

AFGHANISTAN

Country Summary of Higher Education

Background:

Recent expansion of tertiary education sector with historical background: The Government of Afghanistan (GoA) has taken bold steps to tackle the rehabilitation and development needs of the country. In December 2001, Afghan factions met in Bonn under UN auspices to agree on a transitional process leading to elections for a “broad-based, gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic, and fully representative Government”. Much has been achieved since then including the adoption of a new Constitution in January 2004 and the election of the first democratically elected President in December 2004. The inauguration of the National Assembly in December 2005 marked the formal conclusion of the Bonn process, a major achievement.

In the past five years, the government of Afghanistan has made notable efforts to revive the higher education sector in parallel with ongoing progress in primary and secondary education. Nineteen higher education institutions have reopened their doors and enrollment has jumped from 4,000 students in 2001 to 37,000 in the fall of 2007. With students returning from Pakistan and other countries and the students graduating from high schools, demand for higher education has been on the rise. There is an urgent need for well-educated and trained leadership in all sectors of the economy. Rebuilding higher education is a pressing and critical need for Afghanistan. There continues to be a critical shortage of professionals such as engineers, technicians, administrators, accountants, agriculturists, and business leaders, to meet the needs of reconstruction, growth and poverty reduction.

Tertiary education system: The body that regulates and controls all public higher education institutions is the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). All public higher education institutions in Afghanistan having little to no autonomy and they are subject to rigid administrative regulations and rules.

Quality assurance mechanisms: To date, Afghanistan has had little to no experience with implementing quality assurance for its higher education system. Due to the devastation caused by thirty years of conflict, the needs of the higher education sector remain that of rebuilding and setting a foundation for a long term development process in the sector.

Government Strategy & Policy Reforms: In recognition of the enormous challenges and opportunities facing Afghanistan, especially in the higher education sector, the government of Afghanistan envisions developing a post-secondary education that is inclusive, equitable and accessible to all meritorious Afghans regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or geography. It aims to establish a system which is rooted in and relevant to the country’s history, traditions, socioeconomic and cultural reality, its strategic location, its geopolitics and the numerous challenges it faces. The GoA’s Compact goals for the higher education sector is that by end 2010, the enrolment of students to universities will be 100,000 with at least 35% female students; and the curriculum in Afghanistan's public universities will be revised to meet the development needs of the country and private sector growth.

The government has drafted a new higher education law which has been cleared by the cabinet and is waiting endorsement by the Parliament. The law stipulates the responsibilities of the state, public providers and private providers but does not discuss increased institutional autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions. Of note is that the government is allowing private institutions to operate in Afghanistan for the first time.

Summary Data Table (Data in 2007):

Number of Higher Institution	19		
	Males	Females	Total
Number of Students	26,398	7,668	34,066
Number of Lecturers	1,795	302	2,097
Number of Lecturers by Education	112	2	114
Lecturers with Masters Degrees	628	80	708
Lecturers with Bachelors Degrees	1,055	220	1,275

Source: Ministry of Higher Education Afghanistan

Issues:

Physical Facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, the physical infrastructure is grossly inadequate (electricity and water supply are often insufficient and/or not functioning and classroom, laboratory and library facilities are very rudimentary). • Basic computer facilities are lacking for both instruction and administration. • Ongoing repair and rehabilitation activities are ad-hoc, and facility planning based on a strategic plan for the university is non-existent.
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The low enrollment (average is 1,983 students per institution - 3 institutions have less than 200 students). Consolidation of institutions is necessary to attain a size that is economically viable and thus leads to a better chance of reaching reasonable quality standards. • Very low student to professor ratio (e.g. 4 to 1 and 6 to 1 in some universities). • Available resources such as classroom space are not used efficiently; most university classes finish at 1pm.
Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low quality due to an acute shortage of qualified faculty members. Many faculty lack sufficient credentials and expertise for their critical role in academia • Curricula, teaching materials and pedagogical methods are grossly outmoded and a heavy reliance on dictation as the principal way of imparting knowledge. • No existing quality assurance mechanism
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of relevance and linkages with the economy as faculties and departments work in isolation from employers. • Neither the universities nor the polytechnics have a Board of Trustees with representatives from the world of work and civil society.
Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The budget of higher education institutions is barely sufficient to cover salaries, free dormitory costs and highly subsidized meals for the students. • Resources are not available for the purchase of indispensable pedagogical inputs such as internet access, textbooks, journals and lab materials. • Budgets are allocated purely on the basis of historic trends without any objective criteria, thereby offering no incentives for efficiency and innovation.
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most higher education institutions have little autonomy, if any, and are subject to rigid administrative regulations and rules. • The notion of planning, management and performance indicators is both foreign and weak in the higher education system and in each institution. • Employment status and salary scale of faculty need to be rationalized (to attract better qualified faculty) as currently both teaching and administrative staff are civil servants and their pay scale is confounded with civil service grades and academic ranks.