RAPID EDUCATION AND RISK ANALYSIS
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CARE</td>
<td>Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBE</td>
<td>Community Based Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRED</td>
<td>Center for Research on Epidemiology of Disaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM-DAT</td>
<td>Emergency Events Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DED</td>
<td>District Education Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECCN</td>
<td>Education in Conflict and Crisis Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMIS</td>
<td>Education Management Information System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNI</td>
<td>Gross National Income</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIG</td>
<td>Hizb-e-Islami-Gulbuddin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMU</td>
<td>Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORM</td>
<td>Index for Risk Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAF</td>
<td>International Security Assistance Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISI</td>
<td>Inter-Services Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIL</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant</td>
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<td>ISIS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and Syria</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISKP</td>
<td>Islamic State - Khurasan Province</td>
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<tr>
<td>KII</td>
<td>Key Informant Interview</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>PED</td>
<td>Provincial Education Director</td>
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<td>PTR</td>
<td>Pupil-Teacher Ratio</td>
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<td>RERA</td>
<td>Rapid Education and Risk Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIGAR</td>
<td>Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTP</td>
<td>Tahrik-e-Taliban Pakistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNAMA</td>
<td>United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Rapid Education and Risk Analysis (RERA) report aims to provide *Afghan Children Read* with a rapid situation analysis of the education sector in Afghanistan. The primary data collection for this study is based on a purposive sample of school communities in the five districts of Shakar Dara, Herat City, Guzara, Jalalabad, and Kama. This report can be used to inform policy making and programming for *Afghan Children Read*. The process of data collection, analysis, and reporting took place between October and December 2016.

This report focuses on the risks posed by general insecurity, the return of refugees from other countries and natural disasters. A secondary focus of this report is the perception of education in the target districts, perceived quality of early grade reading, role of parents, coping strategies of communities, and perceptions regarding public, Community Based Education, and private schooling options. This report is based on a qualitative situation analysis and combines secondary data with primary data collected from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KII) with provincial education directors, district education directors, school principals, teachers, and parents in the five target districts.

Education in Context

For the past four decades, Afghanistan has been plagued by war and insecurity, and the central government has not been able to consolidate its control over the country. Despite the sizeable amounts of money spent on fighting the insurgency and on reconstruction in the country, the security situation is still very volatile, and development of the country has stagnated. Amidst the pessimism that is caused by insecurity, education is one of the only sectors that has seen steady progress over the past decade and a half. Nevertheless, there are still many challenges that face the education sector. These include lack of school infrastructure, professional teachers, and standard teaching materials. There are still many students, especially girls who do not have access to basic education. The Pupil -Teacher Ratio in the country is much higher than the national target of 1:35. Most recently, these challenges have been exacerbated by the arrival of repatriated refugees and internally displaced persons, and natural disasters.

Key Findings

The following are the most significant findings from the purposive sample of targeted districts.

Impact of Insecurity, Natural Disasters, and Repatriation

Overall, respondents reported that general insecurity, car accidents, natural disasters, and displacement have an adverse impact on education in the target districts. According to both primary and secondary data, security issues communities face include threats from opposition groups, arson, theft, suicide attacks, bombings, and celebratory gunfire. Given that there is continued ground fighting in the country, schools continue to be used for military purposes. Findings from this study show that schools, students, and educational personnel continue to be threatened and attacked. These incidents and threats significantly impact students’ and teachers’ decisions on whether or not to show up at school. Parents often must choose between the safety and security of their children and their education.

Attitudes about Education

This study found a discrepancy between respondents’ perception of how much society values education and how much respondents themselves value education. When asked, all respondents, including parents,
mentioned that they highly valued education. However, most respondents also reported that the society in general does not value education very highly. Financial reasons, cultural norms, and security threats were cited as primary reasons some parents do not allow their children to attend school. Financial constraints force some families to put their children to work. Boys are mostly expected to work outside the house while girls are tasked with housework. According to many respondents, when pressed financially, parents are more likely to take their daughters out of schools than their sons. Furthermore, even when the cost of education is not an obstacle, respondents reported that some families see girls’ schooling as contradictory to social and cultural norms and do not allow their daughters to attend school.

Quality of Early Grade Education
Overall, respondents felt that the quality of early grade education in their communities is lacking. Respondents reported that the underlying reasons for the poor quality of early grade education include lack of standard classrooms, lack of textbooks, lack of professional teachers, lack of libraries in schools, too many subjects and not enough time on task for students, overcrowded classrooms and the lack of educational policies pertaining to teacher recruitment and student enrollment. However, despite the low quality of early grade education, respondents reported that the reading ability of students is satisfactory.

Role of Parents
Overall, respondents agreed that parents play a critical role in their children’s education. Nevertheless, most of the respondents said that due to poverty and illiteracy, most families are not able to help their children with their homework. Parents mostly support their children’s school work through buying books and stationery and sending their children to supplemental courses. When parents were asked, most of them claimed that they regularly visit their children’s school and read stories to their children. One factor that can increase parental involvement in their children’s education is constructive and sustainable communication between schools and parents.

Public versus Private versus CBE Schooling
Despite some negative perceptions of private schools, especially due to their high costs, respondents generally perceived the quality of education in private schools to be better than both public and CBE schools. Many respondents cited accessibility, longer class durations, and more qualified teachers as the key factors that make private schools better. Respondents did not have consensus over whether CBE schools are good alternatives to public schools. Where attending public and private schools are not feasible or safe, CBE schools were thought as good substitutes.

Barriers for Teachers
Most respondents agreed that security is a concern for teachers, but it is not the major impediment to teacher retention. Generally, respondents were more worried about the safety of female teachers than male teachers. Most participants believed that the major cause of teacher dropout is their low salaries.

Strategies to Overcome Risks
Close collaboration and communication between schools, teachers and the community seems to be the most effective strategy that communities employ to keep their schools open. Primary data shows that coordination between school and the local police serves as a mechanism of early warning. However, a collaboration of schools with local mosques and community leaders, rather than the police, seems to be the most effective strategy for deterring potential threats. But perhaps the most important element in keeping schools open is the sheer determination of school officials, teachers, and students themselves.
PURPOSE & METHODOLOGY

USAID’s Education in Conflict and Crisis Network (ECCN) developed the Rapid Education and Risk Analysis (RERA) tool in 2015. The purpose of RERA is to help USAID and implementing partners understand the effects of conflict and disasters on education and to understand community resiliency strategies in crisis and conflict environments. Because the nature of conflict is unique in each environment, the RERA is designed to provide a general framework to be adapted to each context. By design, this analysis is a ‘rapid’ assessment that provides an overall picture of significant risks within Afghanistan and is not intended to be an in-depth evaluation of those risks.

The RERA in Afghanistan aims to provide USAID/Afghanistan and the Afghanistan Ministry of Education with a snapshot of:

- Insecurity in the country, attitudes about education, key areas of stress on the educational infrastructure, environmental hazards, and effects of these risk factors on the educational system.
- Resiliency strategies within the target communities in Nangarhar, Herat, and Kabul that can help Afghan Children Read capitalize on community strengths as it introduces new programming.

Approach to this Study and Key Research Questions

Following the precedence set by the RERA El Salvador, this study focused on community and youth resiliency to guide the process of drafting a methodology, collecting and analyzing data, and devising recommendations for Afghan Children Read. Similarly, this report defined resiliency as the ability of schools and communities to be versatile in the face of adversities, the capacity of schools to mobilize community actors, and communication between families and schools in order to increase cooperation.

This study uses a resiliency approach to present insights into the following seven broad questions:

1. To what extent (and how) are the risks of insecurity, natural disasters, and repatriation of refugees perceived to affect early grade students access to quality education in the target districts?
2. To what extent (and how) are attitudes about education, and girls’ education particularly, perceived to affect educational outcomes?
3. What is the perceived quality of early grade education in local communities, especially in relations to early grade reading, and how has the stress on the educational infrastructure affected this perception?
4. What is the perceived role of parents in supporting their children’s primary education (grades 1-3)? In what ways are parents currently supporting their children and in what ways do they feel they can enhance their support?
5. What strategies do the population in the target districts use to overcome risks and increase access to quality early grade education and what roles do the parents, communities, school management shuras, or other groups, play in this strategy?
6. What are perceptions of communities and parents in regards to access and quality of public versus CBE versus private schooling options for their children?
7. What are the perceived barriers to access, safety, and retention of teachers in formal, CBE, and private schooling options?
Methodology

The methodology of this study was tailored to the unique context of Afghanistan and concentrates on the key risk factors associated with insecurity and armed conflict, repatriation, and natural disasters. This report examines the intersections of these risk factors with education and discusses their effects on students, parents, communities and the educational infrastructure.

The RERA Afghanistan uses a combination of a desk review, analysis of secondary data at the national level, and primary data from focus group discussions and key informant interviews with stakeholders in a purposive sample of school communities in the target provinces of Afghan Children Read project. Focus group discussions were the primary form of data collection and each focus group discussion was organized so that the participants were grouped similarly. For example, there were separate focus group discussions for teachers and principals to minimize the possibility of intimidation due to the various positions within the school community. Additionally, there were focus group discussions for mothers and fathers so that parents’ views could be disaggregated by gender and to allow both mothers and fathers to discuss their ideas more freely. Key informant interviews were conducted with stakeholders when there were not enough people within the group or in the geographic location to hold focus group discussions.

Scope

Based on discussions with ECCN and the Afghan Children Read project staff, it was decided that the desk review and the secondary data analysis will focus on the national level. Five out of the 22 target districts of the Afghan Children Read project in Herat, Kabul, and Nangarhar provinces were selected for primary data collection. In Herat and Nangarhar, the provincial center and one rural district were purposefully chosen to capture the views of urban and rural populations. In Kabul, one district, out of the two project districts, was selected for primary data collection. Teachers, school administrators, community members, district education directors, and provincial education directors in the five districts participated in this study.

