



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
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International Institute  
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**INEE**

# Education and fragility in Afghanistan

## A situational analysis

Morten Sigsgaard



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The publication costs of this study have been covered through a grant-in-aid offered by UNESCO and by voluntary contributions made by several Member States of UNESCO, the list of which will be found at the end of the volume.

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Ref.: iiep/web doc/2009.09

Cover photo: 'Coming from school', Tirin Kot, Afghanistan 2009. Copyright Martien van Asseldonk

Typesetting and printing: IIEP's printshop

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## Presentation of the series

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UNESCO is increasingly requested to provide an educational response in emergency and reconstruction settings. The organization is in the process of developing expertise in this field in order to be able to provide prompt and relevant assistance. It will offer guidance, practical tools, and specific training for education policymakers, officials, and planners.

The fifth of the eleven objectives adopted by the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000 explicitly focuses on the rights of children in emergencies. It stresses the importance of meeting “the needs of education systems affected by conflict, natural calamities and instability and conduct[ing] educational programmes in ways that promote mutual understanding, peace and tolerance, and that help to prevent violence and conflict”. The Dakar Framework for Action (World Education Forum, 2000: 9) calls for national Education for All plans to include provision for education in emergency situations. Governments, particularly education ministries, have an important role to play in an area that has often been dominated by the actions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies.

The field of educational planning in emergencies and reconstruction is still young. It must be developed through documentation and analysis. Accumulated institutional memories and knowledge in governments, agencies, and NGOs on education in emergencies are in danger of being lost due to the dispersion of documents, and to high staff turnover in both national and international contexts. Most of the expertise is still in the heads of practitioners and needs to be collected while memories are fresh. Diverse experiences of educational reconstruction must be more thoroughly documented and analysed before they disappear from memory.

This task includes the publication in this series of country-specific analyses being conducted on the planning and management of education in emergencies and reconstruction. They concern the efforts currently being made to restore and transform education systems in countries and territories as diverse as Pakistan, Burundi, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Sudan, Kosovo, Timor-Leste and Rwanda. This series, *Education in emergencies and reconstruction*, has been initiated and sponsored by IIEP, in close collaboration with colleagues in other UNESCO offices.

The objectives of the case studies are to:

- contribute to the process of developing knowledge in the field of education in emergencies and reconstruction;
- provide focused input for IIEP training programmes for government officials and others in education in emergencies and reconstruction;
- identify and collect documentation on the management of education in various countries;
- capture some of the undocumented experiences of practitioners;
- analyse the responses in very different situations to educational provision in times of crisis;
- increase dissemination of information and analysis on education in emergencies and reconstruction.

IIEP’s larger programme on education in emergencies and reconstruction embraces not only these case studies, but also a series of global, thematic, policy-related studies. In addition, IIEP has published a *Guidebook for planning education in emergencies and reconstruction* for ministry of education officials and the agencies assisting them, and is developing training materials for a similar audience. Through this programme, IIEP will make a modest but significant contribution to

the discipline of education in emergencies and reconstruction. Its hope is to enrich the quality of the planning processes applied.

Mark Bray  
Director, IIEP

## List of abbreviations

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ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBO	Community based organization
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DVD	Digital Video Disc
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Educational Management Information System
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICOS	International Council on Security and Development
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks
IWPR	Institute for War and Peace Reporting
MoE	Ministry of Education
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NESP	National Education Sector Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD-DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
PACE-A	Partnership for Advancing Community Education in Afghanistan

PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

## Executive summary

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This paper is a part of a wider research project on education in fragile contexts being undertaken under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE). It asks how education can be delivered effectively in Afghanistan and how it contributes to, or mitigates, fragility.

Informed by an analytic framework developed by INEE, the paper explores five drivers of fragility: security, the economy, governance, social, and the environment. These five drivers overlap and are causally intermingled. The concept of ‘fragility’ is problematic – theoretically, practically, and politically – and is here used to denote the set of difficult operating circumstances for education agencies.

Afghanistan has been called “the quintessential fragile state”. Education actors face immense challenges. But change is possible. Since the ousting of the Taliban from Kabul in 2001, there have been impressive quantitative results: a 570 per cent growth in enrolment (currently over 6 million); a seven-fold increase in the number of trained teachers, and the construction of around 4,000 school buildings. The Ministry of Education (MoE) is moving towards technical self-reliance, has indicated ownership of the country’s National Education Strategic Plan (NESP), has completed its first school survey, has established a teacher registration system, and is developing a simulation model for educational planning. These are strong signs of hope. The next challenge will be to improve the actual quality of education.

These education efforts are part of a state-building project that has yet to create peace or justice. The security threat of the Taliban’s guerilla warfare is undiminished. The opium economy still flourishes. Foreign aid is distributed ineffectively, benefiting foreign armies and corporations, rather than ordinary Afghans. The government admits that corruption is rampant. Taliban attacks on schools are the main security-related driver of fragility. Education providers negotiate with the Taliban to keep schools open, but rarely for girls. Community, home-based and distance education can partially overcome this gender constraint but on a limited scale. Military presence alone cannot create security; it also requires community willpower.

Bush and Saltarelli (2000) have shown that the education system can itself create fragility. The 2002 Back to School campaign increased enrolment, but reinforced an already divisive curriculum, pitting Sunni against Shi’a Muslims. Schoolchildren learn violence when teachers hit them. However, there is evidence that teaching and curriculum reform can promote human rights, peace, and security.

Agencies in Afghanistan must choose between working in or around conflict. Using Afghan staff transfers risk from visible internationals to less visible Afghans. This creates the dilemma of staff security versus operational concerns. Military protection and cooperation with armed forces is necessary, but Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) – military-led teams of construction specialists – are criticized for blurring the distinction between aid and military work.

Opium and mis-spent foreign aid are the main economic drivers of fragility. The opium economy involves widespread corruption, and opium is the livelihood of many Afghans. Foreign aid is theoretically under the democratic control of donor agencies and Western tax payers but does not achieve as much as it could. The Afghan state’s development needs remain under-funded whilst the US military alone receives 14 times as much funding as all donors spend on aid. Foreign

corporations scoop 20 to 50 per cent profit rates and each consultant costs US\$250,000 to US\$500,000 a year.

One of the main purposes of the education system is to educate future wage-earners who may then expand the tax base, thus leading to a more self-reliant economy. The plans of the MoE – Afghanistan’s largest government employer – to construct 73,000 classrooms should help mitigate economic fragility.

Bad governance results from a mix of corruption and inefficient bureaucracy. This is acknowledged even by the MoE. Corruption leads to slow salary payments, bribery, and ‘ghost teachers’. Children learn to expect corruption in school and elsewhere. However, community involvement in school management committees can encourage the growth of civil society and improve governance.

Afghan fragility is worsened by divides of ethnicity, clan, language, religion, gender, and urban/rural residence. The two schoolbook languages, Dari and Pashto, cannot represent the cultures of all the country’s communities. In rural areas, measures such as community-based education or seasonal education for the Kuchi nomads help provide a minimum of education.

The government’s nation-building strategy of forging a unified Afghan identity based on Islam is disseminated both in the mainstream education system and through religious schools. Gender may be the most important of the social divides. The issue of women’s rights is both an ideological and concrete battleground between the government and the Taliban. Providing education for girls can be destabilizing as girls’ schools are systematically attacked.

