all areas with a strong Taliban presence."²⁵

NGOs implementing the CBE program report similar Taliban demands. In 2012, SCA supported 467 schools in rural areas, comprised of approximately 120,000 students, of whom 56% were girls.²⁶ Many of those schools were situated in provinces where the Taliban had a strong presence, such as Wardak, Ghazni, Paktika, Nangarhar, Kunar and Kunduz. The Taliban sporadically closed those schools, but with one exception all were reopened after negotiations between local Taliban and local elders.²⁷ The most typical demand of the Taliban is to add a few hours of religious subjects per week and to remove contentious pages of history and culture textbooks.²⁸

In the first six months of 2012, UNAMA reported 34 cases of "attacks against education facilities, staff and students, and other incidents impacting education."²⁹ During the same period in 2011, UNAMA documented only 10 similar incidents.³⁰ In May 2012,

the MoE announced that 550 schools, mainly girls' schools, had been shut due to threats and attacks in 11 provinces.³¹ The Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, rejected the accusations, saying that the MoE "is stirring propaganda against us," adding that the children of Taliban members attended *maktabs* in the rural areas.³² A joint UNAMA-UNICEF report in April 2016 documented some "132 conflict-related incidents affecting access to education." This included "11 education personnel killed, 15 injured and 49 abducted." The report added that attacks have caused "partial or complete closure of more than 369 schools in 2015, affecting more than 139,000 students and 600 teachers." The UN's report noted that in 19 cases the anti-government elements, the Taliban, had targeted girls' education. Some 94 co-ed schools had been force closed affecting more than 50,000 girls.³³

PART 3: CURRENT TALIBAN POLICY AND PRACTICE TOWARD EDUCATION

TALIBAN POLICY

The Taliban have released several statements in support of education in recent years.³⁴ In August 2013, an *Eid al-Fitr* proclamation attributed to Mullah Omar (who had died four months before) stated, "To protect ourselves from scarcity and hardships, our young generations should arm themselves with religious and modern education, because modern education is a fundamental need in every society in the present time."³⁵ In May 2015, the Taliban published a statement made by its representatives at an international conference in Qatar, which committed to upholding all rights of women under Islam, including the right to education – albeit, "within the scope of Sharia and Afghan traditions," which they did not define.³⁶ In January 2016, the Taliban's "Commission for Training, Learning and Higher Education" released an education policy statement that reiterated support for "modern education" based on the following principles:

- Education, teaching, learning and studying the religion [are] basic human needs.
- The Taliban in accordance with its comprehensive policy has established a Commission [to] ... pursue, implement and advance its education policy.
- The Commission seeks growth to all educational sectors inside and outside the country, be they Islamic such as religious *Madaris*, *Dar-ul-Hifaz*, village level *Madaris*, up to legal Islamic expertise; or be they modern primary, intermediate and high schools, universities or specialist and higher education institutions.
- For the development of these institutions, if any countryman seeks to build a private institution, the Commission will welcome their effort and lend all necessary help available.
- To raise the education level and standardize these institutions the Commission will welcome and gladly accept the views, advice and constructive proposals of religious scholars, teachers and specialists in religious and modern sciences.
- The Commission seeks ... to encourage and motivate the sons of this nation towards educational institutions and to give special attention to creating opportunities for educational facilities at village level.
- The Commission has provincial level and district level officials who will execute all educational plans and programs in their respected areas. All the respected countrymen will be able to gain access to them regarding affairs of education.³⁷

The statement omitted any explicit support for girls' education.

Discussions with local Taliban in eastern Afghanistan in late 2015 and early 2016 suggest that Taliban in those areas would support girls' secondary or higher education if their conditions were met, including the presence of female teachers, separation from boys, adequate security, and adherence to their concept of an Islamic dress code.³⁸

TALIBAN PRACTICE – OVERVIEW

In 2015, Taliban attacks on schools and threats against educators increased, in line with a general surge in violence following ISAF's military drawdown at the end of 2014.³⁹ Incidents have included attacks on schools used by the state for other purposes, such as polling places or police or military bases; targeted killings of pro-*maktab* clerics in Khost; teacher kidnappings in Wardak; and public intimidation and shaming of students in Kunduz during the Taliban's temporary capture of the city in September 2015.⁴⁰

In late 2015, UNAMA estimated that 13 districts – in Helmand, Zabul, Ghazni, Paktika, Khost, Badakhshan and Sari Pul – were under stable Taliban control. In these districts, availability and quality of education is very poor; the MoE has no access, and hence no public schools exist other than village mosques used for basic religious instruction.⁴¹ In some areas, absence of formal education is the recent norm.⁴² For example, in Baghran, Naw Zad, Musa Qaleh, Wa Sher and Deh Shu districts of Helmand, there have been no functioning formal schools for either boys or girls for over a decade.⁴³ In Taliban-dominated Khakrez, Nesh and Shah Wali Kot districts in Kandahar, all schools are closed, while in districts of comparable security under state control, schools are open.⁴⁴

Nawa district in southern Ghazni, under Taliban military control since about 2007, is another example. The three key Taliban members are Mullahs Ismail (shadow district governor), Haji Mullah Nasir (district council member and former Ghazni shadow governor) and Rahimullah (military commander). No schools have operated since 2007 for either boys or girls. Even before the Taliban took control there were no girls' schools. Three *madrasas* function in the district. In 2011, community elders asked the Taliban representatives to open a *maktab*. The local commanders gave conditions for opening schools: money from the MoE must go to the Taliban, and the Taliban must assign the teachers and headmasters, and set the curriculum. The MoE rejected this proposal, and schools have remained closed. No organization offers community-based classes in Nawa. A local community effort to establish a low-cost private tuition services failed when the local people could not afford the estimated monthly cost of 50 Afs (less than \$1) per person.⁴⁵