Secondary Data Collection

A review of existing literature on issues of access to quality schooling for boys and girls in Afghanistan was conducted for this report. The review focused on the impact of insecurity and conflict, natural disasters, and internally displaced people on the education sector. Raw data from MoE’s Education Management Information System (EMIS) and other sources was analyzed to provide greater insight into key issues such as enrollment rates, natural disaster trends, and the human cost of armed conflict. Additionally, available data was disaggregated by province, educational level, and gender to provide greater focus on the geographic scope and target population for this study. Secondary data used in this report comes from Afghanistan’s Ministry of Education (MoE), United Nations, the World Bank Group, the World Health Organization, and various other reputable sources. Whenever there were multiple sources for the same information, the data was cross-checked and triangulated to present the most reliable information.

Primary Data Collection

RERA Afghanistan used a mix of focus group discussions and key informant interviews with primary school communities and Ministry of Education officials in the five target districts to gather primary data. In total, 25 focus group discussions were held with 180 participants (80 female, 100 male) and seven key informant interviews (two female, five male) were conducted. More specifically, two focus group
discussions were held with 12 district education directors, five focus group discussions were held with principals from 39 schools, six focus group discussions were conducted with 46 teachers, and twelve focus group discussions were conducted with 83 parents. Three of the parent focus group discussions (one in Jalalabad and two in Guzara) were held with 20 CBE parents (nine female, 11 male). Key informant interviews were conducted with provincial education directors in Nangarhar and Kabul, the district education director of Shakar Dara, two CBE teachers in Jalalabad and two CBE teachers in Guzara.

The district education directors were invited to the center of each province to be part of the focus group discussions. The district education directors facilitated the selection of five to seven schools in each target district. One formal school was chosen in consultation with the district education directors in each district to conduct discussions with teachers and parents. The criteria for selecting each school was based on the district education director’s assessment of how well the school represented the general population of schools in his district. Three focus group discussions (one with teachers and two with parents) were held in the selected schools.

### Limitations

RERA is designed as a rapid qualitative situation analysis that should inform policy and programming. Both the rapid and the qualitative nature of RERA introduces inherent limitations to the study design. Additionally, because Afghanistan is amidst armed conflict, many trade-offs must be made to ensure safety and security of data collectors as well as of the participants. The following is a list of the major challenges and constraints that were faced in conducting the Afghanistan RERA:

- The study aims to provide an overall understanding of significant risks and resiliency factors in the selected locations. This study is based on a purposive sample of target communities and is not representative of the entire population. Although the findings of this report point to possible

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**Table 1: Sampling Distribution for FGDs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>School Principals</th>
<th>School Teachers</th>
<th>Formal and CBE Parents</th>
<th>District Education Directors</th>
<th>Totals by Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#  f  m</td>
<td>#  f  m</td>
<td>#  f  m</td>
<td>#  f  m</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalalabad</td>
<td>1  3  8</td>
<td>2  9  12</td>
<td>3  10 9</td>
<td>1  0  5</td>
<td>7  22  34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kama</td>
<td>1  0  7</td>
<td>1  0  7</td>
<td>2  7  7</td>
<td>-   -</td>
<td>4  7  21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herat City</td>
<td>1  3  4</td>
<td>1  4  1</td>
<td>1  3  4</td>
<td>1  0  7</td>
<td>4  10  16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guzara</td>
<td>1  2  5</td>
<td>1  7  0</td>
<td>4  16 13</td>
<td>-   -</td>
<td>6  25  18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakar Dara</td>
<td>1  3  4</td>
<td>1  5  1</td>
<td>2  8  6</td>
<td>-   -</td>
<td>4  16  11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>FGDs</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>80</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total Participants = 180
risks associated with education in Afghanistan, they are not meant to be generalizable to the whole country.

- Participation in the focus group discussions and interviews were voluntary. The voluntary nature of the study meant that some participants refused to take part in the discussions. For instance, in Jalalabad, mothers whose children attended CBE schools refused to be a part of focus group discussions. This resulted in a lower number of CBE parents in the study, and therefore the results do not capture the CBE perspectives comprehensively.

- This study did not collect primary data from students. The research team felt that asking young children questions regarding their safety might cause distress and trauma and would, therefore, fall outside of the “Do No Harm” principle.

- This study is based on the perception of participants. The study did not seek to verify the information provided by the respondents.

- Lack of data, mainly secondary data on target districts, presented an additional challenge in the process of writing this report. Most of the existing studies on education, security, and natural disasters do not have provincial and district-level data. Additionally, the findings of most studies are not generalizable because obtaining a representative sample is very difficult given the lack of population data, means of contact with individuals, and security constraints.

- This study was not able to conduct some of the planned focus group discussions or interviews. The following list presents the FGD and KII that could not be held and their associated reasons.
  - Focus group discussion with CBE mothers in Jalalabad was not conducted: CBE mothers in Jalalabad refused to be interviewed for this report because they did not feel comfortable participating in the focus group discussion, despite the presence of a female facilitator.
  - Focus group discussions with CBE parents and interviews with CBE teachers in Kama did not take place: The DED in Kama informed the team that there were no CBEs in the district.
  - Interview with the provincial education director in Herat did not take place: The provincial education director from Herat referred the survey team to his deputy because he was going on a trip. His deputy, however, refused to take part in the study.

- The data collection for this study focused only on the security and safety perceptions of parents, teachers, principals, and MoE staff. The study did not survey police, government officials (in sectors other than education), and local and international NGOs. Views from these stakeholders would further enrich the study.

- The scope of this study is limited to analyzing the impact of attitudes towards education, insecurity, displacement and natural disasters on student learning. The report, therefore, does not focus on factors such as poverty and nomadic and rural lifestyle and their implications for the education sector.

**Country Context**

This section offers an overview of the significant risks that the population in Afghanistan face in the target provinces of the *Afghan Children Read* project.
Country Snapshot

Afghanistan has been in conflict for nearly four decades. War and instability are the norms for the current generation, which has never experienced security, prosperity, or peace in their homeland. The current population’s experience is shaped by trauma, foreign interventions, and financial, military, and technical dependency on the international community. Among countries that are in conflict, Afghanistan has the largest cumulative fatality rate, estimated between 1.25 to 2 million individuals between the start of the conflict in 1978 and 2001.1

Since 2001, the international community has pumped an estimated $130bn2 of aid into the country. The United States alone has spent $783bn3 in direct military operations to stabilize Afghanistan. Even though the cost of war and reconstruction exceeds the Marshall Plan after WWII, the country continues to be highly insecure. The grim statistics for health, education and the national economy illustrates the effects

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of this insecurity. Afghanistan has the world’s highest infant mortality rate, the fourth lowest life expectancy rate at birth, and the sixth lowest adult literacy rate. Afghanistan’s GNI per capita is in the bottom tenth percentile internationally. It is estimated that 97 percent of the nation’s official GNI is related to foreign military and aid expenditure, and the country continues to be the world’s largest producer of opium.

There is also a growing negative trend in the national mood of the population. The Asia Foundation’s 2016 Survey of the Afghan People reports that 71 percent of the population think the country is moving in the wrong direction; this is the lowest level of optimism recorded since 2004. Security, unemployment, and corruption are cited as the top three reasons for the dissatisfaction with the current state of the nation. The same survey reports that nearly 70 percent of the population fear for their personal safety and 19 percent of the population report that they or a family member have been a direct victim of violence in the past year.4

Despite these challenges, Afghanistan has made progress in some key developmental indicators over the last 15 years. Based on the UN’s Human Development Index (HDI), which measures the long-term progress of a country in three basic dimensions: life expectancy, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living, Afghanistan’s HDI value has increased by 39.2 percent from 0.334 to 0.465 between 2000 and 2014. More specifically, during this same period, life expectancy at birth rose by 5.3 years from 55.1 to 60.4 years, expected years of schooling by 3.7 years from 5.6 to 9.3 years, and the gross national income (GNI) per capita (2011 PPP$) by 150 percent from $745 to $1,885 in 2014.5

Primary and Secondary Education

Since the fall of Taliban, Afghanistan’s education sector has significantly improved. The country has seen a ten-fold increase in school enrollment, rising to over 10.2 million students in 2015. During this same period, the number of teachers has grown from nearly 26,500 to approximately 188,000. The number of schools has proliferated from just over 3,000 to nearly 14,000. Afghan children have gained more access to schooling in the past 15 years than in the previous one hundred and forty years of modern schooling combined.

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Figure 2: Mean Years of Schooling

Figure 2, above shows the improvement in expected years of schooling since 1980, disaggregated by gender where possible.\(^7\) Between 2000 and 2013, mean years of schooling increased by one year and expected years of schooling has increased by 3.7 years.\(^8\) This means that in 2013 the average adult, age 25 and older, had attained one year of schooling more than the same group in 2000. The current set of students is expected to receive 3.7 years of additional education compared to their counterparts in 2000.

There are also significant improvements in reduction of the gender parity gap. In 2002, enrollment in primary education was 2,667,629 students, of which only 805,074 (30.2%) were girls. In 2016, this number has increased to 6,217,756 students, of which 2,484,471 (40%) are girls.\(^9\) Similarly, in 2012, the net attendance in primary education was 64.4% for boys and 48.3% for girls, which shows a considerable increase from 43% and 29% in 2005, respectively.\(^10\) These statistics show a positive trend in access to education that is projected to continue for the foreseeable future. The gains made in providing access to millions of children is a remarkable achievement on the part of the Afghan Ministry of Education and the national and international partners that have provided critical support.

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Challenges Facing the Education Sector

Despite the substantial gains in access, there are many challenges that the education sector faces. Afghanistan’s HDI for mean years of schooling at 3.2 years is well below the international average and the expected years of schooling does not take the country out of the “low development” ranking.

