

On the Road to Resilience Capacity Development with the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan

Overview

States affected by conflict are far from achieving Education for All goals, and many lack human, institutional, and financial capacity. 'Capacity development' is frequently proposed as the solution to their problems.

This research brief, based on findings presented in the IIEP book On the Road to Resilience: Capacity Development with the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan (Sigsgaard, 2011), explores some of the challenges that Afghanistan faces in rebuilding an education sector after 30 years of conflict. Lessons learned are put forward for ministries of education and partners involved in capacity development.

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Planning despite dire challenges

Afghanistan has made remarkable achievements in education despite decades of instability. In 2001, only 1 million primary school age children, were enrolled in the country. By 2009, 6.5 million children attended primary school, including 2.4 million girls. The number of primary schools has almost doubled (from 6,039, in 2001, to 11,460, in 2009) as have the number of teachers (from 80,000 to 143,000 during the same period). This remarkable expansion of access to education indicates the strong popular will for education and is highlighted by the Ministry of Education as a national planning success.

Yet Afghanistan's education planners face considerable challenges. The state controls less than 50 per cent of the country, which is scarred both by the ongoing war and by attacks on schools, teachers, and students (especially girls). Capacity development in the country must factor in contextual factors such as the armed conflict, as well as public service management issues, if education is to be an instrument for peace and nation-building.

'Capacity' is here defined to include not only service delivery capability, but also capability to commit and engage in development activities, or to attract support. The challenge in a war-torn country such as Afghanistan is how to develop such capacities in cooperation with the ministry of education.



Partnerships in planning

This research brief is based on a series of case studies of capacity development partnerships between four development partners and Afghanistan's Ministry of Education.

The **Ministry of Education (MoE)** is well placed to assess capacity achievements and challenges from an 'insider' vantage point.

Achievements include the setting up of education management

planning processes and plan documents (NESP-I and -II).

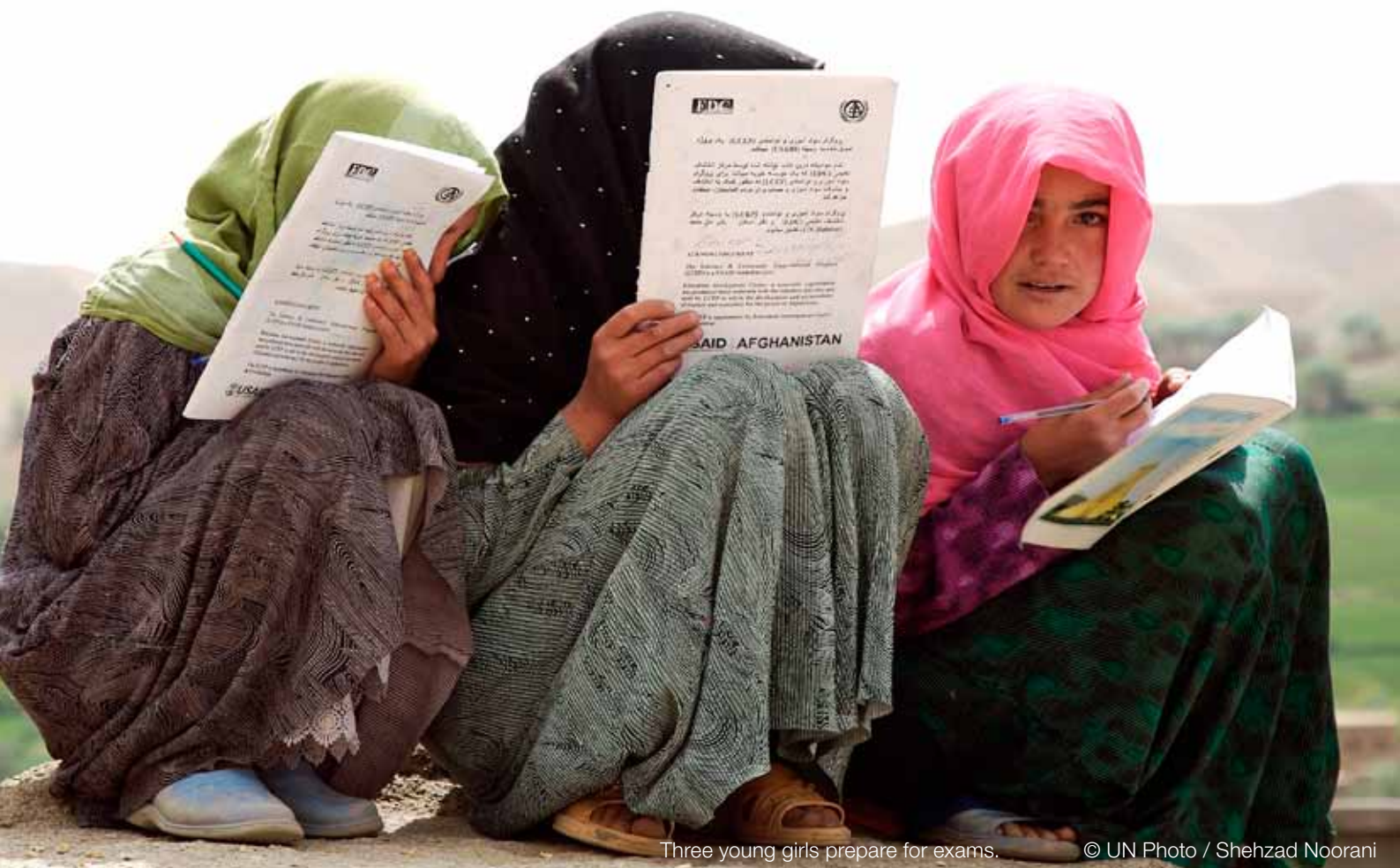
Current challenges include procurement reform, donor coordination, serious gender imbalances, and the security situation.

