

NEWSLETTER

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The Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP).

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Editorial

The Education Quality Improvement Program of the Ministry of Education proudly presents the first edition of its Newsletter - a monthly publication that aims to provide visibility to real stories about EQUIP-supported programs in the education sector in Afghanistan, which cannot be adequately represented within the formatting and spatial constraints of routine reports. We attempt to give readers a close-up look, and a more in-depth understanding of activities for promoting and improving the education sector,

particularly, girls' education, in Afghanistan. Each monthly issue will focus on specific accomplishments and challenges encountered, and enable a better understanding of EQUIP's priorities and objectives.

The primary focus of this issue of the newsletter is on achievements in the area of teacher education, in particular in Khulm district of Balkh province. It also describes the Teacher Education Directorate's creative approach to build capacities of teachers in insecure areas. We also share lessons learned from organizations working to ensure quality of education for marginalized community groups in Pakistan, and the role and benefits of social mobilization for initiating education programs, in diverse urban and rural settings.

Dr. Seddiq Weera, Strategic Advisor to the Minister of Education also shares with the readers, the aims and plans of EQUIP for the education sector in Afghanistan, define its strategy for reform, and to reiterate its commitment to achieving its goals in the shortest possible time.

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 zikh.haq@gmail.com. We look forward to a hearing from you.

What's New at EQUIP?

After many delays, EQUIP added a Communication Unit to its Central Coordination Office, and hired a Senior Communication Specialist to fill its first staff position.

This Unit, will establish a network linking the Ministry of Education, EQUIP implementing partners, donors, government and international stakeholders, and community groups, thus contributing to transparency, efficiency, and confidence building.

It will seek to share successes, analyze failures, and explore innovations and new ideas with the readers, and enable all involved in Afghanistan's education sector development machinery, to find their rightful place in it.

Milestones in Capacity Building for School Teachers. Teacher Education Department (TED)

All Schools to have Qualified Teachers by 1392 – Khulm Balkh

By year 1392 all school teachers in Khulm district of Balkh will have a minimum 14 years of formal education. This was announced by the District Education Department to a World Bank mission touring Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) and Teacher Development Centers (TDC) in the three Northern provinces of Balkh, Sarepul and Samangan in March. The achievement will be a significant, if small step towards realizing the education quality enhancement goal, by ensuring the availability of qualified teachers in schools.

With 200 teachers already graduated from the in-service training program in TDC Khulm, the district only needs 50 more teachers to enroll in the Teacher Development Center (TDC) this year, to ensure all teachers in the district have a minimum grade 14 education.

INSET – I and II Training Reaches Teachers in Insecure Districts of 11 Provinces



The Teacher Education Department (TED) overcame a major obstacle to provide INSET trainings for teachers in insecure Districts of 11 provinces. This had been a challenge throughout the execution of the DT3 program. TED planned to conduct the trainings in the safer provincial capitals instead, but the project contract did not have provision of funds needed to transport and accommodate teachers coming

from their districts to participate in training workshops in the provincial capitals.

After intensive efforts, in March TED succeeded in having funds allocated for transportation of teachers in the 11 target provinces, including Khost and Ghazni where the education programs are USAID funded. The other nine provinces include, Paktya, Paktika, Zabul, Helmand, Farah, Nimroz, Urozgan, Nooristan and Badghis. As a result, 3453 of the 5000 planned teachers from 47 insecure districts, could participate in INSET-1 & 2 trainings.

Principals in 34 Provinces of Afghanistan Complete SMT-III Training

A creative approach enabled the Teacher Education Department (TED) of the Ministry of Education to ramp up its commitment to enhance the capacity of school principals, so that they could provide administrative as well as academic leadership to their schools. The initiative responded to a recommendation made during the mid-term review, to increase the duration of the School Management Training to further strengthen school principals to play both administrative and academic leadership roles effectively.

TED developed a new SMT-III training package (13 days) covering 20 of 50 essential competencies of school management. The training plan was shared with the Procurement Department in MoE, and both TED and the Procurement Department agreed to bypass lengthy procurement procedures that would delay implementation.

TED trained 400 core members from among provincial Teacher Training College lecturers in Kabul, and assigned them with the task to implement the SMT-III training in the provincial capitals of 34 provinces; the training was

The Human Face - A Person Who Cares

The Ministry of Education's objective of *Education for All* can be achieved; all that is needed is people who care. This was proved by Mohammad Yasin from Cahrsangh Balkh. A farmer by profession, he donated 3260 square meters of his own land for construction of a building for the village girls' school, which had hitherto, been forced to accommodate itself in the inadequate space of the local religious school. M. Yasin donated personal land worth 1,750,000 Afghanis and handed over its documents to the Education Director in 1389. Today construction of the girls' school named after Haji Mirzaqul - M. Yasin's father - is complete, and the building will be formally inaugurated in April.

The nation salutes individuals like Mohammad Yasin, who understand their civic responsibility and believe it worthwhile to give of their personal wealth to promote the cause of girls' education in Afghanistan

successfully completed on March 10, 2012. Thus TED was able to roll out the SMT-III training for more than 21,573 school administrators.

