



Chapter-3

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Education



## Education

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The Government of Afghanistan has clearly stated its commitment to further girls' education:

*The evidence is clear that investment in education, with special effort to include girls, is the single most important investment in development that any country can make. Girls that have been to school transform their country as they grow up. They tend to marry later and have fewer children who are more likely to be healthy. They help increase household income and in turn they insist on access to education and health care for their own children.<sup>53</sup>*

In 2001 the overall adult literacy rate in Afghanistan was estimated at 36%, while for adult women it was 21%,<sup>54</sup> and the subsequent Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (2003) revealed large urban-rural discrepancies for both sexes.<sup>55</sup> These figures show that Afghanistan's education indicators are among the worst in the world,

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<sup>53</sup> *Securing Afghanistan's Future*, 2004: 13

<sup>54</sup> Adult literacy rate relates to the age group 15 and above. *The EFA 2000 Country Assessment Report* underlines that data on education is not only scant and incomparable, but the reliability of available data is also highly questionable. The conclusion is thus that the data presented at best is indicative of certain trends relating to status of education in Afghanistan.

<sup>55</sup> According to the nation-wide Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (2003), the estimated national illiteracy level (persons aged >15 years) is 56.8% for men and 85.9% for women, but with large urban-rural discrepancies for both sexes (40% vs. 63.9% for men and 71.9% vs. 91.9% for women).

and that girls and the rural population are especially disadvantaged and have been for decades.<sup>56</sup>

This chapter summarizes trends in key education indicators for Afghanistan, and also lays out the main constraints to education for girls in particular. While a significant leap in enrollment has taken place since the collapse of the Taliban rule, almost half of school age children are still not enrolled. Furthermore, there are huge regional disparities, as well as rural-urban disparities. A number of supply factors that affect children's and, in particular, girls' access to school are the lack of school facilities, in particular girls' schools and girls' secondary schools; lack of female teachers; and insecurity. Several socio-cultural and political factors are also identified as having a negative impact on girls' enrollment and school retention, such as poverty, targeting of girls' schools by opponents of the present government, and culturally determined notions of education as 'unnecessary' or 'harmful' for girls. Considerable regional and ethnic heterogeneities exist within Afghanistan – not only in the matter of constraints, but also in the matter of opportunities. Thus for example in some regions women's mobility is more constrained than in others. However, it is difficult to separate the issue of cultural barriers to mobility from those of security – how much of the constraint on women's mobility, and allowing girls to walk to school, is related to the poor security situation – which may in fact improve as political stability comes about? How much of the demand is constrained by the lack of supply of female teachers, which in turn may be related to security as well as differing cultural norms?

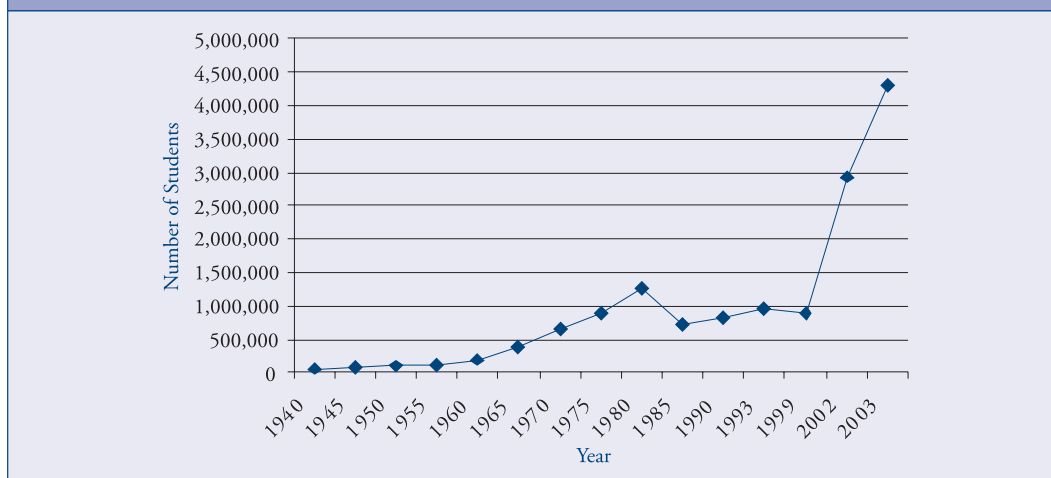
After the downfall of the Taliban, Afghanistan saw the highest school enrollment rates in its history, with more than 4.3 million children enrolled in primary and secondary school in 2003,