Iliteracy is a huge challenge for Afghanistan’s development and a key indicator for the education sector. Afghanistan continues to rank 155 out of 160 countries in terms of literacy. Adult literacy rates in the country stand at 38.2 percent for the general population with 52 percent of males and only 24 percent of females are able to read and write. This rate is much lower than the median literacy rate for low-income countries, which is 70 percent for males and 57 percent for females. These figures are worse outside of Kabul with Nangarhar reported to have an adult literacy rate of 40 percent for males and only 8 percent for females. Combating illiteracy is critical to the development of the country. Not only is literacy a right, but literacy skills are also essential for informed decision making, personal empowerment, improvement of health habits, and for economic growth.

A strong educational system is needed for Afghanistan to improve literacy levels nationwide. Although there are many challenges the Ministry of Education faces, this section specifically focuses on overcrowded classrooms, high dropout rates, a deficit of teachers and textbooks, and a growing young population which will place greater strain on the educational system. These challenges are meant to illustrate the risks within the educational system.

According to the Afghanistan Education for All (EFA) report, there is a severe shortage of teachers in schools across the country. The national target is to have one teacher for every 35 students. However, currently, there is one teacher for every 54 students, with primary grades having disproportionately higher class sizes. It is estimated that the student-teacher ratio will rise even further given the rapid increase in the number of students every year.

International research has consistently shown that a low student-teacher ratio is critical for improving student academic achievement. For grades 1-3, a student-teacher ratio of no more than 18 students per class is needed to see the positive effects of class size. Reducing class size is a huge challenge for the Afghan educational system. To reduce class size, the Ministry of Education will need to hire more qualified teachers, add more classes, and provide schools with more supplies. These factors introduce significant cost increases for the sector. Additionally, finding qualified teachers, which is the most

Kabul is one of four provinces in the country with a pupil-teacher ratio under 1:35. The student-teacher ratio in Herat is reported above 1:41, and in Nangarhar it is reported above 1:51. The lack of sufficient teachers highlights a critical risk in terms of improving the quality of education.

12 Ibid.
important factor in benefitting from smaller class sizes, will continue to be a challenge even if cost is not a factor.\textsuperscript{15}

Although enrollment rates are high, the dropout rate is a significant concern for the education sector. In 2013, the dropout rates for grades 1, 2, and 3 were 4.9 percent, 7.2 percent, and 7.1 percent, respectively. This rate increased to 8.4 percent at grade 6. The survival rate to grade 6 for students who enter grade 1 is 60 percent for boys and 54 percent for girls. This means that over 40 percent of the students who enroll in first grade drop out before they reach 6th grade.\textsuperscript{16}

Shortage of textbooks is another critical challenge for the educational system. In 2015, the MoE distributed approximately eight million fewer textbooks than its target; 35,079,939 textbooks were distributed compared to a target of 42,929,492.\textsuperscript{17} The distribution of textbooks is further complicated when disaggregated by location. For example, in 2016 while the MoE had distributed sufficient Pashto reading textbooks in Jalalabad and Kama, a significant number of students in Shakar Dara, Guzara, and Herat City did not receive Dari textbooks. In Shakar Dara, half of the students did not receive textbooks, in Herat City, forty percent of students did not receive textbooks, and Guzara one-third of students did not receive textbooks.\textsuperscript{18} Given the steady increase in the number of students, the shortage of textbooks will likely exacerbate unless the MoE invests more resources to address this issue.

The demographic profile of Afghanistan creates further challenges for the already over-stretched education sector. Afghanistan has the youngest populace in South Asia. Currently, it is estimated that 63 percent of the Afghan population is below the age of 25. This trend is likely to continue since there is a fertility rate of 5.3 and an estimated annual population growth of three percent.\textsuperscript{19} Meeting the educational needs of this young growing population is a monumental challenge for the Afghan educational system. The system must keep expanding its reach in access, while at the same time trying to improve the quality of education.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3.png}
\caption{Demographic Profile of Afghanistan}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{15}“Class size and student achievement: Research review” Center for Public Education, December 14, 2017. http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/
\textsuperscript{16}“Education for All 2015 National Review--Afghanistan.”
Increased investment in building the human capital of the young generation and productively employing graduates in the labor force are critical to the long-term stability of Afghanistan. The World Bank and UNHCR estimate that the government will need to increase its investment in the educational sector by 12 percent annually to maintain the same level of educational services without any improvements. Additionally, the labor market will need to absorb 400 thousand new job seekers into the workforce every year. This is a huge challenge in Afghanistan where the current unemployment rate is at 22.6 percent and an estimated one and a half million male youth are unemployed. This high rate of unemployment of youth is a grave concern for the country’s stability. There is a tremendous body of international literature that directly correlates conflict with large youth populations that do not have socio-economic growth opportunities. In Afghanistan where security is deteriorating, it is critical that not only the educational demands of the population is met, but also that there are clear education policies that provide paths to employment.

 Armed Conflict

Overview of Conflict

Armed conflict and violence is the biggest challenge facing the country. According to Global Peace Index, Afghanistan ranks 160 out of 164 countries in regards to peacefulness. Only Syria, South Sudan, and Iraq are ranked more insecure than Afghanistan. In areas that are affected by insecurity, schools, students and educational staff are frequent targets of threats and attacks. Other direct impacts of conflict on education include destruction and closure of schools, dissuasion of parents from sending their children to schools, and military use of schools.

The current armed conflict in Afghanistan involves three major insurgent groups that are fighting the Afghan government. Taliban continues to be the largest armed insurgent group with an estimated 25,000 fighters. It is widely believed that elements within the Pakistani intelligence service, ISI, are the major supporters of the Taliban. The Taliban insurgency includes the Quetta Shura, the Haqqani network, as well as the involvement of the Pakistani Taliban known as the Tahrir-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP), which is ISIS’s branch in Afghanistan, is the second-largest insurgency group and is a growing threat. The U.S. Department of Defense has estimated that ISKP has between 1,000 to 3,000 fighters as of February 2016. The third major insurgent group is Al-Qaeda with about 100-300 fighters, who are believed to primarily facilitate other insurgent groups. Al-Qaeda affiliates in Afghanistan include Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) as well as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba,

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20 Ibid.
Lashaker-i-Janghvi, and Harakat-ul-Jihad Islami who are all Pakistani-based militant groups.\textsuperscript{24} Currently, 13,000 foreign troops are helping the Afghan government combat these insurgent groups.\textsuperscript{25}

The ongoing conflict has caused civilian fatalities, injuries, and internal migrations. There is no verifiable reporting system for civilian deaths, which make it difficult to obtain reliable data. United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) began to record civilian casualties based on secondary data in 2007. Since the beginning of the current conflict, conservative estimates put the total number of civilian deaths at more than 31,000 and civilian injuries at more than 40,000. The graph below from Crawford, who has perhaps combined the most reliable data, shows the estimated number of civilians that have been killed since 2001.\textsuperscript{26} Ground engagements, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and targeted killings by anti-government forces account for most civilian deaths. Suicide bombings, aerial operations by pro-government forces, and explosive remnants of wars, including landmines, are also significant contributors to civilian fatalities.\textsuperscript{27} Crawford et. al depicts the patterns of civilian deaths from 2009 to 2015 and their attributed causes in the following graph.

As can be seen, there is a spike in the number of deaths due to ground engagements, targeted killings, and explosive remnants of war since 2013. Casualties from IEDs, suicide attacks and aerial operations from pro-government forces are all significant but have stayed relatively at the same level.

Figure 4: Civilian Deaths by Means

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
Armed Conflict in Herat, Nangarhar, and Kabul

In Nangarhar, the district of Hisarak and in Herat, the districts of Shindand, Ghoryan, and Tulak are contested between the Afghan government and the Taliban.\(^{28}\) Insecurity in Ghoryan raises concern given that the district is an *Afghan Children Read* intervention district. In October 2015, the Taliban took control of this district for a few hours, but the government regained control soon after.\(^{29}\)

In early 2016 there were successful counter-insurgency operations in the district by the Afghan government.\(^{30}\) In late November 2016, President Ashraf Ghani inaugurated the Asian International Railway, which goes through Ghoryan district.\(^{31}\) The inauguration of this railway indicates an improvement in the security situation of the district.

Apart from intermittent attacks in Kabul, the Taliban have not been able to gain any foothold in the province. Nevertheless, in all three provinces, there is a risk of conflict spillover from adjacent districts that are under Taliban control or are contested areas. For instance, Azra in Logar and Tagab in Kapisa, which are controlled by Taliban, border Khaki Jabbar and Surobi districts in Kabul, respectively. Similarly, Tulak district in Ghor, which is a contested area between the Afghan government and the Taliban, borders the districts of Farsi, Obe, and Chishti Sharif in Herat. Any conflict spillover from these neighboring districts will have implications for the ability of students to attend schools.

Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and ISKP all pose threats in Nangarhar. In September 2016, the top US commander in Afghanistan reported that Al-Qaeda had a presence in the province of Nangarhar.\(^{32}\) Nangarhar has

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\(^{29}\) Ibid.


been effected by the emergence of ISKP in Afghanistan more than any other province. Although relatively small in numbers, the fighters loyal to ISKP have become known for their brutality. As of November 2016, the group had a presence in Nazyan, Achin, and Deh Bala districts. Since 2016, the Afghan government aided by the United States waged several successful military operations against the group. The number of ISKP fighters dwindled to 2,500 in early March from 3,750 to 4,000 in the second half of 2015. Other groups such the Taliban and local militia groups also waged war on ISKP, which has contributed to the weakening of the group. Currently, stationed mainly in Nangarhar, ISKP continues to be a threat not only to Nangarhar, but also to other provinces including Kabul. For instance, the group claimed responsibility for a suicide attack on a peaceful demonstration by mainly Shia protesters in Kabul on July 22, 2016, which killed more than 80 people and left more than 230 injured.

