



Looking Beyond the School Walls: Household Decision-Making and School Enrolment in Afghanistan

Looking Beyond the School Walls

This briefing paper explores key demand-related factors influencing decision-making about school enrolment of both boys and girls in Afghanistan, and identifies ways to increase enrolment and encourage student retention.

Contents

- I. The Dynamics of Household Decision-Making
- II. Key Themes: Examples from Village and City
- III. Why Consider Demand-Related Issues?
- IV. Some Ways Forward: Looking Beyond the School Walls

Overview

As Afghanistan undergoes substantial post-conflict reconstruction, a “Back to School” campaign beginning in 2002 (1381) has resulted in a striking total of more than 4.3 million children enrolled in grades 1–12.¹ However, more than 2.5 million school-age boys and girls (ages 7–18) are still not enrolled, despite the fact that, as stated in the Constitution of Afghanistan, education to grade 9 is compulsory. What are the reasons, often complex and multiple, for these figures? What specific factors do households take into consideration when deciding to send their children – both boys and girls – to school or not? Who makes the decision?

To date, a range of supply-side issues such as school buildings, teachers and curricula have received attention, but demand-related factors on the part of the stakeholders themselves have not been systematically examined. This briefing paper highlights the need for policymakers and others in the education sector to consider important demand-related issues pertaining to school enrolment – and these may be outside the immediate school context.

Recent qualitative research² by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit on household decision-making and school enrolment in both rural and urban settings provides important insights into this complex process. It found that more than one member of a household is usually involved in an enrolment/non-enrolment/dropout decision. Even in extended families, a child’s father and mother play the prominent roles in the negotiation, which may entail either

About the research. This paper draws on the findings of four case studies researched and published by AREU in 2005. The project was funded by the Danish and Canadian governments and the World Bank, and it was conducted in partnership with Sanayee Development Foundation, Save the Children USA and Oxfam GB. The research sites were: villages in Chahar Asyab, Kabul Province; District 13, Kabul City; villages in Belcheragh, Faryab Province; and District 2, Kandahar City. Jeaniene Spink contributed to the design of the study; Pamela Hunte and Gulbadan Habibi managed the field work; Saghar Wafa and Baser Nader were field team leaders.

About the author. Pamela Hunte is an anthropologist who has experience working in Afghanistan over the past three decades. She is primarily interested in sociocultural change in the areas of health and education. In recent years, she has worked as a consultant for AREU on livelihoods issues.

¹ *Securing Afghanistan’s Future: Accomplishment and the Strategic Path Forward* (Technical Annex/ Education), Kabul: TISA and International Agencies, 2004. Undoubtedly enrolment is even higher today, however this source continues to provide the most reliable statistics to date.

² In contrast to quantitative surveys, qualitative research examines a specific topic in detail using a small, purposive sample.

In order to improve the education of Afghanistan's children, encourage enrolment and foster student retention, focus upon only supply-related issues is not enough.

cooperation or conflict. Multiple reasons usually influence a single decision, with supply and demand issues often interacting.

In both urban and rural contexts, however, there are cases in which supply-side factors are not involved in these decisions at all. This finding points to the importance of examining and understanding the demand-side of the equation – requiring consideration of the livelihoods of the stakeholders themselves. Parents may desire education for both sons and daughters, but be constrained by a combination of poverty (which inhibits the enrolment of both boys and girls) and their fear of negative social pressure (specifically in relation to girls' enrolment).

Considerable variation in demand-side issues exists between households. In relation to gender dynamics, there are families in most communities which are willing to take the social risk and send their daughters to school – at least for the primary years. With regard to resource allocation, many extremely poor households continue to place high expectations on education as a way out of poverty and, rather than require their children to work, they send boys (and to a lesser degree, girls) to school in the hope of a better future.

Stakeholders are acutely aware of the supply-side issues involved in their communities' schools, and that the quality of education (especially that of teaching) is important to parents. However, due mainly to limited contact, parents' relations with their children's schools and teachers are often characterised by social distance and distrust. They feel that they lack the necessary leverage with government and NGOs to allow them to become active participants in the education of their children and, correspondingly, in the management of their local schools.