Due to conflict-related damage and the impact of Afghanistan’s climatic extremes, only a quarter of all existing school buildings are usable. Environmental degradation exacerbated by 30 years of war has disrupted agriculture and resulted in food insecurity and threat of famines. School-feeding programmes and land schemes for teachers try to mitigate this. Despite establishing an Office for Disaster Preparedness, the MoE is yet to develop its own natural disaster preparedness plan.

This study shows the primacy of ensuring security in order to deliver education. This cannot be done solely by military means: it needs willpower, not just firepower. Community and home-based education creates security, promotes education quality and enhances social capital. Foreign aid focused on military or corporate profits fuels fragility. Aid reform is needed. The MoE needs to be in charge of coordinating all education efforts. Disaster prevention should be integrated into the national education plan. A national education plan is not just a planning tool, but also a driver of capacity development and a needed symbol of hope and resilience.

# 1 Introduction and methodological reflections

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This desk review is a part of a larger INEE research project – *Field-based Situational Analyses of Education and Fragility: Understanding Education’s Role in Fragile Contexts* – which aims to strengthen the evidence base for understanding the impact of fragility on education, and the impact of education on fragility. It examines Afghanistan since the ousting of the Taliban regime from Kabul in 2001, asking how education can be delivered effectively and how aspects of education contribute to, or mitigate, fragility in Afghanistan. Drawing on reviews of programme documentation, academic articles and interviews with staff from Afghanistan-based UN offices and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), it is based on field evidence often gathered amid serious security and other field constraints.

## 1.1 The concept of ‘fragility’

This study is based on a set of common research questions for situational analyses developed by the INEE Working Group on Education and Fragility which was established in early 2008.<sup>1</sup> These research questions are enclosed in the Appendix. Conflict and fragility are often regarded as synonymous, reflecting general confusion with the ongoing debate in the international development community about ‘fragility’. Among donor and education agencies, strong critiques of varying conceptualizations of fragility<sup>2</sup> coexist with the reality that researchers and practitioners still talk of ‘fragile states’. This suggests that a common-sense consensual understanding of the concept has emerged. A standard definition of a fragile state – one that is often quoted – is offered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC):

States are fragile when state structures lack political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations. (OECD-DAC, 2007a, p. 2)

A publication by the Danish Institute of International Studies (Engberg-Pedersen, Andersen, and Stepputat, 2008, pp. 21-22) highlights problems with this definition:

1. It is state-centric, overlooking fragility outside of the state or in the region. It implies that fragility is best solved through a strengthened state. One of the OECD-DAC (2007a) principles for engagement in fragile states<sup>3</sup> is to focus on state-building as the central objective, not assigning roles to other local actors in the private sector or civil society.
2. Accusations of lack of political will are undiplomatic, analytically troublesome – how is lack of will to be measured or documented? – subjective, and inherently political.

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1. [www.ineesite.org/index.php/post/wg\\_education\\_and\\_fragility](http://www.ineesite.org/index.php/post/wg_education_and_fragility)

2. Among the terms found in the literature are: fragile state, failed state, Low-Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS), Conflict-Affected Fragile State (CAFS), difficult partnerships, and poor performers. Each emphasizes different aspects and causalities of fragility. See discussions by Engberg-Pedersen, Andersen, and Stepputat (2008); Cammack, McLeod, Menocal, and Christiansen (2006), and on the website of the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre ([www.gsdr.org/go/topic-guides/fragile-states/terms-and-definitions](http://www.gsdr.org/go/topic-guides/fragile-states/terms-and-definitions)).

3. It is noteworthy that OECD-DAC talks about engagement *in* fragile states, not *with* fragile states.

3. The definition overlooks how international or regional drivers of instability can frustrate even determined national efforts to overcome fragility. Fragility and its causes are generally analysed within a specific state. This focus on individual nations conceals the fact that external actors are not apolitical. Even if external forces are judged to be benign, some actors still perceive external interventions as politically motivated, further exacerbating fragility. Hence, the emergence of fragility cannot be seen as a purely national phenomenon.

There are multiple indicators that Afghanistan is indeed a fragile state as defined by OECD-DAC. All actors seem to agree that a massive, comprehensive, long-term, and expensive state-building effort is needed, but the OECD-DAC principles also recommend taking the national context as a starting point<sup>4</sup> for the state-building exercise. The question still remains: does the fragile state label add to our understanding of Afghanistan?

Drawing on critical discourse analysis, Cornwall and Brock (2005) note that fragility can be seen as a 'development buzzword', a term that (re)produces consensus around why some actors are poor and what should be done about it, and thus shuts out competing definitions.<sup>5</sup> In a recent speech to the UN General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Pierre Nkurunziza, President of Burundi, said that the terminology around fragility is patronizing and value-laden:

... terminology around 'fragile states' should only be used with caution. I am aware of the semantic debate among development practitioners, such as: 'we will only speak of countries in a fragile situation'. But that does not take away the feeling of paternalism that is attached to these words. I strongly feel that it is not a free terminology. Apart from the emotional implications, it has financial and political implications. Moreover, it gives us a bad image in the eyes of foreign investors we so badly need. My first proposition therefore is to replace the terminology around 'fragile states' by words of hope and of partnership, of constructive relationships where we treat each other with respect. This is how we, the Burundians, want to become a proud people in the eyes of the world. (Nkurunziza, 2009)

Several education analysts have shown that the fragility agenda cannot be separated from the geopolitical and strategic questions about who is to deliver security and which sectors of the donor economies benefit from it (Waldman, 2008b, p. 5).

Senior UN education staff in Afghanistan commented that the concept of fragility does not help them in their work. The challenge is for Afghan education officials to create a realistic plan and implement and monitor it. It is less important for operational purposes whether donors characterize Afghanistan as being fragile or not. Another UN education staff member confirmed this, adding that Afghan education officials were more interested in learning very concrete planning techniques than using international instruments. The challenge was how to learn to plan in a simple and effective way under such challenging circumstances (Personal communication, February 2009).

In short, 'fragility' is often neither of practical or theoretical use. It can be politically problematic. While in an ideal world it would be best not to use it, or to replace it with another term, 'fragility' exists, is widely used, and is among the terms of reference of this publication. 'Fragility' is thus used here as a descriptive term without normative connotations. This paper simply uses it as

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4. OECD-DAC, 2007a, p. 1.

5. I thank Stephanie Bengtsson, who notified me of Cornwall and Brock's work (personal communication, 26 February 2009). Cornwall's article, *Buzzwords and Fuzzwords* (2007), continues this discussion about how words shape worlds in development.

shorthand to describe the difficult circumstances which education agencies must accept if they wish to operate in Afghanistan.

## **1.2 Evidence and monitoring systems**

Any discussion in evidence-based studies of the interplay between education and fragility must be preceded by asking what we mean by 'evidence'.

Collecting quantitative data about the Afghan school system and its users is necessary in order to create an Education Monitoring Information System (EMIS) – a basic requirement for educational planners in Afghanistan's MoE. This quantitative research, however, needs qualitative research to explain what lies behind the figures. For example, the great increase in enrolment rates over the past five years appears to be mitigating fragility. By taking children off the streets, a sense of normality is being established, and the next generation of productive citizens is being forged. However, few teachers are capable of even passing exams in their own subjects (Spink, 2006: p. 15; Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 11). Physical abuse and punishment in schools are widespread and still not prohibited by law (Save the Children Sweden, 2008).