**Conflict and Education**

Continued access to education remains a significant challenge for Afghan children. School closures, threats, abductions, use of schools by the military as combat bases, direct attacks on schools, and death and injury from those attacks are key stressors that the current conflict inflicts on the educational systems. The armed conflict continues to take a heavy toll on children. It is estimated that 25% of all civilian deaths are children, recruitment of children for armed conflict by the insurgent groups has dramatically increased in recent years, and abduction of children has tripled. Children face threats of violence in school, as well as on their way to and from school. The following graph from UNAMA data shows the number of children killed and injured since 2009.

![Number of Child Deaths and Injuries](image)

**Figure 6: Number of Children Killed and Injured Since 2009**

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14 Ibid.


According to this data, there is a significant increase in the number of child casualties and injuries since 2013. Many of the injured children will inevitably not attend school or, if they do, be faced with challenges since most of the schools are not designed to accommodate children with disabilities.

The Ministry of Education does not systematically track conflict-related incidents. The media reports on individual cases of conflict are usually anecdotal. The most reliable source of data on the consequences of conflict on the educational system is that of the United Nations, which provides general trends of incidents related to schools at the country level. The graph below shows the trend of conflict-related incidents across the country using UNAMA reports that have been cross-checked with other available sources of data when available.  

As can be seen from the graph in Figure 8, there is a general decrease in the number of conflict-related incidents in recent years compared to a spike in 2009. The peak in 2009 is most likely due to the use of schools as polling stations for the presidential election. The number of conflict-related incidents since 2012 has remained fairly constant at an average of 160 recorded incidents yearly. More specifically, the number of direct attacks on schools seem to stay relatively consistent at 30, 34, and 29 attacks for 2013, 2014, and 2015 respectively. The number of students and school personnel who have been killed or injured has slightly decreased from 46 in 2013 to 37 in 2014 and 26 in 2015. However, threats, abductions and use of schools by the military have all increased.

**Direct attacks on schools**

Direct attacks on schools are one of the primary ways through which conflict impacts education. These attacks have included the burning of school buildings, use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at and around schools, rocket and grenade attacks, suicide bombings in front of schools, aerial bombardments, and looting of schools. The most prominent form of attack has been arson. Anti-government forces have been responsible for most of these attacks. However, the UN has documented that pro-government

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38 United Nations, “Education and Healthcare at Risk,” April 2016, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/education_and_healthcare_at_risk.pdf. There was a discrepancy between the number of recorded incidents for years 2013 and 2014 in the 2014 and 2015 UNAMA reports. We have used the data from the 2014 report for these two years because the data from the 2015 report seem dramatically under-reported. Conflict-related incident data was not found for 2011.

39 Ibid.
forces, especially the Afghan Local Police, are responsible for upwards of a third of the attacks, and one-fourth of the attacks are by unidentified perpetrators. There has been at least one incident in which the American forces bombed a school.40 Furthermore, a research report by CARE International in 2009 found that sometimes tribal disputes are deemed a reason for school attacks.41

**Attacks on students and educational personnel**

Killing, abduction, and intimidation of students and educational staff are perhaps the most serious threats to the educational system. Teachers and students have been killed in targeted attacks, by IEDs, have been poisoned and abducted. Teachers and students receive written and oral threats, warning them from attending schools. Written warnings usually take the form of “night letters” and text messages. The graph on the right combines the incidents related to killings, abductions, and threats for 2013, 2014, and 2015; and shows a sharp increase in the total number of overall incidents with threats and kidnappings responsible for the spike.

In 2015, the United Nations Security Council had verified 132 attacks on schools and school personnel. Of these 132 incidents, “82 were attributed to the Taliban, 13 to ISIL-affiliated groups, 11 to undetermined armed groups, 1 to Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and 23 to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and pro-Government militias; 2 incidents could not be attributed to any party.”42 Although reliable data does not exist for attacks on CBE schools, a CARE International report found that “schools seem to be less targeted where the community itself requested the school in the first place.”43 Given that CBE schools are established in the absence of formal schools where communities seek access to education, they might be targeted less than formal schools.

**Military use of schools**

In May 2015, the Afghan government became a signatory to the Safe Schools Declaration, which aims at preventing the use of educational facilities for military purposes. However, The Afghan Local Police

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42 United Nations Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General,” Children and Armed Conflict (General Assembly--Security Council, April 20, 2016), http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=s/2016/360&amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;amp;a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and the Afghan National Army have both used schools extensively for their military operations.\textsuperscript{44} For example, in 2015, there were 35 incidents of military use of schools by pro-government forces, which occupied schools for a cumulative 1,311 days. The use of schools for military purposes increases the risk of attacks on schools and disrupts education.

**School Closures**

School closures affect teachers and students on a regular basis. However, it is hard to find reliable figures since school closures are time dependent and the duration of closure can vary from a couple of days to several years. The United Nations reports an average of 130 school closures annually. This calculation is based on 673 documented closures between 2010-2014 and 369 between 2013-2015. In 2014, the UN Afghanistan task force “verified the continued closure of 469 schools throughout the country due to insecurity.”\textsuperscript{45} In 2015, UNAMA and UNICEF recorded nine incidents of intimidation and threats, which “led to the closure or partial closure of 213 schools (including 94 mixed schools that were closed to girls only), affecting at least 50,683 girls.”\textsuperscript{46}

A majority of these instances happened in Nangarhar and Herat provinces. Given the lack of contingency plans, school closures often lead to students not being able to attend classes for prolonged periods of time.

**Impact of Insecurity on Girls’ Education**

Girls’ schools, girls, and female teachers are disproportionally targeted at much higher rates than boys’ schools, boys and male teachers. Findings from research carried out by CARE International in 2009 indicated that of all attacks on schools between 2006 and 2008, 40% were aimed at girls’ schools. The trend of attacks on girls’ education becomes even more significant when attacks are disaggregated by school type. According to the same report, girls’ schools account for only 19% of the schools in the country and therefore, “19% of schools receive 40% of all attacks – a clear sign that girls’ education is deliberately under fire.”\textsuperscript{47} Opposition to perceived ‘western’ or ‘un-Islamic’ curriculum and external affiliation of schools are the most commonly cited reasons for attacks by the insurgency.

The report of the UN’s Security Council on children and armed conflict (2015) in Afghanistan mentions that in 2014, there were 62 reports of threats against school personnel and students, which mostly targeted girls. For instance, in May 2013, “in the Khogyani district of Nangarhar province, a letter from

\begin{itemize}
  \item **In Nangarhar, the emergence of ISKP was linked to “extortion of teachers’ salaries and … [to] closure of some 68 schools throughout the province, affecting more than 48,751 students and teachers, including at least 16,896 girls.”**
  \text{United Nations, “Education and Healthcare at Risk”}
\end{itemize}
the local Taliban warned that school personnel, teachers, and girls would have acid thrown on their faces if they continued to attend school.” Similarly, the same report notes that most school burnings were targeted at girls’ schools. These attacks and threats discourage parents from sending their girls to schools. The primary data collected by this study, which will be expounded in the findings section, confirm that insecurity and armed conflict has a significant adverse impact on girls’ access to education.

**Ghost Schools and Ghost Teachers**

In addition to security risks, the existence of “ghost” schools and teachers poses a significant challenge to the educational system. The existence of “ghost” schools and “ghost” teachers can undermine the trust of communities in the education system and can lead to disillusionment regarding the education sector in the country. Ghost schools is an umbrella term that subsumes schools that are registered as functioning schools by the Ministry of Education, but are in reality inactive; schools that are paid for, but were never built; and schools that are built, but are not used for their intended purposes. Likewise, ghost teachers are individuals that are paid a salary by the Ministry of Education, but do not show up at school. A January 2016 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) report noted that there were many cases of ghost schools and thousands of ‘ghost’ teachers across Afghanistan.50

Another September 2016 report, which was written by Afghanistan Holding Group and released by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, indicated that of 1,007 schools surveyed across Afghanistan, five schools which were classified as active in the MoE databases were closed for more than one year. Similarly, the report found that thirty schools that were reported as having buildings did not. The report also found that the MoE had over-reported the number of school employees by 797 (in 190 schools) and under-reported the number of employees by 1,248 (in 389 schools).51 The schools that were incorrectly reported, and teachers who were over-reported by the MoE, might constitute cases of ghost schools and ghost teachers or they might be data entry mistakes in the Educational Management Information System. In both instances, the discrepancy between actual and recorded schools and employees is a major challenge for the Ministry of Education.

**Displacement**

Repatriation of refugees from other countries and internal migration is the outcome of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Afghans make up one of the world’s largest refugee populations estimated at 2.5 million. An estimated 4.5 million Afghans returned to the country after 2001, and tens of thousands have been forced to return from Pakistan in recent years. These returning refugees and internally displaced populations tend to relocate disproportionately to urban and semi-urban centers of the country. Given the deteriorating security, the limited capacity of the government to provide essential services, increasing unemployment, this influx of returning refugees and internally displaced populations produce more stress on an already weak infrastructure in the country; especially the education system in urban centers.52

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49 Ibid.
51 Afghanistan Holding Group, “EMIS Data Verification Report” (Kabul, Afghanistan, September 2016).
52 World Bank Group; UNHCR, “Fragility and Population Movement in Afghanistan.”

RERA Afghanistan 2016
As evidenced by the map in Figure 10, the three provinces of Nangarhar, Herat, and Kabul have the most number of repatriated refugees.\textsuperscript{53}

The influx of repatriated refugees, coupled with the existence of a vast number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) increases the demand for education. This influx is already putting a heavy burden on the underprepared and under-resourced education infrastructure in the country.