Future questions include how to make the civil servant job category attractive again, professionally as well as financially, and how to

with foreign aid agencies plays a central role.

A number of development partners have supported the MoE to plan for and implement education programmes under the most extreme circumstances. This research brief explores four of these partnerships.

UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) has partnered with the MoE's



Three young girls prepare for exams. © UN Photo / Shehzad Noorani

information systems (EMIS), public administration reform, a staffing incentive scheme called Pay and Grade (P&G), coordination mechanisms such as the Human Resource Development Board (HRDB), and

decentralize management beyond Kabul.

A key message is that **public sector regulations and structures need to change if the MoE is to develop**, which is why advocacy

Department of Planning and Evaluation since 2002. Through collaboration on two national education sector plans – NESP-I (2006-2010) and NESP-II (2010-2014) – IIEP supported the Ministry of Education to develop

their capacity sufficiently to write the second plan on their own and in their own language.

UNESCO Kabul's inclusive education (IE) programme has mainstreamed IE into national planning using a mix of broad grassroots support and high-level advocacy.

UNESCO Kabul's Literacy programme highlights the

persistent dilemmas affecting education in conflict situations.

PACE-A is a coalition of international NGOs (CARE, the IRC, Aga Khan Foundation, and Catholic Relief Services). They have mainstreamed community based education (CBE) into national policy and developed ministerial capacity for CBE in the process.

A major education donor, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs reflects the international commitments to Education for All in its Afghanistan policy. It supports a diverse range of agencies and aid modalities. This is alongside its willingness to take 'responsible risks' and fund education over the long-term, which allows sustainable capacity development to be undertaken.

