

NEWSLETTER

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Ministry of Education Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
The Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP).

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Editorial

The Ministry of Education of Afghanistan has taken on a gigantic responsibility of improving access to and quality of education in the country. With millions of school-aged Afghans out of school, thousands without a clear way forward on graduating from high school, and millions others struggling to learn to read and write, in over-crowded classrooms or tents or in the open, often from under-qualified, over-worked teachers with access to minimal resources, this is no easy task. Notwithstanding its multi-layered strategies to upgrade access and quality of education nationwide, it inevitably (and with reason) finds itself at the receiving end of harsh criticism from the public, the parliament,

donor governments, and the international community. As a result, the headway the Ministry is making in small steps towards righting these wrongs, is more often than not, overshadowed by the innumerable education needs of the country it is trying to catch up with.

Not only must it take on formidable challenges to address physical, material, and technical needs of this sector, but must also combat situations like the recent incident in Kunduz, where 150 girl students were affected by poisoned drinking water, or the closure of schools in Ghazni in a show of power by anti-government groups, in order to sustain the upward trend in the education sector in Afghanistan.

The April issue of the EQUIP newsletter, strives to put into focus the positive gains made by the Ministry in the face of such complex and extraordinary odds. The newsletter for the month of April focuses primarily on outstanding successes of the Infrastructure Services Department of the EQUIP program in different parts of the country, and reflects on how communities can help and support education initiatives initiated by the Ministry, for their welfare.

We welcome your reactions and comments, which will enable us to produce more interesting and relevant content in our subsequent issues. Please email any suggestions or feedback to zlkh.haq@gmail.com. We look forward to a hearing from you.

Community Outdoes Construction Companies

Community ownership and involvement is key to ensuring quality of education facilities available to their children.

According to a recent Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) monitoring report, based on an inspection of 100 school construction projects in 24 provinces, there was conclusive indication that in general, community contracted school construction projects did better than the school construction projects contracted out to construction companies.

Of the 100 buildings constructed or under construction, 71 were community contracted (CC). Compared to 69% of schools constructed under the National Bidding Process (NBC) deemed to be of satisfactory construction quality, 76% of CC schools were judged as being of satisfactory construction quality. Life safety considerations were also approximately 3% higher in CC school buildings.

According to the report, "Schools that were built under the CC process were of higher construction standard than those built under the NBC".

The Community and School Construction.

Synergies of EQUIP's Infrastructure Services Department (ISD) and Social Mobilization Unit

Making quality schooling available to all Afghan children is a priority concern of the Ministry of Education, and it is investing resources and efforts to establish adequate and accessible school facilities in all parts of the country, be it major cities, small towns, villages, or remote hamlets. EQUIP-supported MOE Infrastructure Services Department (ISD) organizes, manages and oversees school construction, rehabilitation, and building extension activities based on needs identified by the owning communities. Construction contracts are awarded either through a national bidding process or through contracting the community itself to undertake the responsibility.

The stories below are testimonies to the excellent results for schools, when communities took the lead, and decided what was best for their children. They invested effort as well as material resources to ensure the schools would be the best possible, often doing better than projects contracted to construction companies.

Where Communities Invested in School Education

Development does not always come from outside. Communities can improve their own lives by accepting responsibility for development initiatives.



Community Contributes to Provide a Green School Environment

An example of one such community is the inhabitants of Khanabad district of Kunduz province, where people participated actively in the construction of Ghore Shakh School. Not only did the School Management Shura take responsibility for purchasing 2000 square meters of land for the school, and constructing the building, but the local population contributed 210,000 Afghanis to cover the cost of an additional RCC ring to ensure a strong foundation of the school building. They equipped the school with a library and computer laboratory, and further enhanced the facility by adding a well-equipped sports ground and planting trees and flowers in the school yard. The all-boys' middle school has a student population of 440.

Hazrat Ali High School in Kunduz city also benefitted from a fully-involved and committed School Management Shura. The community raised funds to initiate major school improvement projects including paving walkways, digging drains, constructing a mosque and a playground, and creating green spaces in the yard, doing minor repairs on the school rooms and providing furniture for the school that caters to a student population of 2824 girls and boys.

The Human Face – Rana Speaks

“It’s like a dream come true”, says Rana, an 11th grader from Lycee Naswan Qasi girls’ high school in Chaghcharan district Ghor, remarking on the six-room school building under construction – the first real building for a school of 740 students. The school had been functioning with no building, no resources, not even the barest minimum of teaching material until it came under the quality enhancement plans of EQUIP.

“Ours was one of the most deprived schools, with students sitting in the dust under the sun, learning from teachers, without so much as a blackboard. When the science teacher mentioned a microscope or chemicals, it was hard to imagine what they were.