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<sup>56</sup> **Sources:** The source material with the widest coverage is the *Education for All (EFA) 2000 Country Assessment Report*, which is compiled every decade. The 2000 report is based upon published school data for the first half of the EFA decade, and additional school data that were collected in 1999 from 25 international NGOs/Aid Agencies supporting basic education in 22 of the 29 Afghan provinces. Pre-conflict national-level educational statistics are available in Hunte (1978). *The Report of the EC Rapid Reaction Mechanism Assessment Mission (Education)* by Lahr and Azarbaijani-Moghaddam (2002) is also national in scope and adds post-2001 data based on consultations and field visits. The survey of Girls' Education (Altai Consulting December 2003) is based on 300 in-depth interviews in 6 geographical areas (Kabul urban, Kabul rural, Herat, Bamiyan, Khost and Kandahar). The Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University, has in its Human Security and Livelihoods of Rural Afghans, 2002-2003, used the NRVA (Nationwide Risk and Vulnerability Assessment) survey data and added up with primary research of its own in Badghis, Balkh, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar.

of which one-third were girls. In the age group 7-12 years, 67% of boys and 40.5% of girls were enrolled,<sup>57</sup> with such a high level of girls' enrollment in particular representing an impressive achievement. Likewise, the number of schools has increased from 3,800 in 2002 to 7,134 currently.<sup>58</sup> The Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports that demand for girls' education is surging and that the girls' schools that opened for informal winter sessions in all parts of the country after the defeat of the Taliban were overflowing in 2003, even in traditional Pushtun areas like Griskh in Helmand Province, where 500 girls showed up on the first day. At Kabul University, more than 18,000 students took the admissions examination at the beginning of 2002. Thus demand for education is high, but there are also serious constraints.

**Figure 1: The Growth of Student Enrollment: Grades 1-12 (1940-2003)**



Source: World Bank, 2004b, Technical Annex, p. 5

The spurt in enrollment still represents only a little more than half of school-age children and 40% of the girls. Moreover, these figures hide dramatic regional and urban-rural disparities, with girls representing less than 15% of total enrollment in nine provinces in the east and south. According to a UNO/ESSP survey conducted in 1993, 70% of all primary school

<sup>57</sup> Central Office of Statistics & UNICEF, 2004

<sup>58</sup> Planning Department, Ministry of Education, 2003 (quoted from Report Card: Progress on Compulsory Education (Grades 1-9), 2004)

students were from rural areas, but with vast differences by region and province. Among the 70% students enrolled in rural areas, 65% were boys and only 5% girls, while in among the 30 % enrolled in urban areas the corresponding figures were 23% boys and 7% girls.<sup>59</sup> There are also glaring regional imbalances – in 1990 36% of all primary school facilities were located in the northern region, serving only 27% of the population. By 1999, the situation had become more balanced, with the under-served Southern region having increased its share from 11% to 26% of schools, while the West continued to be under-served.

In the South Asian regional context Afghanistan lags behind in education by a substantial margin. While the average number of years of schooling for girls is 2.5 years in Pakistan and 1.8 years in Bangladesh, in Afghanistan it is less than one year. Similar disparities between Afghanistan and the rest of the region exist in average years of education for men as well. This has a serious bearing on skill levels and productivity – so essential for longer-term development and especially when a country is undergoing a reconstruction process.

## The Policy Context

The historical evolution of education policy and its politicization has been a major factor in the uneven development of education in Afghanistan. Successive governments and political groups have used education, and girls' education in particular, as a launching pad for ideological and political maneuvering. Years of conflict have taken their toll on educational infrastructure and access. In 1935, primary education was officially made compulsory and free and was constitutionally guaranteed in 1964, but serious nationwide implementation was lacking for many years. In 1975, several years prior to the conflict (which started with the Saur Revolution/PDPA coup in 1978), only 11.4% of Afghanistan's population of six years of age or above were literate, and a significantly greater proportion of males were literate than females. In urban settings 14.8% of males were literate while for rural women the figure was as low as 0.6%.<sup>60</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s, schools and educational institutions turned into ideological battlefields between the increasingly vocal Communist and Islamist movements,<sup>61</sup> and after

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<sup>59</sup> Lahr & Azerbaijani-Moghadam, 2002:14

<sup>60</sup> Hunte, 1978

<sup>61</sup> Olesen, 1995

the Communist coup in 1978, the school system became one of the first victims of the long conflict. Initially, the PDPA government pushed hard for increasing enrollment rates and also launched ambitious adult education programs, which enthusiastic local party workers tried to force village women to attend. The government utilized the school system to consolidate its position and even sent more than 50 000 Afghans to the Soviet Union for training and education<sup>62</sup>. A major backlash was unavoidable and sparked revolt against the government; large parts of the existing educational infrastructure were targeted and destroyed by the *mujahedin*. Similarly the PDPA, and later the *mujahedin* used the education system to further their political ends, even more than had pre-1979 governments. The quality of education suffered, and the rural areas were hardest hit with many teachers killed and schools destroyed. In 1983, the Afghan Foreign Minister admitted in the UN that 50% of schools in Afghanistan were destroyed, and by 2003 the ADB estimated that 80% of all school buildings at all levels had been damaged or destroyed .