Dicum (2008, p. 626) offers an example of violence in schools:

Afghan participants all recalled teachers using sticks, both as pointers and as tools of punishment. 'They used to hit us too much. Even in Pakistani schools they hit the children if they don't know something or don't do their homework. They had very long and big sticks in their hands, even the female teachers. They were really harsh. ... [They hit us on our] hands or back. Sometimes when they get angry they just move their hand and hit you. (Jalil, Pashtun, male, 29)' (...) The sharpness of participants' memories either as witnesses to or as victims of this treatment was equally interesting, because corporal punishment was only one form of violence experienced by these participants during their war experiences. Guns, bombings, shootings, death, and other forms of war-related violence were part of their daily lives outside and, less so, inside of school and were vividly described as part of the curriculum of daily life.

Qualitative studies show that education in Afghanistan reflects the wider fragility, and access to education alone is not enough unless its quality is developed.

Researching Afghan and other fragile contexts may also raise ethical questions about how educational efforts are represented. Boiling development efforts down to quantitative indicators may not always do justice to the courage and creativity of the many individuals and organizations who risk their lives and devise inventive plans to deliver education under the extremely hazardous circumstances in Afghanistan. Using predefined categories of what constitutes success, may miss out on what actually works for a given community.

A senior NGO consultant mentioned that the Most Significant Changes methodology – a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation – helped her work with local Afghan education stakeholders such as community based organizations (CBOs) because it takes as a point of departure what the stakeholders perceive as meaningful change in their lives. Realities in remote areas may be nothing like those imagined by education officials in Kabul or foreign consultants. Most Significant Changes helps to create evocative images of a desired future development, providing 'human interest' stories that may illustrate harder-to-digest quantitative data which are less accessible to external audiences. Reports from NGOs such as Save the Children UK (2007) and the Partnership for Advancing Community Education in Afghanistan (2008) illustrate some elements of this reporting method and style.

## 2 Fragility in Afghanistan

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Afghanistan's recent history and 30 years of war has left the country among the poorest in the world. It ranks seventh from the bottom on the Fund for Peace's Failed States Index (2008). Like several other fragile states, it is neither ranked in the UNDP's Human Development Index, nor in UNESCO's Education for All Development Index, as there was either a lack of will or capacity to submit the necessary data. According to the 2008 CIA Factbook, life expectancy is 44 years; the infant mortality rate is 154/1,000, and the unemployment rate is 40 per cent. The legacy of war, and ongoing conflict with the Taliban and other insurgents<sup>6</sup> has left Afghans in dire need and Afghan and foreign state-builders with a complex and immense mission likely to last decades.

Prior to the 1979 Soviet invasion Afghanistan had a relatively well-functioning education system (Samady, 2001, p. 7). Afghanistan's geostrategic location between China, Iran, Pakistan, and the ex-Soviet states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Russia, has led it to be constantly fought over, supported or destabilized by outsider powers. However, no foreign power has ever really defeated or colonized the Afghans, a source of much pride and a sentiment useful in building national identity across the many social divisions.

### 2.1 Achievements in the Afghan education system

Despite adversity, Afghans take pride in whatever they can achieve under the current difficult circumstances, and this is in itself a sign of hope. So, before assessing each of the drivers of fragility and the formidable challenges facing education actors, it is important to note some of the achievements of the Afghan education system:

- Between 2001 and 2008, primary school enrolment rose from 0.9 million to over 6 million (a growth of 570 per cent in six years) and the proportion of girls from virtually zero to 35 per cent. Yet, half of the population of schoolchildren is still estimated to be out of school (Wardak and Hirth, 2009, p. 2).
- The number of teachers has risen seven-fold, but their qualifications are low and only 28 per cent are women. In a 2005 survey in northern Afghanistan, 200 teachers were asked to sit the same exams as their students: only 10 of these (5 per cent) passed (Spink, 2006: 15). The National Education Strategic Plan states that just 22 per cent of teachers meet

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6. Much mainstream and media discourse about the conflict presents the Taliban as a homogenous, unitary actor. However, several have highlighted that the Taliban is rather a misnomer, an umbrella term that covers a set of different forces who for various reasons oppose the current government of Afghanistan and the foreign military presence (Galtung, 2007; Ali, 2008). In his report on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan the UN Secretary General (2008: pp. 4-5) lists the following anti-government groups:

- a. the Taliban, based largely in the south and east of the country
- b. the Haqqani network, closely linked to the Taliban and based in the eastern Provinces of Khost and Paktya
- c. Hezb-i-Islami, based in eastern Afghanistan and the provinces surrounding Kabul
- d. Jamat Sunat al-Dawa Salafia, in conflict with Hezb-i-Islami and based in parts of Kunar and Nuristan provinces,
- e. 1,800 other illegal armed groups, not necessarily anti-government, but often trafficking arms and narcotics.

This diversity within the supposedly monolithic Taliban helps explain why education providers in some locations can negotiate with local 'Taliban' to allow education delivery while in other 'Taliban-controlled' areas this is impossible (Save the Children UK, 2007).

the minimum qualifications of having passed Grade 14, the last grade of secondary school (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 11).

- Since 2003, around 4,000 school buildings have been rehabilitated and newly constructed (Wardak and Hirth 2009, p. 2), but still, only 25 per cent of schools have usable buildings. Thousands of communities have no access to schools due to distance or security. In the period between October 2005 and March 2007, 6 per cent of schools were burned down or closed down by the Taliban (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 11).

UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) has provided technical assistance and capacity development on a long-term basis to the MoE, especially its planning department, since 2002. Funding initially came from UNESCO extra-budgetary funds and the German and Scandinavian governments. The current donor, Norway, has committed to an engagement between 2006 and 2010, which stretches over the plan's implementation period and almost covers its entire time span (Gay, 2009, p. 6). Among its planning successes – and indicators of increased technical capacity and self-reliance – the MoE has:

- developed and taken ownership of the National Education Section Plan (NESP): currently being revised, the new NESP 2010–2014 was due to be released in July 2009, but was delayed by the August 2009 presidential elections;
- convened an Education Development Forum to review the NESP in February 2008;
- set up an Education Development Board to coordinate international aid. Thus, the NESP both provides the framework for educational planning and harmonizes international education support;
- carried out a school survey for the school year 2007 with a complementary set of school maps. Results have helped bridge the data gap, helping to move towards evidence-based planning. A new survey, based on a sampling technique, was carried out in 2008. Results due out in July 2009 were also delayed by the elections;
- started to develop a national teacher registration system;
- developed a projection and simulation model, using school survey data, as part of the NESP revision process. It will help the ministry explore policy options and set realistic targets for future NESPs (Gay, 2009, p. 6).

These positive developments should be set against the constraints mentioned in the following section.

## 3 Drivers of fragility

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Most analysis by established development actors in Afghanistan is largely in agreement about the causes of fragility or conflict, although opinions may differ on what to do about it. An example is the Afghanistan National Development Strategy 2008-2013, which, together with the Afghanistan Compact,<sup>7</sup> is one of the main documents used by the Government of Afghanistan in its relations with major bilateral and multilateral donors. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank regard ANDS as having the status of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). It identifies four main intermingled drivers of fragility (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2007, p. 14):

- Security: As long as the military and police forces cannot establish and maintain the rule of law, all other development efforts will fail.
- Governance: There is corruption at every level of government.
- The economy: Dependence on opium fuels corruption and the Taliban.
- Chronic poverty: Social and economic development are undermined by inadequate health and education provision, and destroyed infrastructure.