The Taliban in Nawa recognize the authority of a 15-member community *shura* that resolves disputes. One Nawa resident suggested, "If we tried for school this way, then yes; Taliban does not have anything against private schools – they are not opposing that. It is possible, if we were supported, with the help of the *shura*, to establish 10 classes or so. And that would have the benefit of collecting 30 or 40 parents together to establish community support. The most important point is that we have 15 elders, respected on both sides ... and there is the possibility of schooling by the help of these people."⁴⁶

When asked to confirm his opinion that the local Taliban are not against education per se, the same interviewee said: "No. No one is against education." But in relation to girls' education, he said: "People want, but there is no possibility to open a girls' school in this area. Firstly, our priority is to the boys. Our boys are just roaming around, illiterate; so the first priority should be given to the boys. In the presence of Taliban it is difficult to open a girls' school."⁴⁷

Some Taliban commanders support general education in the areas they influence. This support includes non-interference with *maktabs* and a permissive attitude toward CBE and private classes. Our research suggests local Taliban are more likely to support education if they perceive control of the curriculum, distribution of MoE funds, teacher hiring and placement, monitoring of attendance and performance and health and security arrangements at and around *maktabs* or designated learning spaces. This perceived control is often the result of local political settlements between Taliban and education providers, agreed with dialogue and mediation assistance from elders and *ulama*.

- Local political factors that appear to be conducive to productive discussions with local Taliban about education include:
- Taliban administrators and commanders from the district, with family or tribal connections to elders and *ulama*;
- Literate Taliban administrators and commanders;
- Taliban leadership directions to promote education in the relevant district;
- SMCs, or other *shuras*, made up of elders and *ulama* who can carry out dialogue, negotiation and mediation functions on behalf of the local community;
- Previous dialogue between the Taliban and local centers of influence in relation to issues of concern to the community, particularly humanitarian issues; and
- Strong demand among the local community for the provision of education.

Bermel, a militarily contested border district in Paktika province, illustrates the complex mix of obstacles to education in Taliban-influenced areas. Bermel has been used for over a decade as a route for Taliban into Pakistan, and has recently served as a sanctuary for Pakistani Taliban escaping Pakistani military attention in South Waziristan.⁴⁸ Bilal Zadran is the Taliban military commander responsible for Bermel and surrounding districts. Bilal was reportedly named as deputy to Sirajuddin Haqqani, leader of the Haqqani Network, after Bilal's brother, Sangeen Zadran, was killed in a U.S. drone strike in 2013.⁴⁹ Bilal prohibits delivery of general education in the areas of Bermel district that he controls, but permits *maktabs* to operate in Ziruk, Nika and Gian, three neighboring districts inhabited by his own Zadran tribe.

Two *maktabs* are open in GoA-controlled areas of Bermel. One local resident argued that corruption in the MoE was a bigger obstacle to education than the Taliban:

"The main problem is not the Taliban. The MoE is also involved in closing schools. Every month, the MoE sends their salaries, the director and district chief get together, shake hands, agree to say the schools are open and not to tell anybody, the money will come and we will share among ourselves. This is happening in Waza Khah, Wor Mamay, Tarwe, Gomal, Bermal, Omna, Ziruk, Nika, and Sarobi districts. For example, last year I was in the [provincial] center. I was sitting there with a high school headmaster from Waza Khah district. I know him. He was filling in some papers. I asked what he was doing. He said he was filling in the numbers / grades of the students, exam results, the things required by the MoE. He means that they don't go to school; they just fill the monthly or quarterly reports. They come to the center of the province, spend 2 or 3 nights in a hotel, complete the forms, and submit them to MoE. Even the director of education department, sitting in the center of the province, is involved in this. Everywhere there are ghost schools and ghost teachers."⁵⁰

RESTRICTIONS ON GIRLS' ACCESS

Restrictions on girls' education extend beyond Taliban-influenced areas, and involve pragmatic, historic and cultural factors, in addition to political allegiances. Safety and health concerns lead many parents to restrict access to *maktabs* by their daughters. Taliban practices in relation to the education of girls are inconsistent. Some Taliban rationalize denying or restricting girls' access to education on the grounds of lack of security, non-availability of female teachers, or lack of appropriate sanitary provisions at the relevant school – reasons that parents also give for not sending girls to school, even if they support education for girls in principle.

If *maktabs* exist in Taliban-controlled areas, girls usually stop school at around sixth grade.⁵¹ This is generally the case in non-Taliban areas as well, particularly among Pashtun populations.⁵² In Taliban-controlled villages of Zurmat, a district in Paktya province, girls must finish maktab after third grade.⁵³ In August 2015, an experienced local teacher predicted local Taliban would implement a total ban on girls' education in the district in 2016.⁵⁴ One senior elder from Khost claimed that in Taliban-controlled areas, all girls' *maktabs* are closed.⁵⁵ CBE classes for girls and boys continue to operate in the same areas, largely under the sponsorship of CARE.⁵⁶

The presence of female teachers is a prerequisite to the education of girls in both Taliban-influenced districts and elsewhere. The MoE planned to increase the number of female primary and secondary teachers by 50% by 2010 and to recruit and train 50,000 grade 12 graduates, of whom 45% were to be women.⁵⁷ Between 1999 and 2012, the percentage of female primary school teachers in Afghanistan reportedly rose from 10 to 31%.⁵⁸ Our research, however, suggests that the current proportion of female teachers, and the number of females enrolled in teaching degrees and training courses, is much less than has been planned, reported and hoped for. In 2015, a senior elder from Khost suggested that of 5000 qualified teachers, only 300 were female. A teacher trainer from Kunar reported that out of 3000 teaching students and 500 headmaster candidates, none were women.⁵⁹

The movement's insistence that girls should be taught only by female teachers requires training of female teachers, which requires educating female teachers through university. In both public statements and private interactions, the Taliban have evaded confronting the internal contradictions of the conflict between their policy and the practice of some of their commanders, who continue to limit girls' education after puberty.