Figure 7: Number of Afghan Returnees by Province; Source: UNHCR

### Natural Disasters

The Index for Risk Management (INFORM) classifies Afghanistan as moderately at risk (6.2 out of 10) of natural disasters.\textsuperscript{54} The data that is available on the effects of natural disasters in Afghanistan indicates that floods, earthquakes, and landslides have made up nearly 85% of the natural disaster events in Afghanistan. However, the data shows that while floods are the most frequent events, earthquakes are responsible for most of the deaths related to natural disasters.\textsuperscript{55} The table presented, based on the Center for Research on Epidemiology of Disaster’s (CRED) Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), shows the cumulative frequency of various disasters since 1900, and the mortality rates associated with each type of disaster.\textsuperscript{56}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural Disaster</th>
<th>Events Count</th>
<th>Total Deaths</th>
<th>Average Death per Incident</th>
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<tr>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Landslide</td>
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<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm</td>
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<td>425</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Historical Cumulative Frequency of Various Disaster and Mortality Rates


It is estimated that earthquakes have killed more than 7,000 between 1997-2007 alone. This figure from a USAID study which maps earthquake hazard shows the fault lines (black) and location of earthquakes since 1964.

The mean annual temperature in Afghanistan has increased by 0.6 C since 1960, and by conservative estimates, average temperatures are predicted to increase by 1.5 C by 2050. This increase in temperature is likely to cause rainfall patterns to fluctuate from -31% to +28%. Given the arid climate and complex topography of Afghanistan, these changes could result in greater occurrences of droughts, floods, landslides, and avalanches.59

Natural disasters can have devastating effects on the education sector. Some of the consequences include the closure of schools, destruction of infrastructure, and displacement of teachers and students. The education sector in Afghanistan is often underprepared in the face of disasters. In the aftermath of these disasters, schools can remain closed for months, and there are usually no contingency plans in place to ensure that student learning is uninterrupted.

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**FINDINGS**

Results from the primary data collection conducted with principal stakeholders in the purposive sample of provinces and districts are presented below. These findings are not meant to be representative of the entire education sector and the associated risks with receiving an education in the country. Rather, these results offer a snapshot of the significant risks within the districts and provinces where *Afghan Children Read* will pilot its activities.

**Impact of Insecurity, Natural Disasters, and Repatriation**

Overall, respondents reported that general insecurity, car accidents, natural disasters, and displacement have an adverse impact on education in the target districts. According to both primary and secondary data, security issues that communities are faced with include threats from opposition groups, arson, theft, suicide attacks, bombings, and celebratory gunfire. Given that there is continued ground fighting in the country, schools continue to be used for military purposes. Findings from this study show that schools, students, and educational personnel continue to be threatened and attacked. These incidents and threats significantly impact students and teachers’ decisions on whether to attend school. Parents also often must choose between the safety and security of their children and their education.

Respondents showed more concern about girls’ security than boys’, both inside and outside of schools. Security threats from groups opposing girls’ education, abduction of younger girls, the distance of schools and bullying that take place to and from school are some of the main deterring factors for families and students. The review of secondary data on this topic seems to echo these findings. Girls’ schools are disproportionately targeted by both insurgent groups and elements opposed to female education.

One safety issue that was cited by almost all respondents, but was not reflected in the literature review, was car accidents. Younger children who go to school without an older escort are often prone to get hit by cars. In areas where schools are located next to busy streets, this can dissuade parents from sending their young children to school.

Natural disasters, specifically floods and earthquakes, pose additional challenges to the nascent schooling system in the country. Respondents from all five target districts reported instances of floods and earthquakes and asserted that these incidents could lead to the closure of schools and interruption of the educational process. These disasters can also damage the often weak and unprepared infrastructure. Primary and secondary data both show that flooding and rain are the most frequent natural disasters in Herat City and Guzara, while earthquakes are a bigger cause of concern in Kama and Jalalabad.

Respondents report that arrival of repatriated refugees and internal migrants put further constraints on school facilities and deteriorate the quality of education. The MoE is not prepared in the face of the influx of refugees and internally displaced persons. Displacement is particularly an issue for the larger provinces such as Kabul, Nangarhar, and Herat, where the *Afghan Children Read* intervention districts are located.

Despite being faced with incredible challenges, communities seem to overcome these obstacles and continue to send their children to school. Close collaboration and communication between schools, teachers and the community seems to be the most effective strategy that communities employ to keep
their schools open. Primary data shows that coordination between school and the local police serves as a mechanism of early warning. However, a collaboration of schools with local mosques and community leaders, rather than the police, seems to be the most effective strategy for deterring potential threats. That said, perhaps the most important element in keeping schools open is the sheer determination of school officials, teachers, and students themselves. The focus group discussions and interviews revealed many instances of school personnel taking it upon themselves to guard their schools despite the threat to their personal safety.

Some of the main conclusions from the focus group discussions and interviews related to the impact of insecurity, natural disasters, and repatriation are presented in the sections below.

**Student Safety**

![SECURITY AND SAFETY CONCERNS ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL](image)

Figure 11: Security/Safety Concerns on the Way to School by District

Overall, respondents felt that students were safer in school than on the way to or from the school. The provincial centers of Jalalabad and Herat City were perceived as more dangerous in regards to security and car accidents than rural districts of Kama, Guzara and Shakar Dara. Some specific findings:

- Overall, 59 percent of respondents said that they were “always” or “often” worried about the security of students on the way to school. This number was the highest in Jalalabad (76 percent) and the lowest in Kama (21 percent). Only 16 percent of respondents said that they were “rarely” or “never” concerned for the security of students on the way to school.

- Security concerns were higher in urban areas (Jalalabad and Herat City) than in the countryside (Kama, Guzara, and Shakar Dara). This disparity might be because in rural communities are more tightly knit, which provides a stronger safety net for students. Another possible reason could be

> “Since our school is near a major highway, every year we lose two to four students to oncoming traffic.”

> *A principal in Kabul*
that given the sheer number of people who live in urban areas, security/safety incidents occur more often.

- Comparatively, only 27 percent of respondents said that they were “always” or “often” worried for the safety of students inside schools. 37 percent of respondents were “rarely” or “never” concerned about the safety of students inside schools. The highest level of concern was reported by respondents in Jalalabad City and lowest by respondents in Guzara and Kama.
- General insecurity, school remoteness, and car accidents were reported as the most frequent causes of safety concerns for students. Car accidents are a grave concern. Students, especially those in earlier grades, are likely to get hit by cars when crossing roads and highways. This is particularly the case for schools that are located next to major streets.

### School Security

![SCHOOL SECURITY CONCERNS](image)

**Figure 12: Security/Safety Concerns in School by District**

Although overall, the security situation in the five target districts is relatively stable, schools have faced security threats such as arson, suicide attacks, bombings, and poisoning. Respondents had divergent views on whether these threats had a significant impact on student attendance. Some specific findings:

- A principal in Jalalabad shared that there was a suicide attack in front of his school; the casualties included one female student and ten male students. Because of this incident, the principal reported that now the children are much traumatized.
- A parent from Kama said that there had been two bomb attacks near their school, one of which exploded and killed a person. The other bomb was neutralized.
- One principal in Kabul related an incident in which the police warned the school of an arson threat. The principal patrolled the school that same night, but the police did not show up. Fortunately, the threat did not materialize.
- A school in Guzara reported receiving threats of an attack through “night letters”. Because of this threat, students did not show up to school for nearly two weeks.
- One school in Kabul and one in Guzara reported poisoning incidents. In Kabul, the pesticide that was sprayed on the farmlands next to the school had poisoned some of the students. In Guzara,
the police warned the school of a threat to poison the school’s water supply. The school held a meeting with the local mosques to address the issue and the threat did not materialize.

- One principal from Nangarhar reported that his school received reports that snacks sold outside of the school might be poisoned.
- Almost all respondents agreed that security incidents lead to student absenteeism. For instance, one principal in Nangarhar said that when an incident happens, both boys and girls leave school for almost a week. Another participant in the focus group explained that if there are security issues, parents do not let their daughters go to school for ten days or more. This sentiment was echoed by most of the focus group participants.

**Natural Disasters**

According to respondents, floods, and earthquakes are the major security concerns in the target districts. The risks of these, however, differ according to each region. While floods are reported as the most frequent natural disaster in the districts of Herat province, respondents from Nangarhar cited earthquakes as the biggest issue. Some specific findings:

- Overall, 36 percent of respondents said that natural disasters “often” or “sometimes” damage the school. This percent was highest in Jalalabad (45 percent) and lowest in Herat City (15 percent).
- In Kabul, earthquakes were cited as the most common natural disaster, although rain and flooding also created occasional problems.
- In Herat, flooding was reported as the most frequent natural disaster. In Guzara, one principal mentioned that sometimes flooding overflows onto the roads and does not allow students to go to school.
- Earthquakes also caused safety concerns for schools in Jalalabad. For instance, according to a principal in Jalalabad, some students broke their ribs and injured their heads due to an earthquake. According to another principal, they hold the early grade classes in the yard in order to make sure that if anything like an earthquake happens, students can evacuate the school premises quickly.
Almost all respondents agreed that schools do not have sufficient measures to avert the risk or minimize the damages incurred by natural disasters. As a result, natural disasters often cause disruptions in school schedules.

**Girls’ Safety**

Respondents concurred that the security and safety risks for girls are higher than for boys. Some specific findings:

- 40 percent of interviewees stated that they were concerned more about female students than male students on the way to and from school. Only 16 percent of respondents said that they were more worried about male students.
- Almost half of the respondents (49 percent) felt equal concern for male and female students at schools. 28 percent of the respondents said that they were more concerned about female students while at school.
- Teachers in Kabul voiced their concerns about girls getting harassed on the way to and from school. This sentiment was also echoed by a principal from Guzara who mentioned that there were people in the area who were opposed to girls’ education and harassed girls that came to school.
- Parents in Kabul agreed that they were more concerned for their daughters’ safety than for their sons’ safety. They were specifically worried about the risk of kidnapping of girls in early grades.
- Principals in Kabul and Guzara maintained that only a few girls come from areas that are far from schools because it is not safe for them. This is especially an issue for girls in higher grades.
- Three principals from Nangarhar were apprehensive about the commute of the girls. They noted that girls who came to school are bullied by boys on the way.
- A teacher in Guzara said that when there are safety risks, families are more likely not to let their girls attend school.

