



**Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Social Effects of
Community-Based Education, Afghanistan (ALSE)
Research Brief #5: Community participation and the sustainability of
rural education in Afghanistan**

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Research Brief ♦♦ Volume 2 ♦♦ Issue 1 ♦♦ April 2017

Background

Many governments seek to strengthen their role as a public service provider by capitalizing on the capacities of local communities. In Afghanistan, this approach requires transitioning services currently under NGO administration to the public sector, while simultaneously retaining their local relevance. Maintaining effective community involvement in providing education requires policies that clearly articulate communities' roles and responsibilities. This research brief and the next examine ways in which government and communities currently work together to deliver quality education. By better understanding the relations, resources, and capacities that currently inform community participation in education, policymakers will be able to more accurately define and support community management in schools under public administration.

Methods

The findings below come from quantitative and qualitative datasets. We draw upon data from our baseline survey collected from 4,005 households, which describe the willingness of ALSE communities to contribute to education. We consider this alongside qualitative data in the form of 147 interviews with government service providers. The interviews capture the perceptions of district (DED) and provincial education directorate (PED) staff regarding a range of issues related to community outreach classes in rural areas. After coding these interviews inductively, important themes emerged about community participation: notably, an understanding of (1) the working relationship between communities and government education service providers, and (2) the

types of resources that communities contribute to rural outreach classes.

Findings

The government service providers told us of the importance of maintaining good relations with communities. However, they were also often quick to reference impediments to these relations. For example, 53 DED officials (over 70 percent of those interviewed) noted the lack of resources for transportation. The absence of transport reduced their access to communities and resulted in monitoring outreach classes in some villages more than others, thereby biasing their interactions towards communities that were closer to district centers. In other words, although government staff understand the importance of maintaining close relations with communities, scarce resources constrain their interactions and prohibit them from meeting the basic costs of outreach classes. Thus, some government respondents revealed that they ask communities to fund education costs themselves.

We tell them the government doesn't have much ability, you take the initiative. At least send the young kids to your nearby schools as much as possible. If that is not possible, you hire a teacher on your own. Find books. You have a responsibility towards your kids. Now that the government cannot, you take care of it... (DED official).

For their part, communities exhibit remarkably high willingness to contribute to education given the prevalence of poverty. Our baseline survey revealed that overall 33 percent of respondents were willing to

contribute money for teacher salaries. Figures are even higher when it comes to in kind support; for example, 46

Considering the religious beliefs of our people, they consider education essentially one of the principles of life and one of the bases of their life...people are so interested, so enthusiastic (DED official).

percent of households were willing to contribute food to support teachers, although in both cases there were important differences by province (see table one).

Table one:

Province	Households willing to contribute to teacher salaries (and standard deviation) ¹		Households willing to contribute food to support teacher payments (and standard deviation)	
Kapisa	26%	(SD = 0.156)	36%	(SD = 0.163)
Parwan	19%	(SD = 0.118)	35%	(SD = 0.118)
Herat	36%	(SD = 0.321)	42%	(SD = 0.185)
Ghor	47%	(SD = 0.173)	53%	(SD = 0.180)
Bamiyan	41%	(SD = 0.153)	48%	(SD = 0.109)
Daykundi	48%	(SD = 0.171)	66%	(SD = 0.120)
Overall	34%	(SD = 0.205)	46%	(SD = 0.186)

The government service providers we spoke to recounted numerous anecdotes about the ways in which communities demonstrated their commitment to education. For example, community members sold assets to cover the costs of education, and communities ensured the protection of MoE staff and teachers during times of insecurity. Yet interviewees also revealed that when households do financially contribute to education it can be at the expense of other basic consumption items such as food. In short, when households are required to make material contributions to outreach classes it may have undesirable consequences for their welfare and promises little in a way of sustainability. Furthermore, some respondents indicated that the poor resourcing of outreach classes by government negatively affects

¹ To obtain these numbers we calculated the average level of willingness per village. We then took the average of village means by province to obtain the overall province means reported as the percentages shown in table one. Willingness was based on a YES / NO response of households to the question: "Which of the following would YOUR HOUSEHOLD be willing to contribute to support a village school? Your household will not be asked to contribute these items. I am only interested in knowing what you would be willing to contribute. Would your household be willing to contribute, a. Money for teacher's salary, b. Another form of payment for the teacher that is not money, such as food...".

community perceptions of education. As one DED official told us: "the parents of the students said, 'there are no facilities, there are no books in the school, there is no stationary, there are no good teachers, our school doesn't have a building, our students don't learn anything there. Instead of the student going there and sitting there for four or five years without doing anything, it is better if they do some work, or work as a labourer. That way at least they will be able to buy a bit of food.'"

Policy implications

As elsewhere in the world, communities in Afghanistan do—and want to—participate in their children's education. Our data reveal that they do so by supporting the administration and management of schools in important material and non-material ways. These efforts undoubtedly help to strengthen the quality and relevance of education services in rural areas of Afghanistan. Yet our data also reveal that community support is in some cases used to replace rather than strengthen the government's obligation to provide education. Furthermore, the government's commitment to working with communities is undermined by a lack of resources. This overburdens communities and may negatively affect their demand for, and perception of, the value of education. To sustain community management of education, we recommend the following:

- 1) Increase resources for district and provincial level education directorates in order to alleviate the financial burden placed on communities;
- 2) Consider engaging communities by strengthening and building upon community values and contributions that do not financially overburden already poor households. This should include encouraging communities' participation in school-based administration and management by engaging their commitment and associated non-material strengths and capacities.

ALSE Looking Forward

In the next research brief, we examine data on community management capacities to identify more sustainable forms of community managed education.