Several other country assessments add to this picture: the UN Development Programme's Millennium Development Goals report for Afghanistan (UNDP 2005); the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's winter 2009 opium assessment (UNODC 2009); the security update (2008) of the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS) – international think tank; and Oxfam's Afghanistan Priorities (Waldman, 2008a). These assessment group the drivers of fragility slightly differently. The drivers are here grouped under the five headings outlined in the INEE research project on education and fragility – security, the economy, governance, social, and the environment.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.1 Security

The Afghan army and police forces are unable to maintain a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force and are challenged by Taliban insurgents who use low-intensity guerilla warfare tactics and have strongholds in Pakistan. The Taliban control increasingly large parts of the country. A situation update by ICOS in December 2008 estimates:

The Taliban now holds a permanent presence in 72 percent of Afghanistan, up from 54 percent a year ago. Taliban forces have advanced from their southern heartlands, where they are now the de facto governing power in a number of towns and villages, to Afghanistan's western and north-western provinces, as well as provinces north of Kabul. (...) Three out of the four main highways into Kabul are now compromised by Taliban activity. The capital city has plummeted to minimum levels of control, with the Taliban and other criminal elements infiltrating the city at will.<sup>9</sup>

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7. The outcome document of the 2006 London Conference on Afghanistan:

[www.unama-afg.org/news/\\_londonConf/\\_docs/06jan30-AfghanistanCompact-Final.pdf](http://www.unama-afg.org/news/_londonConf/_docs/06jan30-AfghanistanCompact-Final.pdf)

8. The five 'domains' are derived from the Education For All–Fast Track Initiative's (FTI) progressive framework, from USAID's fragility assessment tool, and from INEE's annotated list of research questions.

9. ICOS determined Taliban presence using a combination of publicly recorded attacks and local perceptions of Taliban presence. One or more insurgent attacks per week in a province constitute a "permanent Taliban presence" (ICOS, 2008).

The Afghan army and police forces, like other sectors of the Afghan state, suffer from corruption (IWPR, 2006a). They, together with a number of private security firms (IWPR, 2006b), are themselves a source of insecurity (ICG, 2007; ICG, 2008). Although NATO forces seem more reliable, and are key to keeping peace in some regions, their reputation is compromised by unintended casualties among civilian Afghans. Three decades of war have resulted in a proliferation of firearms, landmines, and unexploded ordnance, high crime levels, abductions, opium growing, and drug trafficking, resulting in a widespread fear in the population. The security effects on the education sector include attacks on schools, dangers for teachers and students on their way to school and threats and actual attacks against many of those who risk their lives trying to deliver education.

In assessing how education has been affected by insecurity, it is necessary to understand that Afghanistan is plagued by high overall levels of lawlessness and crime. It is a society in which the violent antagonisms resulting from prolonged conflict do not necessarily stop just because one enters the classroom, or the class tent.

In provinces not controlled by government forces, state-run education in public schools is often not possible, as the Taliban and other insurgent groups attack schools, school staff, and students. The methods of attack are varied and have included threatening letters and phone calls to teachers; attacks on teachers and students on their way to school; the beheading of a headmaster in his home; the placing of a landmine in a classroom, and the use of explosives and mortars to destroy whole schools (O'Malley, 2007, pp. 19-22; Human Rights Watch, 2006). UN figures are alarming:

- 722 incidents affecting education (i.e. attacks on schools and other education institutions, their staff and/or pupils) were recorded between 2004<sup>10</sup> and July 2008. Of these, 230 occurred between July 2007 and June 2008 (UN Security Council, 2008, p. 11).
- In the period from April 2008 to January 2009, around 138 students and teachers lost their lives and a further 172 were wounded in criminal and terror attacks. Some 651 schools were inactive mostly due to insecurity and another 122 school buildings were destroyed or burned down. Some 173,443 male and female students are unable to go to school or gain an education because security concerns prevent schools being built in the first place, according to the MoE (Shalizi, 2009).
- Worst hit are girls whose schools are specifically targeted. While these represent only 14.8 per cent of the total number of primary, secondary, and high schools in Afghanistan, they are affected by some 50 per cent of the recorded incidents (UN Security Council, 2008, p. 11).

Schools are a visible manifestation of the presence of the state. Some elements within the Taliban want education to be limited to radical Islamic education in the *madrassas* (schools for Koran study) that they control. By attacking schools, they display their might, while ensuring the population stays uneducated. Attacks on schools have become explicit Taliban policy. Amnesty International has published details from a Taliban military rule book, or *Laheya*. Its 30 rules apply to every *mujahid* (somebody engaged in *jihad*). While most are disciplinary – specifying the conduct of soldiers *vis-à-vis* commanders, handling property and prisoners, and relations to locals – three rules spell out relations with teachers and schools:

- 24) It is forbidden to work as a teacher under the current puppet regime, because this strengthens the system of the infidels. True Muslims should apply to study with a religiously trained teacher and study in a Mosque or similar institution. Textbooks must come from the period of the *jihad* or from the Taliban regime.

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10. No month specified in the source report from the UN Security Council.

- 25) Anyone who works as a teacher for the current puppet regime must receive a warning. If he nevertheless refuses to give up his job, he must be beaten. If the teacher still continues to instruct contrary to the principles of Islam, the district commander or a group leader must kill him.
- 26) Those NGOs that come to the country under the rule of the infidels must be treated as the government is treated. They have come under the guise of helping people but in fact are part of the regime. Thus we tolerate none of their activities, whether it be building of streets, bridges, clinics, schools, *madrassas* or other works. If a school fails to heed a warning to close, it must be burned. But all religious books must be secured beforehand (Signandsight.com, 2006, quoted in Amnesty International, 2007, pp. 45-47).

A Taliban spokesperson, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, has confirmed the existence of the rule book and stated “there is no difference between the armed people who are fighting against us and civilians who are co-operating with foreigners” (Amnesty International, 2007, p 14).

However, as noted above, the Taliban are not a cohesive entity under a central command. The factionalism of the Taliban has allowed education authorities and communities in several cases to negotiate with the local Taliban and keep schools open. As reported by IRIN (2009):

Asif Nang, a spokesman for the Ministry of Education, told IRIN the government was ready to negotiate with the opposition over schools and would be willing to accommodate their religious reservations. “If they want to call schools ‘madrassa’ we will accept that, if they want to say Mullah to a teacher we have no problem with that. Whatever objections they [the Taliban] may have we are ready to talk to them,” Nang said. The Ministry of Education also emphasized that its curriculum was entirely in accordance with Islamic values and girls were required to comply with Islamic dressing codes (including wearing the hijab) to school. Owing to this appeasing approach, the government has reopened 24 schools in Helmand, Ghazni and Kandahar provinces previously shut by insurgents. “We aim to reopen all the schools which are closed because of insecurity,” assured Farooq Wardak, the education minister, adding that hundreds of new schools would be built in 2009. (...) However, none of the 16 schools reopened in Helmand over the past three months catered for girls, the Ministry of Education said, a severe blow for already low female literacy rates.

Community- and home-based education initiatives are long-established ways of getting around security constraints. Many such programmes have been supported by NGOs (Save the Children, CARE, the International Rescue Committee, the Swedish Afghanistan Committee, and others) before, during and after the ousting of the Taliban from Kabul in October 2001.<sup>11</sup> In many cases they are proven so effective that the MoE has entered into stable partnerships with NGOs who work in partnership with local community-based organizations and with village elders and district leaders. The community- and home-based education initiatives have been researched in detail by Jackie Kirk and Rebecca Winthrop of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and documented by IIEP-UNESCO (Kirk and Winthrop, 2006, 2009; Brannelly and Sullivan-Owomoyela 2009). UNICEF supplements the work of NGOs and, with its strong field presence, delivers community-based education to approximately 86,000 students or 55 per cent of the total number of students in community-based education.