The majority of formal educational institutions in Afghanistan are sex-segregated from grades 1-12. In 1974 only 12.3% of schools (all levels) were girls' schools, and the geographical disparity was also great – 30% of the country's lycees were located in Kabul, and in some provinces there were no lycees at all for girls.<sup>63</sup> In 1979, as few as about 3,500 schools existed in all,<sup>64</sup> and only 13.1% of these were girls' schools. The PDPA government's pro-active secular education policy led to an increase in access, so that by 1990 almost 20% of primary schools were girls' schools. However, the ongoing conflict after the collapse of the PDPA government in 1992 resulted in a worsening security situation and in a sharp reduction in both boys' and girls' schools. In 1993 only 13.2% of schools were girls' schools - a return to the situation of 15 years earlier.<sup>65</sup> Access to education deteriorated further from 1994 onward as a result of the Taliban's draconian policies on girls' education and female employment. By 1996-97, female education was prohibited and only 2% of Directorate [government-managed] schools were girls' schools, while many boys' schools were gradually transformed into *madrasas* (religious schools) in the same period. Despite these official

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<sup>62</sup> *The EFA 2000 Assessment Country Reports. Afghanistan.* [www.2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/afghanistan/rapport\\_1.html](http://www.2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/afghanistan/rapport_1.html)

<sup>63</sup> Hunte, 1978, p.24

<sup>64</sup> A school run in a village generally covering primary grades 1 to 3 only. These schools often had no 'formal' building (Lahr & Azerbaijani-Moghadam, 2002)

<sup>65</sup> *The EFA 2000 Assessment Country Reports. Afghanistan*

restrictions, female primary education continued to some degree, supported by NGOs. When these schools are included, a proportionate increase in girls' schools appears, reaching almost 14.5% of total number of schools in 1999, mainly due to the increase in NGO-funded girls' schools in the Eastern and Central regions where the Taliban's closing down of the Directorate managed [government-managed] girls' schools was felt the most strongly. The resulting proportionate increase in girls' schools during the 1990s was also partly due to the reduction in the number of boys' schools.

## Enrollment Rates

As pointed out earlier, enrollment rates remained very low until the mid-1960s, when a gradual increase took place over the next decade but still retaining huge gender and urban-rural disparities. In the 1980s improvements of opportunities in urban areas occurred as a result of the PDPA government, while education in rural areas suffered due to the conflict. The 1990s saw collapse of the urban infrastructure and a decrease in government responsibility across the country for the education sector. The Taliban's accession to power resulted in the virtual closing down of girls' school as indicated in the GER for girls of 5% in 1999 (excluding enrollment in informal schools). With women comprising over 70% of qualified teachers in Kabul, the Taliban ban on women working also had a negative impact on boys' education, while on the other hand creating a large pool of otherwise unoccupied women teachers available to teach girls in the informal sector.<sup>66</sup> Support provided by the assistance community was piecemeal and project-oriented with little

**Table 5: Gross Enrollment Ratios by Gender**

	1990	1995	2003
Gross Primary Enrollment Rate (Female)	19	32	40
Gross Primary Enrollment Rate (Male)	35	63	67
Gross Primary Enrollment Rate (Total)	27	49	54
Girls Enrollment Share, Primary (%)	34	32	34

*Source: World Bank, 2004c, p. 15, UNESCO, 2000*

<sup>66</sup> (E/CN.42/200/18, para 35, quoted from Barakat & Wardell, 2001 p. 29)

standardization, but it still led to an increase in facilities and enrolment in rural areas with the development of new and innovative community-support models. On the other hand lack of standardization might have enabled agencies to work with communities to develop alternatives.<sup>67</sup>

The increasing enrollment during the 1990s resulted in a more even distribution across regions – with the eastern border areas showing a higher rate of increase than the Northern and Central areas which used to have the highest enrollment. This was due to the higher level of involvement of NGOs in the eastern regions.