**Repatriated Refugees and Displaced People**

The arrival of repatriated refugees, most of whom come from Iran and Pakistan, and internally displaced persons from other provinces and districts put a significant strain on the educational infrastructure. The arrival of these students drives up the number of students in already-packed classes. Moreover, these students are perceived to be not ready for school. Some specific findings:

- Principals in Kabul and Guzara reported that the arrival of repatriated refugees had increased the number of students in classrooms. A principal in Jalalabad said that before the arrival of these refugees, they had 40 to 50 students per classroom, but afterward, that number almost doubled to 70 to 80 students per classroom. He also added that they had 45 classes in one school while there were only 25 classrooms.
- A parent in Kama said that due to the arrival of repatriated refugees from Pakistan and displaced people from Laghman and Kunar provinces and other districts of Nangarhar, there was a 1st grade classroom that had 132 students.
- Teachers reported that repatriated children also have difficulties with reading and writing the national languages of Afghanistan. This is also true for students who come from other provinces and districts. The presence of students who do not know how to read in the language of instruction creates a problem for all the students in the classroom.
School principals from Guzara noted that they had received repatriated refugees from Iran and Pakistan, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from provinces as varied as Ghazni, Bamiyan, Helmand and Farah. One principal from Guzara mentioned that repatriated students from Iran were not allowed to go to school in Iran and therefore have very little education.

**Attitudes about Education:**

With regards to the value of education, there seems to be a discrepancy between respondents’ perception of how much society values education and how much respondents themselves value education. When asked, all respondents, including parents, mentioned that they highly valued education. This is while most respondents also reported that society does not value education very highly. However, in most cases, school officials were more likely to feel that society does not value education or their profession. They felt that this undervaluation of education manifests itself in low opinions of the teaching profession. As a result, often teachers only teach when they cannot find other positions. Furthermore, in some instances, parents hesitate or refuse to send their children, especially girls, to schools, because they prioritize other matters over education. Sometimes, when families are in financial difficulty, children are expected to lend a hand with breadwinning by working either inside or outside their homes. This contributes to high dropout rates and hinders student learning even when the disruption in education is not permanent.

The undervaluation of education especially seems to have an adverse impact on the education of girls. According to many respondents, when pressed financially, parents are more likely to take their daughters out of schools than their sons. Furthermore, even when affording education is not an obstacle, some families see girls’ education as contradictory to social and cultural norms. Just as insecurity takes a heavier toll on girls in patriarchal societies, undervaluation of education also affects female students more negatively.

Some respondents felt that society under-valued education. However, when asked, almost all parents said that they highly value their children’s education. In most cases, it was teachers and school personnel who felt that the society does not value education or teaching.

Some specific findings:

- Parents in Kabul concurred that children’s education, especially in early grades was of great importance to them.
- One principal in Kabul indicated that there was a slightly negative image regarding education in his community. He said that when people tell their children to study, children usually point out that most rich people in the area have no education, but have become rich through other means.
- A principal in Kabul maintained that usually people regard teaching as a profession that is not as prestigious as others. Due to this social stigma, it is thought that only those who are not qualified for other jobs apply for teaching positions. This also leads teachers to leave their jobs as soon as they find other positions.

> “Once, I asked a student why he was not coming to school. He replied that he was polishing shoes to earn money for his family. I asked him how much money he made in a day. He replied ‘20AFN.’ This broke my heart. I offered to pay him 20AFN per day if he came to school. But he refused the money saying that the people would scorn his family if he did not work.”

* A Female Teacher in Guzara
One district education director in Herat indicated that in rural areas, people are more conservative than in urban areas and therefore usually do not allow their children to go to school.

**Leaving School for Work**

Participants views show that both boys and girls are forced to drop out of school in order to work. Boys are expected to work outside the house, while girls are asked to work inside. Some specific findings:

- Teachers and principals from Kabul, Guzara, and Kama indicated that parents sometimes force their sons to work in restaurants, bus stations, and private gardens and force their daughters to do house chores instead of attending school. One principal in Kabul recounted that a student in 10th grade left school at the end of the year to become a waiter at a restaurant in order to make 10,000 AFN per month.
- School officials reported that since both Shakar Dara in Kabul and Guzara have economies that are reliant on agriculture, during the harvest season, parents need their sons to work in the field or to herd the family’s livestock.
- One teacher from Guzara recalled that one time when she asked a female student why she had been absent the previous day, the student replied that she was doing laundry for the family.
- A parent in Kama said that when they had guests, they would not let their sons and daughters attend school “because a mother cannot do all the house chores alone.”
- A district education director from Herat shared that previously people received biscuits or cooking oil as an incentive to send their sons or daughters to school. However, now since the incentives have stopped, people instead ask their children to help them in house chores or with farm work.

**Gender Bias**

Overall, communities value boys’ education more than girls’ education. However, when asked, female respondents were more likely to report differences in how girls and boys were treated than male respondents. Parents were more likely to report that they did not treat their sons and daughters differently. Some specific findings:

- A principal in Jalalabad indicated that parents valued the education of their sons more than the education of their daughters. For instance, he shared that there are families who send their sons to private schools while they keep their daughters at home to do house chores.
- Another female teacher in Guzara also said that families were not very open about letting their girls attend extracurricular courses.
- A female teacher in Guzara maintained that some families that have both boys and girls, only send their sons to school. When the families were asked why they did not send their girls to school, they replied that “girls are just going to get married and therefore do not need education.”
- Male principals of schools in Guzara said that in their area people did not think that there was a difference between boys’ and girls’ education, and enrollment numbers were the same. Only in some places, when girls became older, sometimes families would be hesitant to send them to school due to social perception of girls’ education. A parent in Kama also confirmed this stating that once girls get past 6th grade, they become adults and they will face problems in attending schools.
Quality of Early Grade Education

Regarding quality of education in early grades, the primary data corroborates the findings from the literature review. Respondents reported that the underlying reasons for the poor quality of early grade education are lack of standard classrooms, lack of textbooks and professional teachers, lack of libraries in schools, and the lack of educational policies, such as those pertaining to teacher recruitment and student enrollment. These factors lead to students not learning in school and to a rise dissatisfaction with the educational system.

Challenges to Early Grade Education

Although respondents reported that they were satisfied with reading ability of students in early grades, most respondents cited the lack of standard classrooms, professional teachers, and textbooks as major issues facing early grade education. Nevertheless, there are variances across schools. Some specific findings:

- A clear majority of respondents (80 percent) reported that the reading ability of students in early grades was “satisfactory” or “very satisfactory.”
- There are variations in the quality of schools. For instance, one principal from Kabul mentioned that early grade students in one school in the district could easily read or write, while in many other schools, students were not able to read. In Herat, one principal stated that they had students in 2nd grade who were not able to read any text at all. Similarly, a principal in Nangarhar said that the students in 4th grade could not read or write Pashto, the official language in which they are taught.
- Respondents in Kabul and Nangarhar also complained about the lack of standard classrooms, professional teachers, and textbooks, and the presence of too many students in classrooms. According to a principal, one of the schools in Jalalabad has only one standard classroom, which has alphabet charts, diagrams, and flash cards, but all the other classrooms are sub-standard.
- School teachers and principals in Kabul stated that too many subjects were being taught in Grades 1 through 3. A principal from Nangarhar and parents from Kama asserted that the materials taught in early grades were too advanced for students. A parent from Kama said that students in Grade 1 had a book called “life ethics” which was so complex that “even their teachers would not understand it.” This is exacerbated by the fact that often there are no Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programs in many of the districts.
- Respondents from Kabul reported that in some schools there are more than 60 students in each class. According to one principal, a school in Kabul has 74 students in a single 3rd grade classroom, and three or more students end up sitting on a bench that is designed for two students. A district education director in Herat explained that due to lack of classrooms, they have to hold three or four classes in the same big gathering hall.
- One principal in Kabul said that they had nine early grade classes, but only three formal teachers. The rest of the teachers are temporary teachers that have just graduated from 12th grade. He also asserted that temporary teachers feel less committed to their students. Principals in Kabul also stated that a lack of substitute teachers is a major concern for schools. For example, when female
teachers take parental leave, due to lack of substitute teachers, the classes are left without teachers for months.

- Principals in Jalalabad said that teachers assign homework to students, but do not follow up on the homework. This discourages the students from studying or doing their homework.

**Other Issues**

Other issues reported by respondents included lack of libraries, limited time on task, lengthy student absences, and students’ enrolling in school at a very young age. Some specific findings:

- Respondents from Herat, Kabul, and Nangarhar reported that there were no libraries near their schools. In Nangarhar only, an organization named Shanti Volunteer Society had established in-school libraries for students.
- Principals in Kabul were concerned about the limited time students spend on task.
- Principals in Kabul also emphasized that there was an issue with nepotism within the education system. For instance, one principal recounted that he was contacted by the office of district education director to hire a certain person, who was a relative of an employee at the district education director’s office.
- One teacher in Guzara said that she had a student who had been absent for 85 days during the school year and did not know how to read or write, but had passed her exams because the Ministry of Education had ordered that too many students should not fail the exam.
- One of the principals in Jalalabad mentioned that many of the students in early grades are younger than their reported age. For instance, sometimes they have students who are reported as seven years old, but are three or four years old. As a result, these students are not prepared to be in school. He recalled that some of the students are so young that “they end up going to the bathroom in the classroom instead of in the restroom.”

**Role of Parents**

Overall, all respondents agreed that parents play important roles in their children’s education. Parents who keep track of their students’ progress are more likely to see positive improvements in their children’s attendance rates and learning. Nevertheless, given the high illiteracy rates, which is expounded in the analysis of secondary data, compounded by poverty and low regard for education, most parents cannot play constructive roles in their children’s education. This often leads to the discouragement of students and low attendance rates.