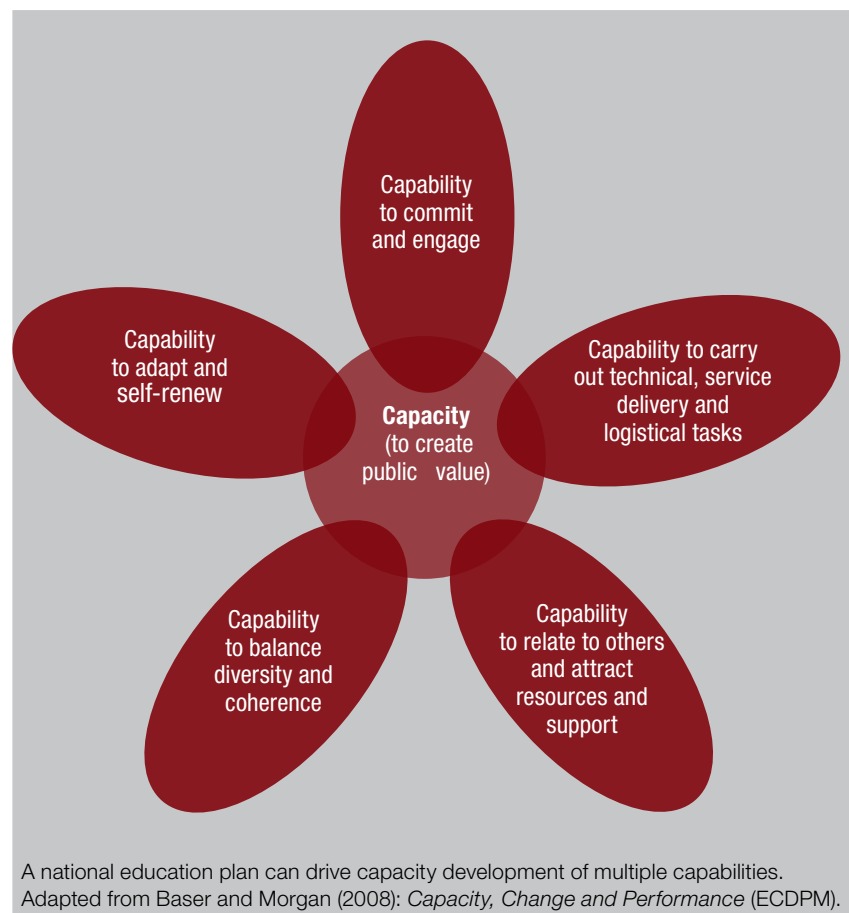
The advantages of a national plan

This research shows that developing a national education sector plan (and other policy documents) can be a strong driver of capacity development.

A national education sector plan can help develop the capability to commit and engage. In Afghanistan, this means the Ministry's ability to lead the development of the education sector. In an organizational landscape where the Minister of Education changed six times between 2002 and 2010, and where the Ministry was faced with a very wide range of technical partners, each with their own agendas, the strategic plan documents supported the Ministry in taking the lead.

At the same time, the national plan development process can drive systems development that increases technical and service delivery capabilities. For example, a national education management information system (EMIS) or the Pay & Grade civil servant salary scheme support the system to function more effectively.

A national plan also provides a reference point for policy dialogue, strengthening the capability to relate to others and to attract resources and support. Planning is greatly facilitated when this policy dialogue is institutionalized, as in the Human Resource



Development Board and in the Community Based Education and Inclusive Education coordination mechanisms.

The plan preparation or revision process is also a chance to develop the capability to adapt and self-renew, which is key to seizing the many opportunities for positive change that present themselves in Afghanistan. Such

opportunities could, for instance, include policies for community based or inclusive education, but also agreements with insurgents to ensure the protection of schools and children, which can help prevent systematic attacks on education.

The long-term availability of IIEP and other partners for policy advice proved helpful in

developing the MoE's capability to balance diversity and coherence. This is the ability to manage the tension and paradoxes that most

Afghans, including education planners, must live with. One education official asked, 'How is one to prioritize when everything

is a priority?' The development of the national education plan helped the government to prioritize more strategically.



Ministry officials and donor representatives at Educational Development Forum in Kabul, 2008. © IIEP / Dorian Gay

Lessons learned

Service delivery and enactment of MoE policy hinges on systems: They enable planning based on facts, and can reduce corruption as well as over-reliance on individuals.

The research resulted in a range of 'lessons learned' for Afghanistan's MoE as well as its partners. Both face strategic decisions that will have important implications for the future of Afghanistan's education sector.

Service delivery and enactment of MoE policy hinges on systems: They enable planning based on facts, and can reduce corruption as well as over-reliance on individuals.

Building partnerships based on trust takes time yet is required for high-level political backing.

Decade-long engagements in Afghanistan have allowed agencies to gain credibility and develop trusting partnerships with the MoE. The agencies needed this base of trust and credibility in order to capitalize on windows of opportunity. Political backing was also ensured through advocacy and collaborative work.

People come and go, but systems remain

Service delivery and enactment of MoE policy hinges on systems. Systems enable planning based on facts, and can reduce corruption as well as over-reliance on individuals. Systems can include education management information systems (EMIS), school mapping, teacher registration systems, and the pay & grade scheme; but can also be grassroots movements. The next step in this process of systematization is to establish national capacity development programmes.

Donor flexibility and long-term commitment helps

The donors who supported the capacity development activities outlined in the research – in this case, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, and the USA – adhered to the Paris principles on aid effectiveness by engaging over several years, showing flexibility and taking ‘responsible risks’. Examples of good donor support included the acceptance of sudden changes in project design and of bottom-up participatory programme design.

Agency collaboration with the Ministry on policy documents led to capacity development and enabled donor coordination; learning throughout the process was more important than perfect products.



Two women education planners display certificates.

© IIEP / Khalil Mahshi

A National Education Sector Plan can create hope and confidence – invaluable resources when everything is a priority and everything a challenge.