Some Taliban mullahs, though not qualified as teachers, do teach girls secular subjects in mosques and school buildings. They do not teach exclusively religious subjects: some teach history, languages (Arabic, for example) and basic science and mathematics.⁶⁰ In Bermel, mentioned above, a local mullah operates a madrasa that also functions as a private school. The mullah was apparently concerned that if he registered his madrasa with the MoE, the Taliban would target it. Funded by local parents, he offers private education, including some secular subjects. In late 2015, about 60 girls were attending.⁶¹ Other *madrasas* also offer secular subjects. These include girls' *madrasas*, run by women and supervised by male clerics, who reportedly receive funds from the MoE to teach secular subjects.⁶²

The Taliban do not deny girls' secondary school education in every area they influence. In Taliban-dominated Shirzad district, in Nangarhar province, there are ten high schools, of which three are for girls and from which hundreds of females have graduated in the past few years.⁶³ A similarly positive situation is reported in Taliban-influenced areas of Pashtun Kot district of Faryab province.⁶⁴ In Khost, Haqqani Network commanders permit several girls' high schools run by CARE to function.

The following measures would make families more comfortable with sending teenage girls to school, and also make Taliban more likely to permit access:

- Separate, clean, secure (lockable), and well-maintained toilet facilities;
- Free distribution of sanitary provisions for menstruation;
- Boundary walls around the school sufficient to prevent passersby from staring;
- Rudimentary secure transportation from village to school; and
- The extension, if possible, of CBE to the upper secondary level.

These measures are common demands across the country, not only in Taliban-influenced areas. SCA and other NGOs have been working for decades to build walls and toilets and provide other privacy, sanitary and health facilities for girls' schools.⁶⁵ While they may not change ideological objections, these measures could make girls' secondary education easier for families to support, and therefore increase pressure on the Taliban not to interfere with education provision in the areas they influence.

TACTICAL AND INCIDENTAL INTERFERENCE

Taliban attacks against education do not always reflect opposition to education itself. The Taliban's tactical and incidental interference with education includes the use of school closures as a bargaining tactic to exert control over the funding and curriculum of the schools, or as leverage over issues unconnected to education. The Taliban may also attack schools as symbols of government or the foreign presence, in retaliation for attacks against *madrasas* and mullahs, or if the premises are also used for military purposes or polling places.⁶⁶ Incidents could also be due to familial, tribal, ethnic and personal feuds that affect but have nothing to do with education. Such attacks or closures, however, risk provoking a backlash from communities that demand education for their children.

In October 2015, in Sarkano district of Kunar province, local Taliban commanders forced the closure of four high schools. A Taliban teacher had been receiving wages from the MoE but not attending classes. The MoE removed the teacher from the payroll. The Taliban subsequently closed the four schools and demanded the banning of scientific subjects. Local elders, working with MoE officials, reached a secret deal with the Taliban to reopen the schools. Scientific subjects have been continued, and the Taliban teacher is back on the payroll. Also in October 2015, in Chapa Dara district of Kunar, two Taliban commanders closed local schools in an attempt to secure the release of a relative captured by the National Directorate of Security. Local elders were able to secure the reopening of the schools, reportedly by approaching Taliban leaders in Peshawar.⁶⁷

Sometimes the Taliban will close schools simply to demonstrate political influence. A recent example is from Farah city, which has about 50 schools. Until recently, 30 per cent of 60,000 students were girls. In November 2015, Taliban based roughly fifteen kilometers outside of the city told the local people to close the schools, for unknown reasons. Schools were closed, so community elders mobilized to negotiate with the Taliban in an attempt to reopen them.⁶⁸ According to the last available information, the schools are still closed.

Education continues to be disrupted in areas subject to conflict and protracted crisis,⁶⁹ with many closures due to insecurity.⁷⁰ The situation in Kunduz after the Taliban's military offensive in September 2015 highlights the devastating effect of conflict on service delivery, family priorities and local incentive structures.⁷¹ In Dasht-e-Archi district, for example, education provision has been severely affected by recent heavy fighting. In an August 2015 interview prior to the Taliban offensive against Kunduz City, a headmaster from Dasht-e-Archi noted that both boys' and girls' schools were functioning quite well under local Taliban rule. A subsequent interview with the same headmaster in October 2015 revealed a different situation: some CBE classes had recommenced, but all *maktabs* were closed; people remained inside or were fleeing; 100 of 150 villages in Dasht-e-Archi had been evacuated; there were reports of forced Taliban military recruitment of boys; and the Taliban were also setting up "military *madrasas*" for young volunteer recruits.⁷²

Besides the Taliban, other armed groups such as *Daesh* (the Islamic State, or IS) also influence the delivery of services. IS interference has badly damaged the education system in southern border districts of Nangarhar. IS commanders have forced school and CBE classes to close in Achin, Deh Bala and Kot, despite the best efforts of the Afghan National Army, local MoE and community *shuras*. Deh Bala district has 25 schools, all of which were closed in late 2015.⁷³ One Deh Bala resident stated: "There has not been any problem [with] education up to now ... Taliban did not create any problem in education. They were helpful in monitoring process of schools."⁷⁴