Children whose parents help them with their school work have fewer absences than children whose parents do not help them.

Principals in Kabul

One factor that can increase parental involvement in their children’s education is constructive and sustainable communication between schools and parents. Parents who are regularly in touch with schools are more likely to be invested in their children’s education. This communication not only improves student learning, but also builds school community resilience in the face of any risks.

**Role of Parents In their Children’s Education**

Overall, respondents agreed that parents play a critical role in their children’s education. Nevertheless, most the respondents said that due to poverty and illiteracy, most families are not able to help their
children with their school work. Parents mostly support their children’s school work through buying books and stationery and sending their children to supplemental courses. When parents were asked, most of them claimed that they regularly visit their children’s school and read stories to their children. Furthermore, most of the respondents agreed that television is a big distraction for students. Some specific findings:

- 87 percent of parents said that they read to (or told) their children stories at night. 64 percent of parents stated that they read stories to their children at least once a week.
- 77 percent of parents said that they were literate, while 23 percent reported that they were illiterate.
- Principals in Kabul explained that overall children, whose families work with them at home, have fewer absences than other kids.
- There is some variation in respondents’ perception of whether parents presently play active roles in their children’s education. Most respondents maintained that the families’ lack of education and their financial troubles prevent them from providing necessary support for their children’s education. Educators shared that they felt only families that are literate, pay heed to their children’s education. Several principals from Jalalabad felt that parents were not aware of their children’s education at all.
- A father in Kabul remarked that at the end of the day, fathers come back from work exhausted so they cannot always help their children in their studies.
- According to parents and teachers in Kabul, some parents buy books for their children, but many do not. Parents who provide books for their children, mostly buy religious and storybooks for their children. One principal from Guzara mentioned that sometimes parents reward their children for reading books, which encourages them to read more.
- Respondents from Kabul and Jalalabad reported that parents who are financially well off enroll their children in supplemental courses or private schools and buy textbooks and school supplies for their children. A principal from Jalalabad also mentioned that most of the wealthy parents, who enroll their children in private schools, follow up on their progress because of their monetary investment.
- In Herat, several principals mentioned that people mostly send their children to mosques to supplement their children’s education and receive religious teachings.
- Principals in Kabul and Herat mentioned that television is a big distraction for students because students spend a lot of time watching non-educational programs. They insisted that parents should decrease the number of hours children spend watching television.
- A female teacher from Guzara recalled that they had a student who came to school two months after the start of the school year. When they asked the student why he had not come to school earlier, he said that he was told that the schools had not started yet. According to the teacher, this showed a lack of commitment to education on the part of the parents.

**Communication between Schools and Parents**

As previously stated, overall, respondents agreed that parents play important roles in their children’s education. Parents who keep track of their students’ progress are more likely to see positive

“A father who makes 4,500 or 5,000 AFN per month cannot provide stationery and educational material for his children.”

* A parent in Kabul
improvements in their children’s attendance rates and learning. Parents who are regularly in touch with schools are more likely to be invested in their children’s education. This home-to-school communication not only improves student learning, but also builds school community resilience in the face of any risks. Some specific findings:

- When parents were asked how often they visit their children’s school, 26 percent said that they visit their children’s school once every week or more, 14 percent said about once a month, 44 percent said about once a quarter, 9 percent said about once a year, and 7 percent said they have never visited their children’s school.

- When parents were asked how often they meet school staff, 34 percent responded “once a week or more,” 31 percent responded that they meet school staff “every month,” and 10 percent reported that they have never met school staff.

- When asked, 11 percent of teachers, principals, and district education directors reported meeting students’ parents “once a week or more,” 60 percent reported meeting parents once “every month,” and 5 percent indicated that they have “never” met their students’ parents.

- Respondents felt that positive communication between schools and parents can encourage parents to be more supportive of school efforts. For instance, one principal in Kabul recalled that one time they had a competition among students and they asked one of the wealthy parents to buy prizes for the winners. The parent said that he would be happy and obliged.

- Respondents from Kabul, Nangarhar, and Herat maintained that schools held meetings with parents, which helped to improve communication between schools and parents. For instance, a principal in Kabul recalled that when a child had a behavior problem at school, the school called his father and the father disciplined his child. Principals in Kabul also mentioned that they communicate with parents by writing notes to parents in student notebooks and parents read and respond back.

- In Nangarhar, after a seminar held by the Asia Foundation, the principal for one school encouraged the parents to buy extracurricular books for the students. This proved to be very successful, and the parents bought books for early grades and established a library at the school.

- A principal in Nangarhar said that when they ask parents to meet them about the progress of their students, only one in three parents showed up to the meetings.

**Strategies to Overcome Risks**

Most respondents concurred that the most important strategy for building resilience in the face of any potential risks has proven to be mobilizing community support for schools. This support can go a long way in averting the risks faced by the education sector in the country. When there are threats of insecurity, communities can provide strong safety nets for schools and students. Similarly, communities can work with schools to devise measures to ensure safety and design contingency plans in the face of natural disasters and other safety risks. The community safety net can especially help in ensuring the safety of female students, which can lead to higher access to education for girls.

**Role of Community Shuras, Discipline Committees, and Police Departments**

Almost all respondents maintained that community shuras, discipline committees, and police departments played a major role in mitigating security or safety risks. Some specific findings:
Schools in Kabul and Herat have in-school committees for discipline and safety of students. Schools in Guzara carry out body search of students to make sure that they do not carry weapons with them into schools.

Respondents from Kabul stated that they have a committee named the Committee for Defense of Education, which is comprised of elders and community representatives that helps schools when there are issues. In one case, this committee took the responsibility to monitor the path that students, especially girls, took to go to school to make sure students did not face security risks or harassment. These committees also help schools by providing transportation when teachers face security risks or when schools lack equipment or library books.

In Kabul, a number of parents said that they walk their children to school before going to work in the morning to ensure that children get to school safely.

In Kabul, people helped a school to reroute the flood course and to pile stones and sand in front of the school so that the school would not be flooded.

Teachers in Kabul said that when there are security issues, they report it to the district and provincial education departments and to the local police department.

School principals in Kabul indicated that in the rare cases where schools are closed, they contact local shuras and use mosques as classrooms.

Protection of Female Students

Most of the efforts by community shuras and schools are focused on protecting girls. Some specific findings:

- Principals in Kabul mentioned that sometimes local people and shuras help walk school children back to their homes. Similarly, teachers in Herat mentioned that shuras help with protecting girls and preventing boys from harassing them.
- Teachers in Kabul indicated that schools provide transportation for students that come from far places. In addition, they ask a teacher to ride in the same vehicle as the students in order to minimize any security risks.
- The principal of a girls’ school in Herat recalled that one time they had a boy who threatened some girls. This same boy at another occasion had threatened the head teacher with a knife. After a few days, with the help of police, the school managed to catch the boy. They beat him up so much that “his hair was stuck to the wall.” After that, the school did not receive any more threats, however the incident demonstrates the role of violence as opposed to other means in settling honor issues such as the one described.
- The principals in Nangarhar said that female students regularly asked them for protection both in and outside schools. When girls’ classes are over, they have staff at the gate who make sure that there are no security threats in the area. When students get sick, they call their families to pick them up or schools send someone with the student to accompany them to their house to ensure their safety.

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This is quite a troubling way to deal with the issue of threats, and it highlights the need for appropriate strategies in dealing with threats and clear mechanisms for reporting the threat to authorities. However, participants shared in several focus group discussions that authorities seldom act when there are threats against schools and that the communities usually must take matters into their own hands.

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“One time, when our school faced security threats, the people of the area took up weapons and defended us.”

A principal in Kabul
Teachers in Kabul indicated that when girls’ schools are in session, they lock the school gates and prohibit men from entering the school.

Public versus Private versus CBE Schooling

Participant views on the quality and safety of public schools compared to private schools and CBEs is very divergent, with many contradictions. Participants believed that the quality of teaching in private schools tended to be better, but they also felt that private schools take students away from public schools and are not accessible to everyone. Respondents did not have consensus over whether CBE schools can be good alternatives to public schools. Where attending public and private schools is not feasible or safe, CBE schools are thought as good substitutes.

Public versus Private Schools

Overall, parents believe that the quality of private schools is higher than public schools. Some specific findings:

- One teacher from Guzara said that private schools were better than public schools because students came and left school at regular hours. She also felt that sometimes, private schools were closer than public schools, which was better for female students due to safety reasons.
- A principal in Nangarhar stated that some formal schools had three shifts in a day and only allocated 30 minutes for each subject, which was not enough time for learning.
- One principal from Kabul said that some private schools established by BRAC were rumored to have promoted Christianity in villages. The community, however, had not bought into the rumors and had protected the school.
- Another principal from Kabul maintained that private schools had taken away students from public schools.
- Parents in Kabul mostly agreed that in private schools, teachers are recruited based on merit, the number of students are lower in classrooms, and teachers pay more personalized attention to students. They indicated that they would enroll their children in private schools if they had the financial means to do so. Most parents from other districts also concurred with this sentiment.

Public versus CBE Schooling

Respondents had divergent views on CBE schools. Some specific findings:

- Slightly more than half of the interviewees (51 percent) believed that public schools were safer than CBE schools. In Kama, this figure stood at 93 percent which was the highest of any district. Only 14 percent of the respondents in all five districts said that CBE schools were safer than public schools.
- Respondents in Kabul shared that there are some private schools and NGO-run CBES in Kabul that have proper school equipment. These CBE classes also tend to have a fewer number of students in a class, which can lead to more personalized attention for each student.
- In Kabul, despite the lower number of students in CBE schools, participants felt that the quality of CBE education is lower than formal schools. Most of the teachers who teach in CBE schools are seen as not having the proper credentials to teach.