The enrollment figures for 2003 (age group 7-12 years) reveal a very positive development with 67% of boys and 40.5% of girls enrolled.[but only an 8% increase over 1995, if the figures are to be believed.]<sup>68</sup> However, a close look at the net enrollment in disaggregated form reveals continuing stark regional and gender disparities. The net enrollment rate exceeds 80% for both boys and girls in Kabul, Herat and Mazar cities. Moreover, in three locations – Herat City, Badakhshan Province, and Herat Province<sup>69</sup> — girls’ net enrollment exceeds boys’. On

**Table 6: Changes in Distribution of Enrollment among Regions during the EFA (Education for All) Decade**

Regions	1990	1999
Northern	22.4%	18.5%
Eastern	5.8%	17.4%
Western	9.6%	3.4%
Southern	5.2%	23.8%
Central	57%	36.8%

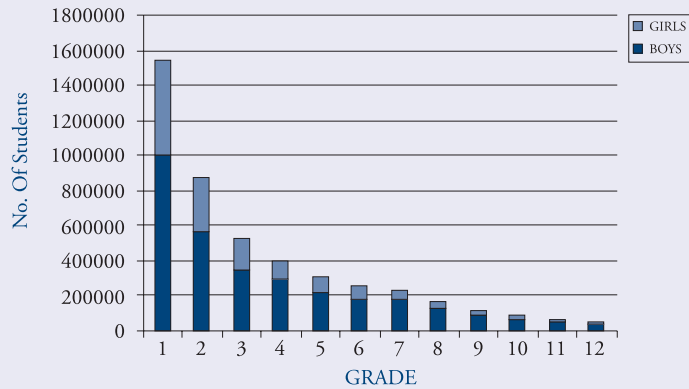
*Source: The EFA 2000 Country Report, 2000, Afghanistan, UNESCO*

<sup>67</sup> Global Movement for Children Afghanistan Working Group, 2001

<sup>68</sup> Central Office of Statistics & UNICEF, 2004

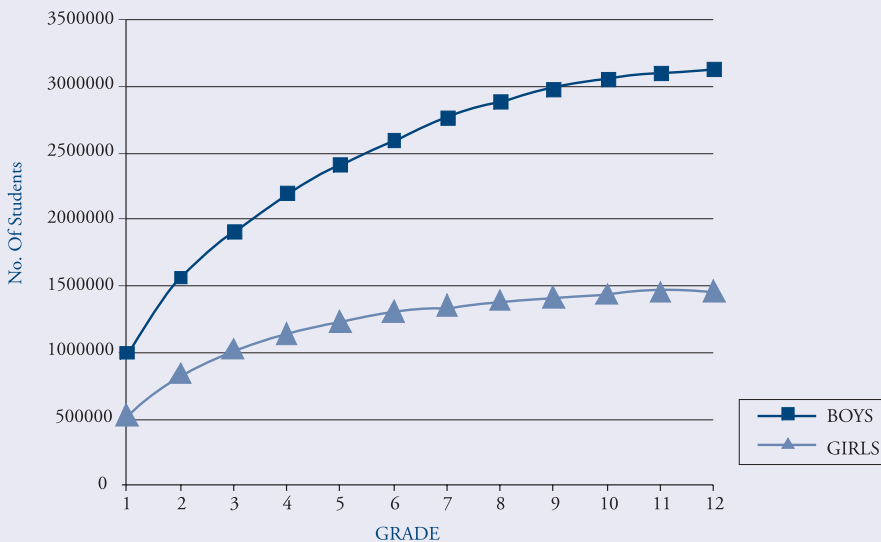
<sup>69</sup> Net enrollment rate is 87% in Kabul city (boys 92%, girls 81%), 86% in Herat city (84% boys, 88% for girls) and 85% in Mazar-i Sharif (86% boys, 85% girls). World Bank Annex, 2004

Figure 2: Student Enrollment by Grade: 2003



Source: Planning Department, Ministry of Education

Figure 3: Cumulative Enrollment by Gender



Source: Investing in Afghanistan's Future. Education Policy Note. World Bank, (Draft, June 2004: p5)

the other hand, in the three provinces of Badghis, Helmand and Uruzgan, the total net enrollment rate is less than 20%, with the ratio for girls being as low as 1% in Badghis and Zabul provinces.

Secondary school enrollment is low for both boys and girls, but there has been considerable improvement since the end of 2001, when there were almost no girls in secondary schools, largely as the Taliban authorities had closed the majority of the limited number of girls' schools available. A few girls attended some single sex secondary schools in north-eastern Afghanistan, in areas beyond Taliban control.<sup>70</sup> Access to secondary education was and is constrained by a number of factors, particularly the number of and location of secondary schools. In the past many district centers had one boys' and one girls' secondary school, catering mostly to urban students. The NRVA indicates that secondary school opportunities for girls are still severely limited in rural areas.