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11. For instance, Save the Children UK has worked in Afghanistan since 1976, which has allowed for a significant level of expertise to be accumulated (2008, p. 8).

Distance education via radio, television and DVD is another way of overcoming security challenges. The BBC World Service Trust's Afghan Education Projects programme has been running since 1994 and uses radio drama, radio talk shows and cartoons to address education, return of refugees, mine awareness, and good governance issues. According to the BBC, 48 per cent of the Afghan population listens to the radio dramas every week (BBC, 2008). On a smaller scale, Save the Children UK's radio programme incorporates girls' rights messages and has inspired girls to want to become journalists: "In this case insecurity has served as a catalyst for innovation, resulting in the use of a mechanism which enabled (...) a much wider reach and impact than (...) through a conventional workshop and training approach" (Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 15).

Does education make Afghanistan safer and less violent? The potential may be there, but, as researchers have noted (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Smith and Vaux, 2003), it is not necessarily the case. Education can create peace, stability and resilience, but it can also be a driver of violence, instability and fragility. As Spink (2005) has shown, millions of schoolbooks were reprinted during UNICEF's Back to School campaign in 2002-2003, but the MoE missed a window of opportunity to reform the curriculum. While most explicit incitements to violence were removed, references to mistrust of descendants of Ali (that is, prejudicial references to Shi'a Muslims) were not. Millions of children were introduced to a culturally-insensitive curriculum that did not represent non-Pashto, non-Sunni histories and culture. USAID agreed to pay for the printing of these books (Spink, 2005, p. 201, referenced in Kirk, 2007, p. 190). The curriculum is currently being revised and new textbooks have been printed, but the old divisive textbooks are still in use.

One could argue that education has, to some extent, promoted peace as the education curricula do, in some instances, integrate peace education, child rights, life skills, and civic education (Save the Children UK, 2007, p. 15). Schools are also used as places to teach safe behaviour, and mine and HIV and AIDS awareness will be included in the forthcoming secondary school curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007, pp. 66). Time and further research is required to investigate the impact of these elements of the curriculum on fragility.

In Afghanistan, education agencies face security dilemmas which they can choose to approach in different ways. Goodhand (2001) distinguishes between agencies who work *around*, *in*, or *on* conflict, in other words (a) avoiding conflict areas, (b) taking measures to stay operational in conflict areas, and (c) addressing the roots of conflict through their work.

Many aid agencies in Afghanistan obviously avoid conflict areas when the lives or security of their staff is threatened, but this depends on the agencies' highly variable security regulations. In early 2009, international UNESCO staff were confined to Kabul. Some NGOs are subject to less strict security regulations and find flexible ways of working *around* conflict. Thus, while international Save the Children UK staff are withdrawn, their Afghan colleagues can stay longer. When even national staff are no longer able to operate, service delivery can be outsourced to local organizations not associated with Save the Children. They are trained in how to behave and survive, including negotiating with the local military command, such as the Taliban. Another Save the Children strategy of staying in conflict is to not completely leave conflict areas, but to scale down efforts, discreetly reduce visibility, maintain local relationships while keeping a low profile, and await opportunities to scale up programmes quickly when the security situation permits (Save the Children, 2007, pp. 14-15).

One could argue that leaders of international agencies like Save the Children UK act unethically because they place their national Afghan staff in dangers that Western staff would never tolerate. On the other hand, it is probably correct that local staff are less visible and hence less vulnerable. So deciding to work in conflict does raise a security dilemma.

The extent to which the roots of the conflict are being addressed, i.e. how work *on* conflict is carried out, is more questionable. The current NESP (2007, pp. 66-69) contains a programme for curriculum development for secondary schools which will incorporate human rights messages. Save the Children incorporates similar child rights messages in radio programmes (Save the Children, 2007, p. 15). Getting to the roots of the conflict is probably more controversial since the definition of what the conflict is about is politically charged. It will undoubtedly take a while before Afghanistan follows the example of Northern Ireland and makes conflict resolution an obligatory part of the curriculum.

Normal security logic would dictate that education agencies need the protection of armed forces to be safe. However, there are problems with this approach. Aid agencies prefer a clear boundary between their work and the military, arguing for a division of labour that ensures that their integrity is not compromised. They want to operate according to humanitarian principles and priorities (not military principles) so that they can claim to be, and be perceived to be, impartial and thus not seen as legitimate military targets. However, the current practice of the military Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) has complicated the situation. The mandate of the PRTs is to act as a military force, but also to carry out humanitarian work such as school construction in order to 'win hearts and minds'. This blurs the line between humanitarian and military targets and endangers NGOs. Some NGOs, for example Oxfam (2007), the Afghanistan NGO Safety Centre and CARE (2005), and Save the Children UK (2007), have criticized the PRTs but have, nevertheless, stayed in Afghanistan. Others, most notably Médecins Sans Frontières, which had been operational for 24 years during the Soviet occupation and Taliban rule, pulled out of Afghanistan altogether as a consequence of this militarization of aid (Delafortrie, 2004). After trialling the PRT concept in Afghanistan, the USA has used it extensively in Iraq. According to General David H Petraeus, the then commander of the US forces in Iraq, future US military strategy will be based on the further expansion of this model (Asia Times Online, 2008).

### 3.2 The economy

Afghanistan's main economic enterprise is opium. The opium industry is valued at US\$3 billion a year, accounting for up to a third of the economy (Waldman, 2008a, p. 11). Opium-generated revenue has widespread impacts as the Taliban trades opium for arms, the opium trade spawns state corruption, and Afghans suffer from drug abuse.

In a country with endemic corruption, the influx of foreign aid also becomes an economic driver of fragility. Research by the World Bank (2007) and OECD-DAC (2007b), shows that foreign aid in 2005 constituted approximately half the lawful economy and 90 per cent of all public expenditure.<sup>12</sup> An aid effectiveness study by the NGO alliance the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) (Waldman, 2008b, p. 5) presents disturbing evidence:

- There is an aid shortfall of US\$10 billion, equivalent to 30 times the annual national education budget: in 2001, donors committed to give US\$25 billion in aid but have only delivered US\$15 billion.

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12. This estimate does not include narcotics-related income and includes both donor and public spending. Waldman notes: "The World Bank estimated that in 2005 external assistance is 'above 40-50% of GDP'; and similarly, that total public expenditure was 57% of the GDP (World Bank 2007, p. 7, p. 9, p. 48) Precise figures for 2007 are not available, but according to the Afghan Ministry of Finance, in 2007 GDP was \$8.5 billion and total donor commitments exceeded \$4 billion. This tallies with the OECD estimate that ODA (which does not include all assistance) amounted to 38% of GNI in 2005. (OECD-DAC 2007b, p. 1)" (Waldman, 2008b, p. 28).

- An estimated 40 per cent of aid goes back to donor countries in corporate profits and consultant salaries – approximately US\$6 billion since 2001.
- Largely due to the lack of coordination and communication, the Afghan Government does not know how one third of all aid since 2001 – some \$5billion – has been spent.
- The US military spends close to US\$100 million a day in Afghanistan yet average daily non-military aid expenditure since 2001 is just US\$7 million a day.
- Over two thirds of all aid bypasses the Afghan Government.
- According to the latest OECD figures, less than 40 per cent of technical assistance is coordinated with the government and only one third of donor analytical or assessment work is conducted jointly.
- Profit margins on reconstruction contracts for international and Afghan contractor companies are often 20 per cent and can be as high as 50 per cent.
- Each full-time expatriate consultant typically cost US\$250,000 – US\$500,000 a year.