Local elders have tried to open dialogue with IS commanders regarding service delivery, but such attempts have so far failed. IS leaders are almost all from outside the area, and a majority of them seem to be from Pakistan, often former militants of the Pakistani Taliban. Some community elders who asked IS to reopen schools were killed. Education workers were also detained and then released with fines and threats of death if they returned to work. In Kot district, the GoA reopened 21 schools after a military operation. Teachers and students had been threatened not to attend and the schools remain closed. IS also warned local people that if they sent their daughters to school past sixth grade, they would be killed.⁷⁵

PART 4: INTERVENTIONS

NON-STATE EDUCATION PROVISION

Interventions designed to enhance access to education in problematic areas have been tried at local, national and sectoral levels. Direct state delivery of education can turn schools into targets for the armed opposition. CBE reduces the likelihood of schools being militarily targeted by reducing the direct association between schools and the state.

CBE providers, mostly international NGOs, work with local communities to identify safe, accessible and otherwise appropriate community spaces as an alternative to state or foreign-funded and constructed *maktabs*. Most CBE teachers are members of the community in which they teach. A similar approach is used for Accelerated Learning Centers, which provide educational opportunities to adults, particularly young women, whose education has been interrupted due to conflict, a lack of female teachers and other social and practical barriers.⁷⁶

The establishment of CBE in 2007 led to increases in enrolment by up to 42 per cent in some sample villages.⁷⁷ It is now a feature of the Afghan educational landscape, and is widely accepted by the Taliban and other armed groups.⁷⁸ CBE has proven to be an effective alternative delivery method in areas where the GoA, particularly the MoE, has very limited access. For example, in late 2015, while state-run *maktabs* in conflict-affected and Taliban-dominated districts of Kunduz remained closed, SCA was able to restart CBE classes for boys and girls. UNICEF, SCA, CARE, Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee, the Aga Khan Foundation and local organizations report numerous other examples of CBE's effectiveness in remote and insecure areas.

CBE's success suggests that it is possible to provide general education in both insecure and stable Taliban-controlled areas. In a context of increasing political uncertainty and insecurity, expanding CBE to other insecure areas is a worthy strategic goal.⁷⁹

DIALOGUE AND MEDIATION

Dialogue and mediation have enhanced access for many humanitarian and development organizations in Taliban-controlled and insecure areas of Afghanistan. SCA and CARE, for example, have a decades-long history of effective delivery of education in Taliban-controlled areas, largely as a result of engagement with local Taliban commanders.⁸⁰ Similarly, focused and sustained dialogue – at both the local commander and political leader levels – might further improve access in problematic areas. Recent Taliban policy statements, instances of sectoral cooperation with the MoE, and permissive operating environments for CBE providers suggest the opening of a window for constructive dialogue with Taliban leaders and commanders on the issue.

Education providers have reported several factors that increase the challenge of opening and sustaining dialogue with the Taliban and other armed groups. These include:

- Fragmentation of the Taliban, combined with differing levels of allegiance to the movement's political leadership among local commanders;
- No access to the Taliban's military and education commissions in Quetta/Karachi and Peshawar;

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- Restrictions on dialogue with local Taliban commanders and administrators, due to organizational security protocols and international terrorist lists;
 - Low levels of flexibility to organize meetings “when we want, with whom we want. Rules get in the way, particularly with people on banned lists”;⁸¹ and
 - Limited access to the Haqqani Network, Islamic State, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), al Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and smaller, less organized militias that can nonetheless disrupt service provision, directly and indirectly.

While there is relative confidence that directions solicited from the Taliban leadership in Pakistan would be followed by the majority of commanders and shadow administrators in southern provinces such as Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul and Uruzgan, there is less confidence in the leadership’s ability to control commanders’ behavior in other parts of the country. Particular uncertainty is reported in southeastern areas controlled by the Haqqani Network and the contested eastern border provinces such as Nangarhar and Kunar.

The nature of dialogue and mediation required will vary from case to case. Most efforts to enhance access to education in Taliban-influenced areas are local: elders, *ulama* and other influential individuals typically engage and negotiate with local Taliban on behalf of the community and education providers. Some international organizations discuss humanitarian issues at the policy level with the Taliban’s political commission in Doha engaging in detailed dialogue and negotiation to solicit “top-down” pressure to address issues in specific locations.

The importance of elders and *ulama* in Afghan society cannot be overstated. Their efforts are commonly cited as the key factor in addressing disruptions to service provision, often because of the benefits of direct personal relationships with local Taliban. Through its department of social mobilization, the MoE plans to increase participation of elders and *ulama* in school affairs by strengthening SMCs to help manage, supervise, and protect schools. Our research suggests these efforts are unlikely to have much effect, until local communities regain some of the trust in the MoE that has been damaged by poor quality service and endemic local corruption. If local communities believe in the service, they will stand behind it. The MoE’s technical support should be combined with protection for local elders from the GoA’s security agencies. Asked what it would take to mobilize other elders to engage the Taliban on education, one elder from southeastern Afghanistan said:

“The people want [education]. But if I start talking with Taliban tomorrow, and no one is there [to support me], I will be killed. If we want to talk with Taliban or have any ties with the Taliban, the Government, even the NDS, must not ask us why. I don’t want them asking me why I want to negotiate with the Taliban. There shouldn’t be interference – especially from these corrupt guys. If we get the guarantee that there is support, then we will take a stand, against everyone.”⁸²