## Retention Rate

As discussed earlier, enrollment rates are only part of the story, with retention in school being another major part. In 1978, Hunte reported extremely high school dropout rates, and attendance that dropped drastically as educational levels increased; at the lycee level only 11.9% of the males in this age group were enrolled as compared to a very low 1.4% for females of lycee age.<sup>71</sup> Recent assessments show that was little improvement in retention until 1999. Evidence from the 1990s indicates that problems of low retention affect all rural students irrespective of gender considerably more than urban students, but also that girls missed out on the great increase in retention rate which boys benefited from – doubtless due to all the upheavals related to girls' education through the 1990s. No recent information is available on the number of students per secondary grade, nor on completion rates through grade<sup>72</sup>. In 1993, roughly three students out of 100 enrolled in grade 1 completed 12th grade<sup>20</sup>. In 1999, the average drop-out rate was 57% for grades 1-5, with 74% of girls and 56% of boys dropping out.

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<sup>70</sup> Lahr & Azerbaijani-Moghadam, 2002, p.13

<sup>71</sup> Hunte, 1978, p.25

<sup>72</sup> Survey University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1993 (quoted from Lahr & Azerbaijani-Moghadam, 2002, p. 16)

Table 7: Survival of Educational Cohorts in the 1990s

Area & Gender	1. grade		2. grade		3. grade		4. grade		5. grade		6. grade	
	1993	1999	1993	1999	1993	1999	1993	1999	1993	1999	1993	1999
Rural boys	1000		680		570		460		350		270	
Rural girls	1000		500		430		290		190		150	
Urban boys	1000		600		550		490		420		340	
Urban girls	1000		540		450		350		270		210	
Overall boys	1000	1000	660	936	570	728	470	577	370	494	290	440
Overall girls	1000	1000	540	908	440	689	320	426	230	351	180	261

*Source: The EFA 2000 Assessment Country Reports. Afghanistan. UNESCO, 2000*

## Tertiary Education

Kabul University was established in 1932, but until 1961 only men could receive a higher education in Afghanistan. In 1961 all faculties were made coeducational, and the University of Nangarhar was established with Kabul Polytechnic following soon after. Twelve percent of university students were female in 1975.<sup>73</sup> After 1978, Kabul University suffered persecution of its staff, of which 35 faculty members were executed and another 260 fled the country. On the other hand, institutions of higher education were opened in Balkh, Herat, Kandahar, Faryab and Kunduz – a total of 12 institutions led by Kabul - as part of the PDPA government's policies to expand tertiary education. Until the civil war of the 1990s, this system of higher education was largely intact. In 1990, UNESCO estimated that there were 1,342 teachers at the tertiary level, one quarter of whom were women, and that women made up one-third of the student body. Since then, however, most university professors left the country although the University of Balkh continued to function through the 1990s, and in 1996 it still boasted of 40% female students and 20% female faculty.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Kalmthout, 2001

<sup>74</sup> Asian Development Bank 2003, p. 20; Interview with local authorities in Mazar-i-Sharif, 1996

In the 1980s the first private university was established for Afghan refugees in Pakistan with Arab support and linked to one of the seven *mujahedin* parties recognized in Pakistan. Other 'universities' were opened by political parties in Pakistan, one of them exclusively for females, but they were all closed down in 1998 by the Pakistani authorities due to lack of government certification. In 1999, the closed universities were combined into one institution functioning under Pakistani supervision, and the campuses were opened for 1,500 males and 700 female students.<sup>75</sup>

Currently, according to the Ministry of Higher Education, in the academic year 2002/03 more than 11,000 students were enrolled at the universities in Kabul and the provinces, of which 30% were women. More than half the students were enrolled in the four institutions of higher education in Kabul, and comparatively more female students were enrolled there than in the provinces. In Fall 2003 enrollment increased to 31,000 (19% were female students) and all 17 higher institutions were operating.<sup>76</sup> However, women from the provinces who choose to pursue higher education in Kabul face the problem of limited access to dormitories.<sup>77</sup> While women thus are coming back into the educational institutions, they are still vastly under-represented within the Ministry of Education, where only 4% of senior management staff (heads of departments, deputies and the minister together) are women.<sup>78</sup>

## Barriers to Female Education

The MICS of 2003 addressed the issue of why children (aged 7-12) are not enrolled in school.<sup>79</sup> Both urban and rural families refer to 'distance' as the most common reason for not sending their children to school. While 29% of rural parents refer to the inadequacy of the school facility and 24% to the lack of a separate facility, i.e. lack of a girls' school, as the reason for not sending their child/daughter to school, these are far less common reasons for the urban population, which are better served with school facilities. However, 'domestic work' and schooling 'not necessary' are quite frequently mentioned by both urban and rural households,

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<sup>75</sup> Dupree, N. June 8, 1999. Global Movement for Children Afghanistan Working Group., June 2001.