Thanks to the intervention of EQUIP and the Provincial Education Directorate Ghor, we now sit on mats under tents. Our classes have blackboards, and we even have a small library and a laboratory where we can actually see and experience for ourselves, what we were merely memorizing as words in the past. We are extremely grateful to the Ministry for acknowledging our needs, and hopeful that our school will receive further support to expand in the future, from a six-room to a 12-room building.”

Through the intervention of EQUIP’s social mobilizers, a local land owner was persuaded to donate 3000 square meters of land on which the school is being constructed. The school constructed on his land will be named after his father, Mirza Suleiman.

Paranda School in the Picturesque Foothills of Panjsher

Paranda primary school in Paranda village in the hills of Panjsher has a student population of 210, of which 120 are girls. This is yet another example of commitment of members of the community, who contributed in cash and in kind, to cover some of the construction expenses. Ghausuddin made an out-of-pocket contribution of USD 12,000 toward leveling the area, and construction of 14 supporting columns, and one room on the ground floor of the building. Abdul Qudus and Omer Khan contributed a thousand dollars apiece, and Mohammad Saleh USD 500, towards the building construction, 100 chairs and desks, and transportation of material.



Community Contracted Paranda School beside a Mountain Stream in Panjsher

Haji Abdullah contributed fifty wooden beams for the ceiling, and Ruhullah gifted 60 books to the newly established school library.

Impressed by the participation of the community, Herome, a Japanese visitor, also contributed 1000 USD to Paranda Primary School.



A dream come true -- Lycee Naswan Qasi in Ghor – learning under the sun

EQUIP’s Education Quality Enhancement Support Funds Enable Afghan Girls and Boys to Access Modern Scientific Education

The Quality Enhancement support provided to schools enables them to enrich educational resources so that students can benefit from a better quality learning environment in which they have access to experiential and practical learning. The EQUIP grants schools receive on the recommendations of the School Management Shuras, go towards establishing science laboratories, computer classrooms, libraries etc.

The Social Safeguard Staff at EQUIP Come to the Rescue of Muslima.

Muslima is a student of grade IX in Ahmad Shah Baba Mina Girls' High School in Kabul. She was recently faced with considerable psychological and emotional trauma, when the other students and teachers discovered she was recovering from tuberculosis, for which she was undergoing treatment.

Though in the fifth month of treatment there is no real risk of infection, as soon as news of her illness spread, she was totally isolated by students and teachers, who refused to sit or communicate with her. This resulted in such intense psychological discomfort that Muslima decided to give up schooling.

Muslima's father brought the problem to the notice of the Environmental and Social Safeguard Unit at EQUIP, and the Senior Officers responded by taking action. The Social Safeguard focal person, along with Dr. Roshan Rasikh working with EQUIP in the Central Office, and Teacher Hassan Khan, Social Mobilization Supervisor for Kabul city visited the school, and provided awareness to teachers, staff, and students, regarding tuberculosis and its transmission, and assured them that there was no danger of infection from Muslima through social interaction with her.

As a result of their prompt intervention, Muslima is back in school; her classmates have understood the nature of her illness, the unkindness of isolating a classmate, and the need to treat her with dignity and respect.



Boys in a laboratory session in Chahr Qala Kunar



Girls observe a laboratory demonstration in Laghman

The Education Management Information System (EMIS) of the Ministry of Education

In the face of all odds, the Education Management Information System (EMIS) is finally realizing its vision of transforming the Ministry Of Education's (MOE) decision making process into one that is information-based. The new EMIS has changed data management and usage.

Recently EMIS won the attention of the Ministry's leadership and top management, which gave new momentum to reform and improvement efforts by EMIS management and team. The EMIS development plan is being implemented. New equipment was purchased for provincial arms of the EMIS; 250 computer stations and 35 servers have been purchased and will be soon installed and configured in provinces. The provincial offices will be trained to enter data into a well-integrated nationwide EMIS.

For the first time in the Ministry of Education, full provincial narrative reports have been developed by provincial education departments and are now accessible online (<http://moe.gov.af>).

"Though it was a difficult achievement", Hamed Askarzada, head of Monitoring and Reporting Unit says, "the success has now renewed hopes for effective management and utilization of information, which will help in improving access and quality of education for Afghan children". This achievement is further strengthened by new Reporting Procedures approved by the Minister, to regulate reporting and accountability throughout the Ministry – another success of its kind in MoE.

Yet another major achievement of this unit is that the 1390 (2011) school survey data entry has been accomplished. This means that information on all schools and students of Afghanistan is now available for planning and other purposes.