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61 This sentiment is in contradiction to the findings from the literature review. Most studies indicate that since CBES are supported by the community they tend to be safer than public schools. The contradiction highlights the variability in school safety. It seems that although CBES might be safer places for children in certain areas, they might be targeted in other areas of the country.
• One principal in Kabul noted that students in CBE schools studied the material of two years in one academic year, which would inevitably negatively affect their learning. Because of this practice, sometimes students who are transferred from CBE schools to public schools are too young for the classes in which they were enrolled.
• In Guzara, principals said that CBE schools had higher quality than public and private schools. They also thought that private schools had the lowest quality.
• Principals in Kabul preferred CBE schooling only for younger boys and girls because the proximity of the schools would ensure students’ safety.
• Teachers in Kabul said that they preferred public schools for their sons and daughters.
• A principal in Kabul mentioned that UNICEF gave away notebooks, pens, and school material to CBE students in Grades 1-3. As a result, many students enrolled in both formal schools and CBE schools in order to receive school stationery.

Barriers for Teachers

Teachers play a main role in the quality of education provided and the students’ reading ability. Therefore, provision of security, especially to female teachers, and adequate remuneration are strategies that can help overcome the lack of teachers and ensuring quality education. Tied to this is attenuating the social stigma surrounding the profession of teaching.

Security and Monetary Barriers

Most of the respondents felt that security was not a major barrier to retention of teachers, although there were some cases of teachers being threatened in Herat and Jalalabad. Lack of financial support for teachers, however, was perceived as a major cause of teacher dropout. Generally, respondents were more worried about the safety of female teachers than male teachers. Some specific findings:

• Overall, 43 percent of teachers said that they were “always” or “often” concerned about their own safety on the way to school. This percent was the highest for teachers in Herat city (60 Percent) On the other hand, 37 percent said that they “rarely” or “never” felt concerned about their safety on the way to school.
• 52 percent of school principals and district education directors felt that female teachers were more at-risk on the way to school than male teachers. Moreover, 44 percent indicated that they were more concerned about the safety of female teachers while inside the school.
• A principal in Guzara recounted that they recently had a case of someone who came to his school and threatened the school staff because he had heard that some of the teachers from the school worked for international NGOs. The school spoke with the community Shura. The Shura found the person and told him that the school only taught religious classes and that the report about the teachers working for international NGOs was false.
• A principal in Nangarhar said that sometimes teachers leave their job in the middle of the year for security reasons. For example, a teacher’s son was kidnapped and her husband had also received threats. The family left their jobs and fled to Kabul for their safety.

“The police headquarter in our area with its 60 police officers has many buildings and 120 vehicles, but the district education directorate that has 90,000 students and 2,000 teachers, does not even have a bicycle.”

A principal in Kabul
• In Guzara, a principal mentioned that they did not have any female teachers because female teachers would not come to rural areas to teach.
• In Guzara, another principle mentioned that a teacher left his job because his family was threatened to be killed if he did not stop teaching.
• Principals in Kabul complained about the lack of difference between the salaries of teachers that had 12th grade education and those that had a bachelor’s degree. The principals felt that low salary is a primary reason some teachers leave teaching for other jobs. One principal stated, “Someone who has studied for 16 years will not want work for 5,000 to 8,000 AFN.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has provided a snapshot of the overall situation of education in Afghanistan, especially in early grades, and has expounded on the risks associated with education. This report can help Afghan Children Read gain awareness of the potential risks when it pilots its intervention activities. This report acknowledges that minimizing risks of insecurity and damage caused by natural disasters require a multi-sectorial response, so the recommendations offered should not be taken to imply that Afghan Children Read can solve these problems. Rather, these recommendations help the project support and bolster coping mechanisms. Finally, these are not meant to be an exhaustive list of recommendations. The Project should study the findings and assess the feasibility of each proposed recommendation and think of new ways to address the various challenges highlighted in this report.

There are general steps that can be taken to minimize the risks that are common to all target districts.

• In all the target districts, and especially in Jalalabad and Herat, car accidents pose a major risk to students. Afghan Children Read can encourage parents to walk their children, especially girls, to school or to send them to school with other older students. Moreover, the project can advocate for the establishment of student safety committees in schools, which can take measures to reduce car accidents. These measures can include assigning older students to help younger students walk to and from schools. These measures can also reduce harassment and risks associated with the remoteness of schools, which is another major safety issue reported by the respondents. Additionally, the project can work with the community and the police to increase road safety.
• In schools, teacher and peer violence are a major safety issue for students. To counter this, Afghan Children Read can work with the Ministry of Education to develop explicit codes of conduct for teachers and administrators as well as codes for how to properly discipline students. The project can hold workshops for school administrators and teachers on these codes. These workshops can also train school staff on predicting patterns of teacher/peer violence, employing conflict resolution strategies, and minimizing violence.

Afghan Children Read should keep in mind the differences in the risks associated with education in the target districts when designing its intervention policy. The project should cater its intervention to each specific context to ensure the minimization of risks.

• Afghan Children Read should conduct a more thorough, evidence-based assessment of the state of preparedness in each of the target schools. This assessment should focus on mechanisms for minimizing risks specific to each school. The project can then allocate resources to bolster these mechanisms.
The provinces of Herat and Nangarhar face threats from insurgent groups, especially given that some of their districts are contested by these groups. Given that the security situation in the country is volatile and could deteriorate during the implementation of the intervention, the *Afghan Children Read* project should have contingency plans in place for a worsening of security in its target districts.

- Lack of clean drinking water was cited as a major issue by several communities. *Afghan Children Read*, in collaboration with the school management shuras and municipalities, should work to provide schools with clean drinking water sources such as protected wells.
- Due to the rise in the number of child casualties and injured children, the MoE should work to institute projects for children with disabilities by providing training for teachers to ensure equitable access for all students.

*Afghan Children Read* should work in partnership with school management shuras and police departments to build resilience and to take measures to protect the schools.

- Community shuras play a critical role in protecting schools from security risks. These shuras can help the schools mitigate the risks of natural disasters and insecurity. In the targeted districts, the project should facilitate workshops attended by all stakeholders that identify security risks, priorities and gaps in the delivery of education and decide on measures to collaboratively address those risks.
- *Afghan Children Read* should also invest in building the capacity of shuras and making sure that these shuras feel ownership over the project. The project, wherever possible, should use mobile technology and as well as media outlets to improve communication lines between the community and the local schools. The project should also hold out-reach programs to improve the school-community relationship. Furthermore, if any issues arise, *Afghan Children Read* should collaborate with these shuras to address them.
- Community shuras can play important roles in protecting female students and teachers and supporting equitable and safe access to schools. Thus, *Afghan Children Read* should work with shuras to ensure that female students and teachers feel safe both inside and outside the school. Some measures include ensuring that ways to and from schools are safe for female students and teachers, penalizing people who harass students, and promoting girls’ education.
- In the case of natural disasters and school closures, *Afghan Children Read* can work with community shuras to use mosques as makeshift classrooms to ensure that there are no interruptions in school procedures.

*Afghan Children Read* should work with school principals, teachers, and students to build resilience.

- In the target districts, the project should educate students, school staff, and communities on the risks factors associated with education and should try to build community resilience to face these challenges.
- *Afghan Children Read* should offer leadership and conflict resolution trainings to school principals in areas that are considered high-risk.
- The project should work with schools to identify trained mental health counselors to help students in need of help. These counselors should be trained in identifying the impact of duress, domestic violence, harassment, and bullying on student learning and assuaging them.
Afghan Children Read should work with parents to ensure that they know their role in their children’s education.

- The project should aim to build the capacity of parents and encourage them to participate in the process of educating their children. The project can help schools maintain communication between schools and parents through establishing school-parent committees that meet regularly.
- The project should also focus on encouraging parents to send their children to school instead of forcing them to work inside their homes or outside. This can be done through having more frequent teacher-parent conferences, as well as holding workshops and seminars for parents that focus on explaining the role of parents in children’s education. Moreover, the project should persuade parents to see their children’s education as a long-term investment rather than a short-term waste of resources.
- Another topic that should be covered in these workshops is the role of TV in children’s learning. While TV programs that are specifically targeted at children can be informative and educational, excessive time spent watching TV also reduces the time dedicated to learning. Given that TV networks rarely have educational material for children, the project should encourage parents to minimize the amount of time their children spend on watching TV.
- Afghan Children Read should hold workshops for parents that will educate them on how to help their children at home and track their progress. The project should work with schools and communities to build understanding that parents who are not literate can still be of great help in their child’s education by providing support other than with their homework.
- Furthermore, the project should ask parents to enroll their children in school only when they are of school age.
- The project should encourage parents to invest in buying and reading stories for their children. The project can distribute children’s storybooks to children in areas where families cannot afford to buy books.
- Afghan Children Read should foster a dialogue with the MoE that encourages the establishment of policies to increase student time spent on task. These policies can include prolonging the length of each session, ensuring that time-consuming practices in classrooms are curbed through effective management and time-management training for teachers, encouraging teachers to prepare materials before each class and not to spend classroom time on correcting homework, and potentially reducing the number of subjects taught in Grades 1-3.

**In all its intervention strategies, Afghan Children Read should adopt a ‘do no harm’ policy.**

- Afghan Children Read should employ a gender sensitive perspective in each of its activities, but should ensure that its activities are not in conflict with the traditions of the local population. Instead, the project can work with local Imams and community leaders to advocate for girls’ education, given that Quran encourages both men and women to seek education. Working through the local traditions ensures that there will be minimum opposition to the project.
- Afghan Children Read should be careful in its use of international branding for its programs. It should instead focus on branding the project as a Ministry of Education project. Similarly, the project should actively work to ensure that it is not perceived as using education for security objectives. This can be done through targeted campaigns aimed at raising community awareness which focus on education as a human right and not connected to any counter insurgency initiative.
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