<sup>76</sup> World Bank 2004c.

<sup>77</sup> National Human Development Report, 2004, p. 69

<sup>78</sup> Lahr and Azerbaijani-Moghadam, 2002, p.24

<sup>79</sup> Central Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2004

**Table 8: Cause of not Enrolling in School for Children (7-12) 2003**

	Distance (%)	Inadequate facility (%)	No separate school (%)	Domestic work (%)	Not necessary (%)	Household income (%)
Urban	25.5	9.6	13.6	18.7	20.1	10.1
Rural	39.5	29.0	23.6	16.9	14.1	6.6
National	37.2	25.8	22.0	17.2	15.0	7.1

*Source: Afghanistan- Progress of Provinces. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003. Central Office of Statistics/UNICEF, 2004*

interestingly enough with a higher frequency among urban households. These figures are a clear indication to planners that lack of access and lack of adequate facilities, including lack of separate girls' schools, constitute the main obstacles to school enrollment. Other factors are lack of toilets and water in schools; ADB reports that approximately one-third of the schools have no identifiable water source, and less than 15% have toilets for children's use,<sup>80</sup> and that this discourages particularly older girls' from remaining in school. Considering the dramatic regional disparities in enrollment, this calls for a major effort in expanding the coverage of quality schools for boys and girls all over the country. As far as the urban population is concerned, increased attention should be paid to the households' domestic demands on children's labor and ensuring that the curriculum will convince parents that education is not only relevant but also 'necessary'.

## Female Teachers

Girls' enrollment is determined by not only the availability of girls' schools but also whether there are female teachers. The urban-rural distribution of teachers was (and still is) highly uneven in favor of urban areas, particularly in the capital and other cities in the north and west of the country. The educational system as well as the teachers fell victim to the conflict and insecurity following the PDPA coup d'état in 1978. Schools were destroyed and many teachers killed because they were seen as representing the values of the Communist government.

<sup>80</sup> ADB, 2003, p. 8

**Table 9: Proportion of Female Teachers over Time  
(Primary and Secondary School)**

Year	Total number of teachers	Female teachers % of female teachers	Estimated number
1979	37 000	20%	7 400
1990	16 500	59%	9 700
1993	23 200	13%	3 000
2000	27 200	10%	2 700

*Source: The EFA 2000 Assessment Country Reports. Afghanistan. UNESCO, 2000 p. 12, Lahr & Azerbaijani-Moghadam, 2002, p. 10*

During the 1990s, the absolute number of employed teachers decreased and the proportion of female teachers was also reduced, with the result that in 2000 the number of female teachers was between one half and 1/3 of what it had been in 1979. Of these, more than 60% were working outside government schools (in NGO run schools). There are now over 70,000 teachers, 28% of whom are women (i.e. about 19,600), but geographical and rural-urban disparities are still glaring: For example in the Khost province there are 1,374 teachers for grades 1 to 9, and only nine of them are women.

Higher education experiences a similar gender disparity among its teaching staff. In 2003 around 12% of professors in 2003 were female, but while they constituted 1/6 of professors with a Bachelor degree only 1/13 of professors with a Master degree were

**Table 10: Number of Female Teachers for grades 1-9**

Region	Female Teachers	Total no. of Teachers
Kabul	7,028	8,821
Badakhshan	569	3,315
Zabul	37	860
Khost	9	1,374

*Source: Planning Department, Ministry of Education, 2003 - quoted from Report Card: Progress on Compulsory Education (Grades 1-9), 2004: Table 3*

**Table 11: Professors by Gender and Qualification (2003)**

	Male		Female		Total	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Bachelor	840	46%	158	9%	998	54%
Master	650	35%	61	3%	711	39%
Ph.D.	130	7%	2	0%	132	7%
Total	1620	88%	221	12%	1841	100%

*Source: World Bank, 2004c*

female. Only 2 female professors had a PhD as compared to 130 male professors (see Table 11).