It is thus clearly the case that the Government of Afghanistan is not the only entity with governance problems. The aid architecture around Afghanistan is very expensive, but not very effective. Many of these facts should raise serious concerns for donors and taxpayers. Is it necessary to spend so much money on the military? Is it desirable that the US military gets approximately 14 times more than the aid spent by all donors? Why should aid money, paid by Western taxpayers, fund 20 to 50 per cent profit margins of private sector companies, and why should private sector expat consultants cost so much? Why does so much aid and technical assistance bypass the Afghan Government when it is meant to be a state-building intervention (Waldman, 2008b, p. 6)? Why are the principles set out in the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* not being respected? Aid ineffectiveness is a key influence on fragility. Aid spent ineffectively fails to mitigate poverty, which then reinforces insecurity.

On the other hand, foreign aid appears to be absolutely necessary to make the state work. The reconstruction and daily operation of the education sector would be highly difficult without foreign aid, which in 2006 funded approximately 92 per cent of the budget of the MoE (Mojaddidi 2006, p.18).<sup>13</sup> Ideally, education would be funded from general tax revenue. At the moment the fact that opium is illicit and untaxed has a negative impact on education.

Remittances sent home from Afghans, particularly in Pakistan and Iran, constitute another major source of household income, estimated at US\$2.5 billion or approximately 30 per cent of the country's GDP (IFAD, 2008). These remittances are mainly transferred through informal, honour-based *hawala* money transfer systems which are not taxed. They can be of significant help, often enabling families to send children to school.

Lack of education clearly negatively impacts the economy. Prospects for livelihoods diversification are limited by the fact that over two thirds of the population is non-literate.<sup>14</sup> Rebuilding the education system is a prerequisite for creating a more sustainable economy, no longer dependent

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13. The national education budget consists of two parts: the Ordinary Operating Budget and the Development Budget. The former constitutes 17 per cent of the total national education budget, and is 45 per cent covered by the Afghan Government and 55 per cent by donors. The Development Budget constitutes 83 per cent of the total national budget and is 100 per cent donor funded. This means that the Afghan Government covers a mere 7.65 per cent of the total education budget and donors the remaining 92.35 per cent. It should be noted that some donor funds are coordinated with the Afghan Government through the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (a pooled funding mechanism) whilst others are not. It should also be noted that these figures may have changed since 2006.

14. UNICEF reports a total adult literacy rate of 28 per cent:  
[www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_statistics.html)

on opium, foreign aid, and remittances. The MoE is Afghanistan's largest government employer, receiving 19 per cent of the state's operating budget, 4.3 per cent of the core development budget and 7 per cent of the total core and external, operating and development budget (Ministry of Education, 2008c, p. 12). The education system contributes significantly to the national economy by paying salaries – however low they may be – and initiating major infrastructure and refurbishment projects, such as the projected construction of 73,000 classrooms (Ministry of Education, 2008c, p. 16). Increasing the number of schools, teachers and other education staff, and increasing their salaries, as outlined in the NESP, will in itself be an important contribution to the Afghan economy.

### **3.3 Governance**

There are many reasons why effective governance is difficult in Afghanistan. A government cannot efficiently govern when it does not control its territory, is unable to derive revenue from key sources of income (in the case of Afghanistan, opium and remittances), cannot predict or control external aid flows, and when its population is fractured by religion, language, ethnicity, and gender.

Most of the public sector, not just education, is affected by excessive and inefficient bureaucracy. Tackling it “would be a daunting agenda in the best of circumstances”, as the World Bank states in its proposed Public Administration Reform for Afghanistan (2008, p. xix). The MoE admits that its own inefficient bureaucratic structure is one of the main reasons why the goals set out in the NESP are not being achieved (despite the fact that the plan has a specific Education Administration Reform and Development section). A telling example from the internal review of the plan is that it usually takes 6-12 weeks for an invoice to be paid, often much longer (Ministry of Education, 2007, pp. 88-93; 2008d, p. 15). NGOs have also criticized these delays (Oxfam, 2006, pp. 18-22).

Corruption is a huge problem. Afghanistan is ranked fifth from the bottom on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, 2008). An overarching problem, corruption is entrenched in the education system. Teachers, like other civil servants, are frequently not paid on time or have to pay a bribe to receive salaries. According to a former high-ranking Ministry of Education official (Mojaddidi, 2006, pp. 10-11) there are between 16,000 to 20,000 ‘ghost teachers’– those who do not come to work or who are doubly registered. This results in cancelled classes, large classroom sizes and general lack of faith in an educational system supposed to build values of integrity. Students do not only learn from what they are taught in class, but from what they experience in school. Corruption therefore, is not simply a systemic governance problem, but a day-to-day reality of the “experienced curriculum” (Dicum, 2008, p. 620) In areas where the school is the most or only visible manifestation of the central government and schoolchildren see corrupt teachers, the long-term consequences for faith in the government are grave.

Centralization is another problem for the public administration. According to a UN education specialist, Kabul is like ‘an island’, its bureaucrats unaware of what really happens in the provinces. This is due to a lack of statistical data and not just adherence to Soviet-era central planning. Security concerns in a country fractured along ethnic lines make it hard for central officials to acquire information. There are no ready-made solutions to this problem and as a UN education staff member highlighted: “in order to decentralize power, you need to build up capacity in the centre first” (personal communication, February 2009).

Lack of information on schools in a country which has not had a national census since 1979 has complicated school governance. In an up-to-date education system, quantitative data for the entire country are surveyed and collected in a systematic manner and added to an Education Monitoring

Information System (EMIS). Data are used to forecast and model future needs. The MoE took steps towards a functional EMIS by conducting its first School Survey in 2007.<sup>15</sup> This was rightly considered a major achievement, considering the inauspicious circumstances.<sup>16</sup> According to a UN education staff member, planning before this school survey would often be based on estimates and reliance on 'local wisdom' (personal communication, February 2009). The political situation in Afghanistan is such that information is likely to be biased in favour of dominant or more influential groups. The results of the 2007 School Survey are still not fully analysed, but are due to be integrated in the updated NESP 2010-2014. The 2007 School Survey is the first complete survey for 20 years. As a valid longitudinal comparison would require at least two complete data sets, it is still too early to assess the impact of education on fragility. Future school surveys might benefit from a vulnerability mapping as part of emergency preparedness.

Assessing education's impact on governance is problematic, but in principle, school management committees for community-based schools can promote local democracy. This is evidenced in a human interest story quoted in a report from PACE-A, an NGO consortium. Salima, a non-literate mother, accidentally killed her son by feeding him what she thought to be cough medicine but which turned out to be a poison. Realizing her illiteracy had caused the death, she resolved to send her children to school in future and got actively engaged in a school management committee. She is responsible for liaison with schools in neighbouring villages, supporting students and their teacher with food, and organizing parents to herd the teacher's sheep. Her husband has built a classroom for the schoolchildren. She described how:

We visit the classroom everyday and try to solve any problems around the classroom and students. (...) When I first started as a school management committee member, I was hesitant about my own ability to encourage people in my village to send their children to school and help the community teacher, because I knew what they were thinking about schooling. But after the training, I realized that what matters most is my own interest. Relying on my wish to share this interest, I feel confident now speaking with people when I talk to them about setting up a school in their village for their boys and girls. (PACE-A, 2008, p. 21)

A story like this provides hope, although it does not reveal important details around local governance, such as how decisions are made and by whom. It is clear, however, that Afghanistan needs many more such local initiatives in order to rebuild community cohesion. Given Afghanistan's need for a stronger civil society, democratically run school management committees could help build the social capital that civil society needs to thrive.