In addition to the efforts of local elders and *ulama*, outreach by individuals has promoted private education in Taliban-influenced areas.⁸³ One initiative in Helmand is illustrative. Nad-e-Ali is a contested district in central Helmand. In March 2001, while the Taliban were in power, Dr Mohammad Khan Kharoti, an Afghan-American, began supporting classes for ten boys and six girls in the village of Shin Kalay (‘Green Village’), which had a population of 11,000. The education project was undertaken with the Taliban’s consent. Kharoti had met with former Taliban Government officials in Kabul, including then Minister of Foreign Affairs Mullah Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil, who advised him that if he could find the resources, he “could start 100 schools.”⁸⁴

The school he built eventually comprised eight classrooms for boys on one side of the school and eight for girls on the other, providing space for nine grades. The complex contained a library that also served as a community center. By 2007, with about 800 boys and 400 girls and a teaching staff of 35, the school was licensed by the MoE and provided with some financial support for teachers' salaries.

In October 2008, however, suspected Taliban militants destroyed the school. Reports suggest the destruction was part of an internal rivalry over contracting funding. The Taliban did not claim responsibility for the attack, which included use of a backhoe over three days to destroy the buildings. Most of the furniture, supplies and materials were also looted. The local community replaced the school with mud brick classrooms erected next to the central mosque. Enrolment rose to about 700 boys while 170 girls were schooled in private homes because of continued insecurity in the area.

In 2010, Kharoti mobilized local elders to travel to Pakistan to talk to the Taliban leadership about rebuilding the school. The elders asked why the initial school had been destroyed, and were told because of unspecified "misbehavior" by girls. After receiving consent from the leadership, the school was rebuilt on the original site. As of mid-2015, enrolment was at about 2000, with up to 700 girls and 35 MoE teachers. The school has relatively modern classrooms, administrative offices, computer labs for girls and boys, and a library. Local Taliban support the school, and several Taliban fighters' children are enrolled as students.

Kharoti believes that the main problem is not the Taliban but family attitudes and practical obstacles (e.g. distance from school), which could be overcome with support (e.g. a minibus). He said: "The key is just talking, to the Taliban, to the Government. But you must start with the local mullah. With support, we could start 100 schools."⁸⁵

Of course, not all efforts to engage the Taliban on education succeed. Dialogue and mediation will be more effective where the local political factors mentioned are present. Gulistan district in Farah province has 219 villages. In November 2015, the GoA militarily controlled five of them; the Taliban controlled the rest. Two of five high schools in the district were functioning: a boys' high school with 100 students and a girls' high school with 40 students. Both high schools were near the district center, in a GoA-controlled area. There were 25 teachers of whom six were women. Elders asked local Taliban to reopen the closed schools. When they failed to agree, several elders travelled to Quetta to meet with the Taliban leadership council. The Taliban representative told the elders that the Taliban shadow district governor has the authority to reopen the school, but he refused to issue a letter ordering him to do so. As of December 2015, the three schools remained closed.⁸⁶

PART 5: EDUCATION AND POLITICAL SETTLEMENT

Education is now a central aspect of the Taliban's quest for local and international legitimacy. Taliban leaders have proclaimed support for education for several years now. However, Taliban continue to deny and disrupt service provision in many parts of the country. A gap remains between Taliban policy and Taliban practice. Important questions remain about the leadership's will and ability to address that gap.

Education provision will become more problematic if the conflict intensifies, the Taliban fractures, or other armed groups, including the Islamic State, exert greater influence. But opportunities to enhance access exist: sensitive non-state provision backed by nuanced dialogue and mediation can enhance prospects for effective education provision in stable Taliban-controlled and highly contested areas.

Many people in Afghanistan and elsewhere are concerned that a political settlement that ends the armed conflict by incorporating the Taliban into the political system might also incorporate some of the Taliban's most objectionable policies, such as limitations on education and specifically on the education of girls. Nothing can be excluded, but there are ways to structure a negotiation and peacemaking process to reduce the risk of that eventuality.

As CIC argued in an earlier report on education and the Taliban, the GoA should seek to keep education out of any discussions of a settlement, to avoid making it the subject of polarization or partisanship. In track two meetings including Taliban representatives and other Afghans, education has mainly been a point of agreement, not disagreement. It may be that Taliban views have actually changed. It may also be that what Taliban representatives say in meetings differs from what their commanders do on the ground. In any case the risk would not arise from negotiation over education, but from the positions and influence of commanders in the field. Taliban negotiators would not make demands for policies they claim to oppose. Most essential, then, is not what an agreement says about education, but what it does about the Taliban as a militant force and terrorist group.

While no one can say what form that political process will take, the most likely end point is a *Loya Jirga*, such as the one envisaged in the National Unity Government agreement. The purpose of that *Loya Jirga*, according to the agreement, is to consider amending the Constitution so as to establish the office of Executive Prime Minister. It could, however, also discuss issues of war and peace. One fear is that it might revisit the Afghan Constitution's provisions on education. These are:

Article Seventeen

Ch. 1, Art. 17

The state shall adopt necessary measures for promotion of education in all levels, development of religious education, organizing and improving the conditions of mosques, madrasas and religious centers.

Article Forty-Three

Ch. 2, Art. 22

Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be provided up to the level of the B.A. (*lisâns*), free of charge by the state.

The state is obliged to devise and implement effective programs for a balanced expansion of education all over Afghanistan, and to provide compulsory intermediate level education.

The state is also required to provide the opportunity to teach native languages in the areas where they are spoken.