## Marriage and Social Norms

The norm of early marriage creates both social and legal impediments to girls' education. Not only do girls drop out due to increased domestic responsibilities after marriage, but a law passed in the mid-1970s prohibiting married women from attending high-school classes was upheld by the Afghan government in September 2003, and defended on grounds that it was meant to "protect unmarried girls from learning explicit details about sex from their married classmates".<sup>81</sup> Therefore, to cater to the needs of married girls in Kabul, the Ministry of Education set up a vocational high school in the Ministry of Women's Affairs. In 2004, the law was finally changed by a Presidential Decree at the initiative of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, lifting the prohibition against married women attending high school. With the formal obstacles removed, married girls may still face difficulties in remaining at school alongside unmarried girls, since objections from other parents and religious leaders could be anticipated according to various school administrators in Kabul.<sup>82</sup>

Traditionally, the majority of Afghan parents are largely indifferent toward or even hostile to formal education for girls. It was and is believed by more conservative parents that formal

<sup>81</sup> From the Afghan Recovery Report, produced by the Institute of War and Peace Reporting, November 5, 2003

<sup>82</sup> Bahgam & Mukhatari, 2004, p.14-15

education will corrupt girls and that this will poison the whole community, as women and girls are the repository of family 'honor'.<sup>83</sup> There has also been a perception that formal schooling is irrelevant in preparing children in rural communities for their gender roles as adults – girls as wives and mothers, boys as 'providers' and guardians.

In Badakhshan, which is characterized by a comparatively favorable climate toward girls' education, girls still tend to drop out around puberty, because they are kept at home to prepare for marriage (which may happen at an age as young as 13). Sometimes, it is because families cannot afford the *burqa* for an older girl, which she may need to wear on her way to school. If the girls manage to stay in school after the onset of puberty, then they seem more likely to complete grade 12 than boys. This may be because the economic opportunity cost of keeping boys in school is greater than for girls.<sup>84</sup> But even where social attitudes are not against education for girls, for rural girls their comparatively limited mobility curtails this theoretical right. Girls typically do not travel or even walk beyond the village, and this results in enormous difference between boys and girls in terms of their ability to access secondary schools in their district (ibid, p. 35).

All of these issues apart, the record enrollment of girls after the fall of the Taliban is a clear indicator of the present positive attitude among the majority of the population toward education, especially for girls. The girls' schools that opened for informal winter sessions in all parts of the country after the defeat of the Taliban were overflowing, even in very traditional areas like Giriskh in Helmand Province where 500 girls showed up the first day.<sup>85</sup>

In 2003 UNICEF commissioned a study of the attitudes behind the low priority granted to girl's education in Afghanistan and the ways to change this situation.<sup>86</sup> The findings were encouraging in the sense that they revealed the clear positive values attached to education by men and women across all social groups, as well as the general understanding that education

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<sup>83</sup> Schutte, even states on the basis of field research in three urban settings that not only may girl's education be considered harmful, but bride-price may even fall if the bride is too knowledgeable since "nobody wants to marry an educated woman"

<sup>84</sup> *Badakhshan*. Strategic Monitoring Unit, 2001, p. 33-34

<sup>85</sup> ADB, 2003

<sup>86</sup> Altai Consulting, 2003

for boys as well as for girls should be considered a religious duty. Among the school-age generation, the wish for education was unanimous, and interestingly enough, boys were also strongly in favor of girls receiving education. Among the constraints, the main factors identified were resistance to education from illiterate parents, notably fathers, as they were seen as the key decision-makers regarding children's permission to go to school. Other important impediments identified were lack of access, i.e. girls' schools located far away, girls' domestic work, and poverty, i.e. the family can not manage without the labor/income of the son or daughter, or cannot afford the expenses associated with schooling such as school uniforms, stationery and the like. In general, the study found that poverty plays a dominant

### Box 5: Innovations and Entry-Points to Enhance Girls' Education

The International Rescue Committee has negotiated with local communities to get their consent for older girls' continuation to secondary levels by community provision of transport to a secondary school in an adjacent village, teaching single-grade cohorts at separate times in a classroom, and using a house-based location in the village. Similar community consultations, stressing the virtues of education for all age groups, facilitated agreement regarding provision of learning opportunities for young women who missed out or failed to complete schooling during years of conflict and political exclusion.

The Afghanistan Institute of Learning has found that communities consider linkage to health education appropriate. Community suggestions to include domestic studies or health care in addition to the required academic subjects for girls at secondary level perpetuate what are considered appropriate gender roles. But they also offer the opportunity to introduce good practice in terms of efficiency and outcomes and thus may help meet female practical gender needs. The broad concept of domestic sciences have in other conservative societies helped to pioneer female education, apart from its potential impact on household health and nutrition. Community-derived concepts of *relevance* have also determined content of 'second chance' education for girls. In the experience of International Rescue Committee, the focus has been on incorporation of life and livelihood skills appropriate to the local context.