### 3.4 Social

Education is part of a state-building process, creating an educated population able to work in and reproduce state institutions. Education is also part of nation-building, and attempts to construct a

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15. The Ministry of Education conducted similar surveys in cooperation with UNICEF and WFP in 2004 and 2005 respectively, but the data were more incomplete than in the 2007 version, and were not enough to create an EMIS system. The first was established after the 2007 survey.

16. Even this School Survey, however, is not entirely complete. Deteriorating security in 8 of 34 provinces meant that the 2007 survey could not reach an estimated 600 of 9,500 schools. (Ministry of Education 2008, p. 8) When survey teams were unable to visit schools, headteachers were asked to travel to the regional capital with documentation to fill in the survey. For 200 schools even this was not possible as the headmasters did not feel secure. So for these schools, estimates had to be derived from data at the provincial education department. This means that the data set cannot be considered complete or entirely accurate.

national identity whose cohesive strength will unite the peoples of Afghanistan across its numerous social divisions. This rests on the assumption that a credible national identity can integrate or override other competing identities such as family, ethnic affiliation, religious allegiance, class, and disability – to name but a few. Afghanistan’s education law is a testimony to this patriotic effort, as evidenced by the objectives in its first substantial article (Ministry of Education, 2008b: p. 2):

Objectives

Article Two:

The main objectives of this law are as follows:

- 1- ensure equal rights of education and training for the citizens of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan through promotion and development of universal, balanced and equitable educational manner;
- 2- strengthen Islamic spirit, patriotism, national unity, preservation of independence, and defense of territorial integrity, protection of interest, national pride, and loyalty to the republic system of Afghanistan;
- 3- educate children, youth and adolescents as pious Afghans and useful and sound members of the Society.

Islam is the national religion, but the population is divided between its two main branches, Sunni and Shi’a. There is, in addition, a significant Ismaili minority who are widely regarded with suspicion, especially by the Taliban. Both sets of protagonists, the Taliban and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, attempt to define Islam to fit their purposes: for the Taliban, radicalization and commitment to *jihad*; for the state, nation-building.

Afghanistan has traditional primary and secondary schools as well as *madrassas*, which provide training for religious leaders and which are run both by the MoE and the Taliban.

The Taliban claim to be particularly righteous Muslims and have rigidly enforced *shari’a* law in areas they control. The MoE includes Islamic education as part of the NESP which laments the fact that “thousands of children are being indoctrinated in hatred and intolerance in *madrassas*” run by the Taliban (2007, p. 11). Through a national Islamic education programme, the MoE seeks to enlist Islam as a tool in its nation-building project.

This definitional struggle, in which each party tries to establish itself as the authoritative proponent of Islamic truth, permeates even the language and style of the NESP. It is written in a rational, technocratic planning style, focusing on solving problems, reaching goals, and devising solutions. Yet, the section on Islamic education (2007, p. 18) concludes with the declaration that “Islam makes it a duty for everyone to seek knowledge and discover facts.” To a Westerner, this may seem at odds with the technocratic style of the rest of the document, but it is evidence of the importance of Islamic duties to all Afghans.

Language is another major divide. Schoolbooks are printed in the two official languages, Dari and Pashto, and there is no teaching in Afghanistan’s many minority languages – Turkmen, Uzbek, Nuristani, Balochi, Hazaragi, Tajiki, Aimak, and some 25 others.

Afghanistan’s approximately 32 million people live in 34 provinces, and are divided into countless ethnic groups and clans. In the absence of reliable economic and security provision from the state, traditional social structures become a source both of protection and corruption. Afghanistan has no less than 83 officially-approved political parties (CIA 2009), most of which are ethnically-based. Different communities have markedly different rates of access to state services. As an example, the nomadic groupings collectively known as the Kuchi have school enrolment rates as low as 6.6 per cent for boys and 1.8 per cent for girls (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 30).

Gender issues are divisive. The Taliban's war on women has left a legacy of fear, but also of resistance.<sup>17</sup> In the education system, achieving gender parity in the recruitment of female teachers and female students remains a problem. Only 28 per cent of teachers are female, and most are in urban areas, while nearly 35 per cent of students are girls (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 11). Insecurity strengthens differential gender access as the Taliban target girls and women, attacking girls' schools to indicate their strength and vehement opposition to women's participation in society. Gender will continue to be an important battleground in Afghanistan: female education exacerbates conflict and fragility. Hence, reducing fragility cannot be a goal in itself, but must be seen in relation to a broader gender-based and human rights agenda.

In many fragile contexts and developing countries, the urban/rural gap in educational access is another major division, linked to economic, governance and security factors. Rural populations are generally poorer, less educated and harder for the state to govern. Longer distances from home to school make rural areas more dangerous and less child-friendly than urban areas. Community- and home-based education are successful ways of dealing with these problems.

### 3.5 The environment

The climate in Afghanistan is harsh, ranging from extremely hot summers to freezing winters. Since only 25 per cent of schools have usable buildings, this probably has implications for the number of days spent in school, the ability to cover the curriculum adequately, and attendance rates.<sup>18</sup>

Three decades of a conflict, which in some provinces is still ongoing, has taken its environmental toll, triggering deforestation, desertification, soil degradation, and depletion of groundwater. Coupled with droughts and floods, these have impacted on education and well-being in what is still largely an agriculture-dependent nation.

A UNICEF report on child malnutrition, aptly entitled *My children are smaller than others* (Junko, 2005), found that 48 per cent of Afghan children are stunted due to malnourishment. This has a negative impact on students' ability to focus during class. In response to the report Oxfam (Mojaddidi, 2006, p. 17) recommended a school-feeding programme of "a simple, nutritious midday snack of milk and two fortified biscuits". The World Food Programme (WFP) is currently running a school-feeding programme in cooperation with the MoE which reaches 1.4 million children in food-insecure districts. The current NESP includes research on the effect of school feeding (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 55). This is a good example of how education can reduce poverty and thus mitigate fragility. However, it remains debatable whether school feeding is a good solution. It has been argued that school feeding creates dangerous dependency on the school-feeding provider, and that the children are left even more vulnerable when programmes end.<sup>19</sup>

Drought can keep children out of school as work obligations (such as fetching water and animal fodder for the household) get higher priority. Earthquakes, mudslides, floods, epidemics, locust swarms, and forest fires also have major impacts on education. The GoA has an Office of Disaster Preparedness (UNDP, 2004), but the MoE does not yet have its own disaster preparedness plan (IRIN 2008).

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17. The website of the Revolutionary Afghan Women's Association [www.rawa.org](http://www.rawa.org) offers graphic evidence of the challenges and violence that organized feminist groups face.
  18. The 2007 Schools Survey (Ministry of Education 2008, p.17) lists schools by climatic type – Warm Area, Cold Area and Very Cold Area – but does not document the relation between climate and natural and human-induced disasters.
  19. For a discussion of school-feeding programmes, see Penson and Tomlinson 2009, pp. 36-46..

An interesting feature of education's impact on the environment is a MoE scheme to compensate teachers for their low salaries by providing them with arable land, seed, fertilizer and other non-food items in return for teaching (Ministry of Education, 2008c, p. 31). WFP supports communities with Food for Education programmes in the same way.

While the school system has potential to introduce education to promote sustainable development this is not currently a priority as other concerns, particularly security-related, are paramount.

