



Afghanistan Policy Page

A one-page brief on a major issue concerning U.S. policy and engagement in Afghanistan.

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Education

Take Aways

- Afghanistan is **extremely economically disadvantaged** due to the low educational level of its population.
- There have been great strides improving primary education access for children, although **greater emphasis on adult education and job skills training is still needed**.
- Years of war destroyed the educational system by the fall of the Taliban in 2001, and the **new schools are often targeted by Taliban militants**.
- **Some analysts worry international education assistance needs more coordination**, otherwise the aid might risk working at cross purposes in efforts to improve linkages between the national and local governance.

Key Issues

- **Girls Education** – Female access to education since the fall of the Taliban has not risen proportionally with male educational access. Female school attendance suffers because of the threat of Taliban attacks, as well as prevailing conservative social norms and a lack of sufficient numbers of female teachers.
- **Violence Against Schools** – Schools, especially all-girl and mixed gender, are specifically targeted by the Taliban, although local communities will often engage directly with militants to protect their children from attacks.
- **Planning Problems** – The Ministry of Education receives the majority of its budget from international donors, but funding cycles may not align with the Afghan fiscal year, and multi-year funding is rare. Furthermore, many donor countries route their funding outside of the Afghan government, fostering budgetary uncertainty and undermining whole of government efforts.
- **Adult Education** – Afghanistan suffers from 40% unemployment by some measures, and long-term employment prospects of the average Afghan are extremely limited. Education and training for adults has strategic implications, as studies have shown that numbers of unemployed join the Taliban or illegal narcotics industry as a source of livelihood.
- **Brain Drain** – The educated population has steadily fled Afghanistan since the 1979 Soviet invasion. Much of the remaining educated elite find it more profitable to work for NATO or NGOs rather than as teachers or government employees.

Possible Questions

- What is being done to **coordinate international aid** in education? Is it possible to make **multi-year commitments** to ensure continued educational opportunities, allowing for more predictable budgetary planning?
- What is being done to **build better school structures** and to **secure educational facilities** against Taliban attacks?
- What **initiatives to provide adult education and vocational skills training** have proven results in Afghanistan?
- What is being done to increase the number of **qualified and female teachers** in Afghanistan?
- **How is progress being assessed** in meeting the goals of improving Afghan educational access?

Top Key Facts

- **57% of Afghan men and 87% of Afghan women are illiterate.**
- 6.8 million children in school in 2009, up from 1.1 million in 2001; 35% female.
- 11,123 schools total, however 695 closed due violence as of June 2009, affecting over 340,000 students.
- **60% of schooling occurs in tents or dilapidated buildings** and schooling is often limited to **2 hours per day**.
- **80% of teachers are unqualified**, according to former Minister of Education Mohammed Atmar.
- Higher education has been slow to meet new demand: when Kabul University reopened in 2002, 24,000 students enrolled. In 2007, only 22,700 students were active in higher education.

In the News

- This week the International Republican Institute released their most recent (November 2009) opinion polling in Afghanistan, finding that 96 percent of Afghans believe education is an important or very important use of foreign assistance. This was a higher percentage than military aid, healthcare, roads/sewage/water, democracy, and human rights.

Further Reading

Glad, Marit (2009): Knowledge on Fire: Attacks on Education in Afghanistan
<http://www.iri.org/>
<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan.html>

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