Article Forty-Four

Ch. 2, Art. 23

The state shall devise and implement effective programs for balancing and promoting of education for women, improving of education of nomads and elimination of illiteracy in the country.

Article Forty-Five

Ch.2, Art. 24

The state shall devise and implement a unified educational curriculum based on the provisions of the sacred religion of Islam, national culture, and in accordance with academic principles, and develop the curriculum of religious subjects on the basis of the Islamic sects existing in Afghanistan.

Article Forty-Six

Ch.2, Art. 25

Establishing and operating of higher, general and vocational education are the duties of the state.

The citizens of Afghanistan also can establish higher, general, and vocational private educational institutions and literacy courses with the permission of the state.

The state can also permit foreign persons to set up higher, general and vocational educational private institutes in accordance with the law.

The conditions for admission to state higher education institutions and other related matters to be regulated by the law.

There is nothing in these provisions that contradicts the Taliban's publically stated policies toward education. The Taliban might want more language providing for *madrasas* and recognizing the degrees they award.

Once the Taliban recognize the same state authorities as other Afghans and are no longer at war with them or foreign troops, they will have no reason to try to use control of the schools as a political tool to gain power at the Government's expense, or to use

force to close schools tactically for bargaining purposes. They may well launch campaigns against elements of the curriculum or school administration, as their predecessors did during the time of Zahir Shah and President Daoud, but that will be part of the political process.

The peace process, therefore, mainly presents an opportunity to cement a growing nationwide consensus on education, and to improve its future by removing the constant threats of war and insecurity that have undermined education in Afghanistan for too long.

PART 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

The following actions are likely to help expand access to education in Afghanistan:

To Donors

- Continue funding at the pledged levels through the transformation decade.
- Agree at the Brussels conference to support policies as recommended below.
- Acknowledge the complexity of the current political and security situation by displaying flexibility toward implementing partners, for example, by continuing funding even if services are forced to temporarily cease due to the armed conflict.
- Increase the proportion of funding dedicated to training rural female teachers.

To the Government of Afghanistan

- Continue to investigate and address decentralized systemic corruption in the MoE.
- Strictly enforce a ban on GoA forces using schools as military bases or shelters. Make this a key point of difference between the GoA and Taliban.
- Take all reasonable measures including appropriate training, education and reprimands, to ensure that 'parallel militias' and other local groups backed by the GoA or its international partners respect human rights and international humanitarian law in relation to the protection of schools and educators.
- Provide assurances to community representatives to the effect that engaging with the Taliban for humanitarian and development purposes, including promoting education, will not be met with opposition from Afghan security forces.
- Strengthen the capacity of the MoE's social mobilization department to facilitate dialogue among key stakeholders in areas subject to emergencies and protracted crises, for example, areas subject to prolonged Taliban control, Islamic State influence, or heavy fighting. The unit would cooperate with local *shuras* to prevent and resolve problems, including disruptions caused by armed groups.

To the Ministry of Education

- Strengthen communication mechanisms with local communities, to enable serious abuses and local corruption to be reported to senior levels of the MoE in Kabul.
- Enhance the use of technology, particularly for the training of female teachers and temporary provision of education to children, in the most problematic areas.
- Explore ways in which women living in insecure areas can become teachers.
- Continue to implement measures to make schools as accessible as possible, especially for adolescent girls, including construction of boundary walls, provision of toilets and sanitary products, and making transport available.
- Strengthen cooperation with existing SMCs and other local *shuras*, rather than creating new or parallel structures designed to identify developing problems, map local attitudes and address disruptions to education.
- Conduct a comprehensive national survey of family (including women's) attitudes toward education, including in relation to the reasons for continuing gender disparity, and the perceived value of general education in the Afghan context.

To UNAMA and UNICEF

- Continue to monitor and report grave violations of children's rights in the armed conflict, including education-related incidents as defined under the guidance material to UN Security Council Resolution 1998 (2011) and related instruments.
- Continue to urge armed groups to account for and cease these violations.
- Continue to map the nature and extent of Taliban and other armed group influence on service provision, including education provision, across the country.
- In cooperation with the MoE, convene a forum of CBE providers to examine options for enhanced cooperation and shared learning, including with national NGOs and private initiatives – for example, by making school management and teacher training classes available to national NGOs operating in insecure areas.

To International NGOs Providing Education in Afghanistan

- In cooperation with the MoE, explore ways to train local female teachers in rural areas, including, for example, through the enhanced application of technology.
- Continue to implement measures to make schools as accessible as possible, especially for adolescent girls, including construction of boundary walls, provision of toilets and sanitary products, and making transport available.
- Engage with MoE's social mobilization department to facilitate dialogue with armed groups and key stakeholders in areas subject to emergencies and protracted crises.

APPENDIX: AFGHANISTAN'S EDUCATION STATISTICS

Afghanistan has experienced substantial quantitative improvements in school attendance, gender equity and literacy since 2001. However, the precise extent of those gains remains somewhat uncertain. Insecurity has rendered data collection and verification extremely problematic in many places. The MoE has also been subject to claims that it has inflated figures.⁸⁷

In August 2015, President Ashraf Ghani appointed a commission, including members from the Attorney General's Office and National Directorate of Security, to investigate claims of corruption and fraud in the MoE. In January 2016, a separate fact-finding team was appointed to assess the quality of education, the number of teachers and students, and the appointment processes of teachers. Full details of the first commission's findings had not been released at the time of publication, but its preliminary findings suggested some previously reported figures might be revised.⁸⁸

According to the MoE's draft National Education Strategic Plan 2015-2020, 8.6 million children were enrolled in *maktabs* in 2013, of which 39 per cent were girls.⁸⁹ In 2011, UNICEF estimated the Net Enrolment Ratio to be 55 per cent for primary and 32 per cent for secondary education, meaning that at least 3.5 million school-age children were out of school.⁹⁰ Girls, disabled, nomadic and linguistically diverse children, as well as those living in very remote and insecure areas, remain the most disadvantaged groups.