The acute shortage of female teachers has been dealt with by the Swedish Committee, CARE and International Rescue Committee, by accepting a community-selected woman (and particularly for younger age groups, possibly a man) with lower levels of education (usually 9th Grade) and providing teacher training supported by regular on-job monitoring and mentoring. While the weakness of this approach may be the quality of education, it has nevertheless reinstated female education disrupted by conflict or lack of qualified teachers, and more remarkably, it has also facilitated first-time ever female education in a number of rural communities. For example, CARE has achieved 48% female participation among its students in Logar, Paktia, Paktika, Wardak and Ghazni. Emphasis is given to frequent and effective monitoring to support and maintain quality.

role in school attendance for both boys and girls alike, and specific gender considerations (e.g. negative attitudes towards girls' education) play a secondary role.<sup>87</sup> The reasons may be that better-off families are less dependent on the labor and income-earning abilities of their children, have better access to transportation which in particular for girls improves chances of school attendance, and may be better educated themselves and thus put more emphasis on education for their children.

In spite of the generally positive attitude among the population, girls' education is still a contested field, which was illustrated during late 2002 when a number of arson and other violent attacks took place in girls' schools in a number of provinces. These attacks are often preceded by written threats warning against girls attending school.<sup>88</sup> This is reminiscent of the 1950s, when ultra-conservatives protested against girls' education, and even assaulted female students in Kandahar by throwing acid at them. Similar reactions against unveiled female students in short skirts were found in Kabul in the 1970s.<sup>89</sup> Today, however, it is not only a few isolated incidents, but also a recurrent phenomenon reflecting both the poor security situation and that the general level of violence in society is far higher. If this trend is allowed to continue, parents will not dare to send their daughters to school in the more remote and politically volatile parts of the country.

## Policy Implications

The adult literacy rate in Afghanistan is estimated as 36%, while for adult women it is estimated as being 21%<sup>90</sup> (2001). A significant leap in school enrollment has taken place during the last couple of years, and four million children are now at school, one-third of them girls, but this still represents only a little more than half of school-age children and 40% of girls. These figures hide dramatic regional disparities, with girls representing less than 15% of total enrollment in nine provinces in the east and south. Besides gender disparity, such figures also reflect the persistent huge urban-rural disparity. Furthermore, the schools are also struggling with high dropout rates, which in 1999 were reported as 74% of girls for grades 1-5 as compared to 56% for boys.

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<sup>87</sup> Feinstein International Famine Center, 2004

<sup>88</sup> E/CN.6/2003/4

<sup>89</sup> Dupree, N., 1998

<sup>90</sup> World Bank, 2004. Adult literacy rate relates to the age group 15 and above

The Government aims to achieve a 100% enrollment rate for school-age children as part of the MDG targets for 2015, with girls' enrollment share targeted at 50%. The constraints to girls' education stem from both demand and supply side factors, but these are mutually reinforcing.

Various obstacles to achieving this goal exist. On the supply side it is:

- ✓ Lack of school facilities, especially girls' schools in rural areas. Girls' Secondary schools are particularly few and scattered
- ✓ Lack of security which combined with distance prevent especially girls from accessing school facilities
- ✓ Lack of female teachers, particularly in rural areas
- ✓ Outdated curricula, including their portrayal of gender roles
- ✓ Poor or lacking school facilities including lack of water supply and toilet facilities
- ✓ Married girls are prevented from ordinary enrollment

Various social factors have a negative impact upon girls' school enrollment as well as on their retention rate when they reach puberty:

- ✓ Security: Political opponents to the present government are targeting girls' schools and carrying out terrorist attacks such as bombing or burning down schools, and campaigning against female education
- ✓ Poverty: Although education is free, for poor families the cost of school uniform and stationeries along with loss of girls' domestic labor/income earning activities is a disincentive to enrollment
- ✓ Low marriage age and high fertility rate mean that marriage and motherhood is seen as girls' only 'career' perspective, causing low school enrollment and also low retention rates, as married girls are withdrawn from school
- ✓ Parents', particularly illiterate fathers', negative attitude towards girls' education

In terms of policy implications, the required interventions, as in the case of health, are clear – provision of educational infrastructure, including buildings and separate schools for girls, textbooks, learning materials, recruitment and training of female teachers, building a relevant curriculum and provision of adequate water and toilet facilities. Mechanisms to promote not only enrollment but also quality and retention would also be extremely important. As in the case of health, what is more important is *how* these interventions will be delivered and policy implemented on the ground. Here it is important to address two related issues: (i)

heterogeneity in terms of region, rural/urban areas, and (ii) to devise culturally appropriate means of education service delivery. Like health related interventions, education too can be delivered through a community driven approach, using the existing systems of local government and local institutions as systems of accountability. Among the instruments that may be considered to provide education to girls are transfers in cash and kind, conditional for instance on enrolling and then keeping girls in school, or in delaying marriage simultaneously with sending girls to secondary school. However, before this, the availability of appropriate schools will need to be shored up.