## 4 Lessons learned

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Ensuring security is the most important factor in delivering education, but cannot be achieved solely by force of arms. Armed force is necessary, but dialogue is equally important. The fact that community- and home-based education can function even in Taliban-controlled areas, given strong community support, seems to indicate that security for education depends more on willpower than firepower. Since the security situation makes long-term planning more difficult, flexibility and pragmatism are needed, both in donors' funding mechanisms and within agencies.

Community- and home-based education provided by NGOs and UNICEF, and increasingly by the government, is modest in scale but, nevertheless, important. These programmes are long-term efforts – some agencies have been involved since the 1990s – and are locally anchored and owned. They can discreetly circumvent some access and gendered constraints to education. Their completion rates are high and the small classes are an advantage for educational quality (the average normal class size is 135 students per class). However, they contain just 2.7 per cent of the total number of students (MoE 2008a, p. 16).

Foreign aid needs to be reformed. It is a double-edged sword. The state needs it, but when spent ineffectively, it fuels fragility in multiple ways. The current disbursement system privileges foreign military forces and gives profits to corporations. Western taxpayers could, and should, get much more 'bang for their buck' in Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan MoE needs to be in charge of coordinating (though not necessarily implementing) all education efforts. This would help to create ownership, build capacity, and strengthen the Ministry's position *vis-à-vis* donors. Oxfam, whilst not uncritical of the MoE, supports this view and recommends that all education actors help to build the capacity of the Ministry. IIEP-UNESCO's work with the MoE shows that long-term capacity building partnerships between institutions (not just individual consultants) can lead to sustainable technical self-reliance.

Disaster prevention should be integrated into the national education plan. In a country plagued by earthquakes, droughts, floods, blizzards and other natural disasters, incorporating disaster risk reduction (DRR) in the national education strategic plan should be a priority for the MoE. This should follow the Hyogo Framework for Action, an international commitment to DRR resulting from the 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR).<sup>20</sup>

A national education plan is not just a planning tool. Even if the first plan is not entirely accurate or its targets unrealistic, it is, nevertheless, desirable to have a tangible document which can later be edited and revised. The plan formulation process is a driver of capacity development and promotes self-reliance and initiative. A printed and disseminated plan visibly demonstrates restored technical capacity, political will and clear commitment. It is highly effective in rallying donor support. Most of all, a national education sector plan is a symbol of hope and resilience. Afghanistan sorely needs such concrete symbols of national pride and international standing in its current troubled circumstances.

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20. [www.unisdr.org/eng/hfa/hfa.htm](http://www.unisdr.org/eng/hfa/hfa.htm)

## Appendix

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### Education and fragility: common research questions for situational analyses

These research questions were produced by the INEE Working Group on Education and Fragility and guided the production of this publication.

#### I. Establishing the Fragility Context

1. In general, what has been the pattern of fragility/conflict in the country over the past 10-15 years?
2. What country assessments have been undertaken and what do they identify as the main drivers of fragility/conflict?
3. How do the drivers of fragility/conflict relate to the following domains:
  - Security
  - Governance
  - Economy
  - Social
  - Environmental?
4. How has education been affected by and had an impact on each of these domains?

#### II. Understanding the Response to the Fragility Context

5. To what extent (and how) has a fragility/conflict analysis been incorporated into education sector development over the past 10-15 years at the following three levels:
  - national education sector plans
  - programming in-country by international donors
  - community level projects by civil society and local NGOs?

Analysis **at each level** should be summarized under the following sub-headings taken from the Progressive Framework:

- i. **Planning** – what education planning processes have taken place? have they included a conflict/fragility analysis? what key issues have been identified and which have been ignored? how inclusive have planning processes been?
- ii. **Service delivery** – what are the main development programme areas in the education sector and to what extent do they refer to conflict/fragility? to what extent have services been delivered in targeted program areas? what (intended and unintended) outcomes exist as result of service delivery/lack thereof? how have the particular fragility dynamics present in country affected service delivery; how has service delivery impacted the fragility dynamic?
- iii. **Resource mobilization** – where has funding for education development come from? what aid instruments have been used and why? what priorities are reflected in the way education

funding has been spent? has any funding been specifically identified to address conflict/fragility? to what extent has funding been expended as planned? what (intended and unintended) outcomes exist as result of the resource mobilization strategies used? how have the particular fragility dynamics present in country affected resource mobilization? how has resource mobilization/disbursement impacted the fragility dynamic?

- iv. **Monitoring systems** – what checks and balances exist in terms of transparency and accountability for education sector development? how has programme implementation been monitored (does this include any reference to impact on conflict/fragility)? to what extent do programme monitoring systems capture educational changes related to the drivers of fragility? what programme evaluations exist that make reference to education and conflict/fragility?

### III. Summarizing Impact

What evidence exists about the impact of these programmes on conflict/fragility from academic papers, project evaluations, stakeholders' and recipients' views/fieldwork? In particular:

6. **Planning** – To what extent have plans been implemented and with whose support? what (intended and unintended) outcomes exist as result of plan implementation? how have the particular fragility dynamics present in country affected planning and its implementation? how have planning and implementation strategies impacted the fragility dynamic?
7. **Service delivery** – To what extent have services been delivered in targeted program areas? what (intended and unintended) outcomes exist as result of service delivery/lack thereof? how have the particular fragility dynamics present in country affected service delivery? how has service delivery impacted the fragility dynamic?
8. **Resource mobilization** – To what extent has funding been expended as planned? what (intended and unintended) outcomes exist as result of the resource mobilization strategies used? how have the particular fragility dynamics present in country affected resource mobilization? how has resource mobilization/disbursement impacted the fragility dynamic?
9. **Monitoring systems** – What data exists, if any, regarding educational outcomes as these relate to drivers of fragility (eg, has school enrolment increased/decreased in (former) conflict zones)?
10. **Capacity development**
- To what extent has education sector development been hindered by lack of capacity; conversely, what examples exist in which fragility allowed growth of new capacity in the education sector?
  - How has lack of capacity been generated by or contributed to fragility/conflict?
  - What examples are there of capacity development programmes with a conflict/fragility perspective (eg development of particular skills; resettlement of displaced teachers)?
11. **Role of the international community**
- What international agencies have had a role in educational development?
  - Have they adopted an approach which works 'around conflict' (avoiding conflict areas)? 'in conflict' (in conflict areas)? or 'on conflict' (including specific programmes on conflict prevent and to address underlying causes) (Goodhand, 2001)?

- What are the views of local stakeholders in education on the benefits and limitations to the way that the international organizations have operated?
12. What are key **observations** and **lessons learned** regarding the education and fragility dynamic in this setting?
  13. In broad terms, have planning, service delivery, or resource mobilization activities had a **positive, neutral or negative impact** on the dynamics of conflict/fragility?
  14. What are the **best examples** of programmes that have had a positive impact and why?

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## The study

Afghanistan has been called 'the quintessential fragile state'. Education actors face formidable challenges. But change is possible. The education sector has witnessed enormous growth since the ousting of the Taliban from Kabul in 2001. The Ministry of Education is now in charge of an ambitious education sector plan and is moving towards technical self-reliance.

Education is integral to a state-building project that has yet to bring peace and justice to Afghanistan. The Taliban continues to pose a grave security threat and the opium economy still flourishes. Foreign aid is distributed ineffectively, benefiting foreign military and corporations more than ordinary Afghans. Even the government admits the corrosive effect of corruption.

This study investigates education delivery and looks at how aspects of education contribute to, or mitigate, fragility in Afghanistan. As part of an INEE research project on education in fragile contexts, this e-publication looks at drivers of fragility grouped under five headings: security, economy, governance, social, and the environment.

## The author

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