Despite considerable progress, Afghanistan's schools had just 72 girls enrolled for every 100 boys in 2015.⁹¹ The estimated primary gross enrolment ratio for girls has increased from less than 4 per cent in 1999 to 87 per cent in 2012, a Gender Parity Index (GPI) increase from 0.08 to 0.72.⁹² Despite this undeniably significant achievement, that GPI remains the lowest in the world.⁹³ The GPI also varies considerably among provinces and between rural and urban areas. In 2012, GPI in Herat and Badakhshan was 0.9 (nine girls to ten boys), while GPI in Zabul and Uruzgan was 0.1 (one girl to ten boys).⁹⁴ The causes of these discrepancies are complex, but could in part reflect different levels of Taliban influence, the demand for and character of local political settlements governing education, as well as ethno-religious traditions, family priorities, security levels and other practical factors.

ENDNOTES

¹Afghan Ministry of Education 2015, 'Draft National Education Strategic Plan III 2015-2020' (NESP III), available from: <http://moe.gov.af/en/page/1831/nesp-iii-2015-2020>. The "quality education for all" language is in line with the core aims of both Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (see further: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>), and the UNESCO-led global "Education for All" initiative: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/>

²Taliban public statement 13 January 2016, 'Statement by Islamic Emirate's Commission for Training, Learning and Higher Education', available from: <http://shahamat-english.com/>; UNAMA, '2015 Mid-Year Report: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', p68, available from: <https://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>

³For a useful recent summary of the CBE program, see for example United States Agency for International Development (US AID), 'Fact Sheet: Community-Based Education', available from: <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/community-based-education-cbe>

⁴Echavez C, Giustozzi A, Bagaporo J, Nadery N et ors 2016, 'The Political Economy of Education and Health Service Delivery in Afghanistan', *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*, available from: <http://www.areu.org.af/EditionDetails.aspx?EditionId=893&ContentId=7&ParentId=7>

⁵*Ibid*, p1.

⁶Burde D., J. Middleton, and C. Samii. 2016. Baseline Report. The Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Social Effects of Community-Based Education: A Randomized Field Experiment in Afghanistan.

⁷*Ibid*.

⁸Confidential communications, August to December 2015.

⁹Karlsson P & Mansory A, 2007. 'An Afghan Dilemma: Education, Gender and Globalisation in an Islamic Context', unpublished PhD thesis for the Institute of International Education, Department of Education, Stockholm University, available from: <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:197642/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

¹⁰MoE NESP III, *supra* n1.

¹¹Private 2013 report by Anders Fänge, former Country Director, Swedish Committee of Afghanistan, cited below as "Fänge 2013".

¹²*Ibid*.

¹³Fänge 2013, *supra* n10.

¹⁴ISAF, cited in Fänge 2013, *supra* n10.

¹⁵*Ibid*.

¹⁶Burde, D. 'Schools for Conflict or for Peace in Afghanistan.' 5 August 2014.

¹⁷Fänge 2013, *supra* n10.

¹⁸Faroq Wardak, then Minister of Education, press release 2011, referred to in Fänge 2013, *supra* n10.

¹⁹Fänge 2013, *supra* n10.

²⁰Confidential communications, August to December 2015.

²¹As reported by several major news outlets at the time, including the BBC 18 August 2012, 'Why Afghanistan's past is being "rewritten"', available from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-18579315>

²²Confidential communications, August to December 2015.

²³Giustozzi A and Franco C 2011, 'The Battle for the Schools: The Taliban and State Education', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, p2, available from: <http://aan-afghanistan.com/uploads/2011TalebanEducation.pdf>

²⁴Confidential interviews with education officials and community members from various provinces, July to December 2015.

²⁵Echavez et ors, *supra* n4, xiv.

²⁶Fänge 2013, *supra* n10.

²⁷Fänge 2013, *supra* n10.

²⁸Fänge 2013, *supra* n10.

²⁹UNAMA, '2012 Mid-Year Report: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', p5, available from: <https://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>

³⁰*Ibid*.

³¹MoE statement, referred to in Fänge 2013, *supra* n10.

³²Reuters 9 May 2012, 'Afghan girls' schools shut down, Taliban blamed', available from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-schools-girls-idUSBRE8480ZT20120509>

³³UNAMA and UNICEF. Education and Healthcare at Risk in Afghanistan April 2016. http://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/education_and_healthcare_at_risk.pdf

³⁴See for example *Eid-al-Fitr* addresses attributed to Mullah Omar since 2011, available from: <https://geopolicraticus.wordpress.com/2013/08/06/mullah-mohammad-omars-eid-al-fitr-address-for-2013/>. Similar statements and sentiments have been expressed by members of the Taliban's Political Commission in private meetings and conferences held since 2013.

³⁵Statement attributed to Mullah Omar 2013, Eid-al-Fitr Address, English version available from: <https://geopolicraticus.wordpress.com/2013/08/06/mullah-mohammad-omars-eid-al-fitr-address-for-2013/>

³⁶UNAMA, '2015 Mid-Year Report: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', p68, available from: <https://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>

³⁷Taliban public statement 13 January 2016, 'Statement by Islamic Emirate's Commission for Training, Learning and Higher Education', available from: <http://shahamat-english.com/>

³⁸Private Confidential communication, January 2016.