Local Communities in Kapisa Agree to Complete School Construction Projects



EQUIP successfully restarted work on four school construction projects in Nijrab district of Kapisa province in northern Afghanistan, which had remained suspended for over a year. The contractors had left the work incomplete claiming they had incurred losses due to theft of construction material at the hands of anti-government and insurgent elements, and because of other difficulties associated with working in an essentially 'Taliban' controlled area. Local people had grievances against the contractors, who had abandoned the work mid-way, after failing to make payments to them for material purchased and labor. The prevailing insecurity and weak government control in the district were the root causes of these problems.

The World Bank cautioned that support for the development initiatives in Nijrab district would be withdrawn unless the stalemate was broken. EQUIP responded to this by sending the Social Mobilization Coordinator to Kapisa Nijrab, to negotiate settlements with the local communities. The coordinator was accompanied by Mr. Hataam, Advisor to the Ministry of Education and a former 'Mujahid' commander from Kapisa -- a highly influential individual in the area.

Community 'shura' members met the visiting delegation at the district center, and discussed the possibility of completing construction of the two girls' and two boys' schools. As a result of direct interactions with the communities, and the weight thrown in by Mr. Hataam, a prominent figure from their own province, 'shuras' of the four schools signed a written agreement with EQUIP allowing resumption of construction of the four school buildings. According to the agreement, EQUIP promised to terminate its previous construction contracts, report the evading contractors to law enforcement authorities, and facilitate the recovery of money owed to the people once they were apprehended.



Mr. Hatam Advisor to Minister of Education

On observing the construction sites and estimating costs of remaining work, the EQUIP provincial engineers reported that basic construction of the four school buildings could be completed using the residual funds. Memoranda of Understanding were signed between EQUIP and the community 'shuras' to ensure community support for completion of the project. According to the agreements, the remaining construction work would be the

EQUIP and School Education in Afghanistan

*(Dr. Seddiq Weera
Strategic Advisor to the
Minister of Education)*

The Ministry of Education's EQUIP program is going through an important phase of clean-up and reform.

The aim is to ensure that work started late in 2011, is completed in early 2012. Our strategy is to plan better, start early, and expand the pool of competent personnel, to enable the Ministry to implement efficiently and achieve better on the access, equity, and quality fronts.

Restructuring MoE's Social Mobilization network, streamlining performance of the Infrastructure Services Department, and enhancing the supportive role of EQUIP are the key tasks for 2012. Other primary areas of focus are strengthening of all school 'shuras', and initiating strengthening of a smaller number of Provincial Education Directorates in selected provinces.

We are committed to reinforcing the public education system on multiple levels so that Afghanistan is able to achieve its objective of Education for All.

responsibility of the community, and purchase of material would be done by a committee of representatives from EQUIP, district authorities, and the community.

The communities were encouraged to unite and contribute to efforts for their own welfare, and EQUIP promised to purchase locally available material and hire labor from among them.

Social Mobilization and its Impact on Promotion of Education A Learning Exposure Trip to Pakistan

Education is the birth right of every child. Notwithstanding cultural, financial, and administrative constraints, quality education is possible even in difficult and hard-to-reach communities against almost any odds, if there is strong institutional will, ability to improvise, a willingness to adapt, and the determination of believing and committed individuals. This was the lesson with which the EQUIP/ MOE team visiting Pakistan in March returned home.

A 22-member delegation comprised of a team of social mobilizers, social mobilization officers at regional and central levels, the Deputy Program Director at EQUIP, and Provincial Education Directors, went on a 10-day intensive exposure trip to a diverse range of schools in Pakistan, in the third week of March 2012. The objective was to compare working examples of community-supported schools in diverse settings in Pakistan, with current community mobilization activities of EQUIP in Afghanistan.

The team visited 12 rural schools in the Frontier and Punjab provinces -- some of them in remote settings and traditional communities -- that presented terrain, cultural norms, and other social and economic constraints, similar to many remote villages in Afghanistan. The visiting team met school administrators and supporting organizations, and some highly motivated community mobilizers, whose perseverance and courage enabled the schools to become a reality, in places where such schools had been nothing short of a dream before.

Unlike in Afghanistan, these schools were supported by NGOs and not-for-profit 'companies' including the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), the National Rural Support Program (NRSP), SOS Rural Support Program (a subsidiary organization of the SOS villages), Support With Working Solution (SWWS), and other partner entities. They operated in villages and communities that the national education system had failed to reach. The basic difference between the schools observed, and the Ministry of Education schools in Afghanistan was that the schools and communities visited had more autonomy with use of resources available, and much simpler systems of decision-making and implementation than is possible within the parameters of a traditional government system.

The visiting team identified good practices and positive strategies that had yielded positive results, and were easily adaptable in the Afghan context. Most such practices were related to school management and creative pedagogy that produced optimum results using the minimum of basic local resources.

A strong belief in the value of education, and unshakeable commitment to the objective of making it accessible to girls and boys in their communities, had enabled community mobilizers such as Nabila Qazi (who lives and works in a remote village in Kasur district of Punjab close to the Indian border), to brave the initial suspicion and hostility of the community, and bring the priceless gift of literacy to girls and boys of her community.

Members of the visiting team returned enriched and refreshed with ideas for improving and enriching community involvement in school management, as well as practical innovative models for school management and organization that required little additional expense.



Nabila Qazi