Donor coordination is required to harmonize salaries

Coordination mechanisms such as the Human Resource Development Board helped the MoE take leadership of the education sector, and provided a space for learning and for building trust. Such mechanisms could become instrumental to solving a major human resource challenge – the salary disparity between the parallel systems of MoE-funded civil servants, and donor-funded national technical assistants (TAs). Agencies need to collaborate with the MoE to map and harmonize TA salaries. This will improve aid effectiveness for donors and the MoE alike.

Nation-building should be based on decent, non-ideological education

Throughout the 20th century, Afghanistan's education system tended to impose a militant national ideology on students. There is movement towards more equitable, non-ideological education provision, which could strengthen the social contract between state and citizen. A key question concerns centralization versus decentralization: Central-level curriculum oversight is essential to emphasizing a united national history. Equity across provinces requires central-level control too. Protection of education from attack, on the other hand, is best negotiated at



Pupils at Butkhak High School in Kabul cheer. © UN Photo / Fardin Waezi

community level, with the MoE supporting.

Put processes before products

Agency collaboration with the MoE on policy documents such as the NESP, the Afghan-adapted INEE Minimum Standards for CBE, and national policies for IE and literacy led to capacity development and enabled donor coordination. In the process, the MoE gained self-confidence, a prerequisite of the ability to commit and engage. Learning throughout the process was more important than perfect products.

A plan is a statement of will and self-confidence

Policy documents in Afghanistan are sometimes criticized for being unrealistic. However, in Afghanistan's political process, ambitious national plans signal a will for drastic change. They are statements of national will and self-confidence regardless of dire circumstances. In addition to the other benefits derived from the planning process, a national strategic plan may contribute to creating hope and self-confidence – invaluable resources in a context where everything is a priority and everything a challenge.

Gender is also a human resource issue

Only 26 per cent of all MoE employees are female. Many women refrain from competing with men for high managerial positions because of the pervasive gender discrimination. Beyond equity concerns, this is also a serious human resource

issue. The MoE and its partners need to review all activities for opportunities to increase women's active participation and representation in national education management.

Choose pragmatic and basic solutions

The partnerships often began with the basic infrastructure, like supplying office spaces, or teaching English and computer literacy. (Conversely, MoE planning in Dari led to increased Afghan ownership.) Pragmatic compromises were key: underqualified teachers were upgraded but only through short in-service teacher training programmes, and not all CBE teachers got on the MoE payroll immediately. 'Good enough' governance is better than none.

Sustained aid is a must for achieving national development objectives

Developing MoE capacity is an investment in national capacity as a whole, which is a precondition for nation building and socio-economic growth. An education programme of decent quality and relevance obviously needs committed and well-trained staff working in proper systems in order to deliver results across the country. However, adequate financial resources are also needed to run the education system and absorb the remaining 42 per cent of out-of-school children. The level of ambition outlined in the NESP-II indicates that the Government of Afghanistan as well as the international community still have a long way to go in developing the MoE's financial and human resources.

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A selection of recent publications

This research brief is part of IIEP's Education in Emergencies series, which features outputs from research partnerships between IIEP and the Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies of the University of Amsterdam, the International Rescue Committee and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and between IIEP and CfBT Education Trust. Under these partnerships the following policy studies have been published, among others:

On the road to resilience: capacity development with the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan

Edited by Morten Sigsgaard • 2011 • Price: €12

The findings of this book are summarized in the present research brief.

Opportunities for change: education innovation and reform during and after conflict

Edited by Susan Nicolai • 2009 • Price: €12

This book describes efforts of education authorities and the agencies assisting them as they take advantage of these opportunities during and after conflict in a range of settings.

Donors' engagement: supporting education in fragile and conflict-affected states

by Laura Brannelly, Susy Ndaruhutse and Carole Rigaud • 2009 • Price: €12

This book gives an overview of the policies and financial commitments of the donors of the OECD-DAC in relation to education in fragile and conflict-affected states.

Other relevant IIEP publications on the subject of capacity development and Afghanistan include:

Capacity development in education planning and management in fragile states

by Lynne Bethke • 2009 • e-publication

This study investigates capacity development for education in conflict situations, including Afghanistan.

Education and Fragility in Afghanistan: A situational analysis

by Morten Sigsgaard • 2009 • e-publication in collaboration with INEE

This study looks at how aspects of education contribute to, or mitigate, conflict and fragility in Afghanistan.

Contact information

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