³⁹Confidential communication, December 2015; see also UNAMA, '2015 Midyear Report: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', available from: <https://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>

⁴⁰Confidential communications, August 2015 to January 2016.

⁴¹Confidential document, viewed November 2015.

⁴²In southern areas, most local populations have had very little historical experience with general education, and almost none with the education of girls. See generally Karlsson & Mansory, *supra* n9.

⁴³Discussion with community elder from northern Helmand, November 2015.

⁴⁴Discussion with education provider from northern Kandahar, August 2015.

⁴⁵Discussions with community member from Nawa, Ghazni, November 2015.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Confidential communication, March 2016.

⁴⁹Roggio B 2013, 'Haqqani Network said to name successor to Mullah Sangeen', *Long War Journal*, available from: http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/10/haqqani_network_repo.php

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹Interviews held between July and December 2015 with community members involved in education from several provinces, including Helmand, Kandahar, Ghazni, Paktya, Khost, Paktika and Kunduz.

⁵²Email exchange with renowned Afghan historian and political expert, April 2016.

⁵³Confidential discussion with secondary teacher from Zurmat, Paktya, August 2015.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵Confidential discussion with community elder from Khost, August 2015.

⁵⁶Confidential discussion with senior representative of an NGO delivering CBE, August 2015.

⁵⁷MoE 2007, cited in UNESCO 2015, 'EFA Global Monitoring Report, Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges', p174, available from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002322/232205e.pdf>

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹Discussion with teacher trainer from Kunar province, October 2015.

⁶⁰Confidential discussion with a senior political analyst, August 2015; confidential discussions with community members from Ghazni and Paktika, November 2015.

⁶¹Discussion with community member from Bermel, Paktika, November 2015.

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³Confidential report by senior community member from Nangarhar province, viewed August 2015. Some analysts have suggested that in areas where girls have greater access to high school, 'flexible' Taliban might have (pro-education) *Hezb-e-Islami* backgrounds.

⁶⁴Confidential discussion with community member from Faryab province, October 2015.

⁶⁵Email exchange with Anders Fänge, SCA Director, January 2016.

⁶⁶Confidential discussions with education providers and community members from several provinces, held between July and December 2015.

⁶⁷Discussion with senior teacher trainer from Kunar, October 2015.

⁶⁸Confidential report by senior community member from Farah province, viewed November 2015.

⁶⁹On the global crisis involving education in emergencies, see Overseas Development Institute 2015, 'Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises: Toward a Strengthened Response', available from: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/Oslo_Education_Emergencies_Protracted_Crises.pdf

⁷⁰The MoE and many NGOs continue to provide education in conflict-affected areas. SCA, for example, has developed internal guidelines for its staff to continue services in differing levels of insecurity.

⁷¹Confidential discussions with local educator from Dasht-e-Archi district of Kunduz province, August and November 2015. See also UNAMA 2015, 'Special Report on Kunduz Province', available from: https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/special_report_on_kunduz_province_12_december_2015_0.pdf

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- ⁷²Ibid.
- ⁷³Confidential report by senior community member from Nangarhar, viewed November 2015.
- ⁷⁴Ibid.
- ⁷⁵Ibid.
- ⁷⁶US AID factsheet, *supra* n3.
- ⁷⁷Burde D and Linden L 2012, 'The Effect of Village-Based Schools: Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial in Afghanistan', National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper, No. 18039, p4, available from: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w18039>
- ⁷⁸According to interviews with senior managers from SCA, CARE, Save the Children, UNICEF, as well as community members from various provinces in which CBE is a key method of education provision.
- ⁷⁹MoE, NESP III, *supra* n1.
- ⁸⁰According to interviews with senior managers from SCA, CARE, Save the Children, UNICEF, as well as community members from various provinces in which CBE is the primary method of education provision.
- ⁸¹Confidential interviews with senior members of international organizations and NGOs, 2015.
- ⁸²Confidential discussion with tribal elder from southeastern Afghanistan, November 2015.
- ⁸³On the potential for private education to play a greater role in the education mix in Afghanistan, see Barakat S, Hardman F, Rohwerder B, and Rzeszut K 2012, 'Low-Cost Private Schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan: What evidence to support sustainable scale-up?' London: EPPI-Center, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, available from: http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/systematicreviews/Low_cost_schools_2012Barakat_protocol.pdf
- ⁸⁴ Discussion with Dr. Mohammad Khan Kharoti, Kabul, October 2015.
- ⁸⁵Ibid.
- ⁸⁶Ibid.
- ⁸⁷See for example, Office of the United States Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, letter dated 11 June 2015 to the Honorable Alfonso E. Lenhardt, Acting Administrator, US AID, available from: <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/special%20projects/SIGAR-15-62-SP.pdf>
- ⁸⁸Tolo News 5 January 2016, 'Ghani Receives New Findings On "Ghost Schools"', available from: <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/23149-ghani-receives-new-findings-on-ghost-schools>
- ⁸⁹MoE NESP III, *supra* n1.
- ⁹⁰Central Statistics Organization (CSO) and UNICEF 2010-2011, 'Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2010-2011, Final Report.' Kabul, Afghanistan: CSO and UNICEF, cited in NESP III, *supra* n1.
- ⁹¹UNESCO 2015, *supra* n55, p156.
- ⁹²Ibid, p157.
- ⁹³Ibid, figure 5.1 pp156-157.
- ⁹⁴MoE NESP III, *supra* n1.

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726 Broadway, Suite 543
New York, NY 10003
cic.nyu.edu

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