Many schools in Afghanistan lack proper buildings and furniture, classes are often overcrowded, and teachers receive intermittent and low salaries. These pressing supply-side constraints notwithstanding, those actors involved in education must look in more detail beyond the boundaries of the school setting. They must become more aware of those crucial aspects of stakeholders' livelihoods which influence school enrolment and retention, focusing on the following five priority action areas:

- Training head teachers and teachers in basic leadership techniques and community organising skills;
- Establishing active local PTAs (Parent Teacher Associations) in more communities, and strengthening existing associations;
- Providing practical gender training to all teachers and encouraging positive community involvement in this area;
- Targeting outreach to children not enrolled in school; and
- Expanding and refining the school food supplementation programme.

I. The Dynamics of Household Decision-Making

Who decides?

The matter of who makes the decision about school enrolment is directly related to the quality of relationships among household members and the distribution of power within the family. The dynamics of interaction within households, often extended in structure and containing members of differing ages and gender and, correspondingly, statuses and roles, are exceedingly complex; much variation exists between families. In general, although decision-making power may primarily be possessed by the male head-of-household, as is often stereotypically thought, women are also active participants in the decision-making process and, in some cases, wield considerable power themselves.

My wife and I make decisions about enrolling the children in school together. We discuss things. After all, they're her children too...

Father, District 2, Kandahar City

My husband and I both have decision-making responsibilities. We both keep the budget, and my husband takes my advice for all of the workings of our household. He doesn't make any decision without my advice...My husband is a wise person, and he tries very hard to have both our daughters and sons study. And I support my daughters a lot myself, because I really want them to go to school and learn something.

Mother, District 2, Kandahar City

Specifically pertaining to the enrolment of both boys and girls, even in extended families it is primarily parents who make the decision, sometimes with input from grandparents and the child's older brother. The decision itself may entail cooperation or conflict, and much discussion and negotiation often occurs between parents. Gender relations vary greatly between families and, in general, those households which enrol all of their children (boys and girls) in school exhibit comparatively more egalitarian relations between members (for example, both males and females often take part in decisions ranging from daily household purchases to arranging marriages of children, and both parents have similar aspirations for their sons and daughters).

The people in our village are not sophisticated, but now they do see the need for education, and they send their children to school to become wise and literate. They want their children to become something in the future – a doctor or an engineer. I wish my children to have a comfortable life in the future. And when people mention my name and say that my children are literate, it will make me very happy.

Mother, rural Belcharagh

Why send children to school?

Education plays an important role in the livelihood strategies of many families, so most households try to send at least some of their school-age children to school. Both men and women in the study sites, most of whom were non-literate and had never attended public school themselves, noted the significance of education in present-day Afghanistan and its crucial role in the country's reconstruction.

Although the current emphasis on education among Afghans is not completely new,³ returned refugees often note that they have become *roshan-fikr* ("enlightened") through their observation of the role of education in Pakistan or Iran, and they have returned with increased aspirations for their children's education. On a personal level, regardless of economic status, fathers and mothers want the lives of their children to be better than theirs, and they perceive that one way to future success for their children and, correspondingly, their households is through education. Part of the definition of success through education is economic in nature, and it implies the belief that sending children to school – especially boys, but also girls – will result in their gainful employment. Perhaps not consistent with the household's economic reality, the phrase "to become a doctor or an engineer" is a commonly voiced aspiration of parents. In addition, many parents believe that they will achieve increased social status for themselves and their families through their

³ Quranic verse urges the believer to "seek knowledge as far away as China". In addition to religious education, since the time of King Habibullah (1901–1919) government-sponsored public schooling has been another option especially for sons of the urban elite. Over the decades, tensions between modernising and traditional sectors in Afghan society have always been present, with the type of education offered often a key issue in the conflict.

children's education and, in some cases, decision-makers are influenced by religious tenets which they interpret as encouraging the education of both genders.

Gender disparity in school enrolment

In both rural and urban contexts, children who are enrolled in school – both boys and girls – are mostly in the primary grades and have largely been enrolled due to the “Back to School” campaign of recent years. Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, there have been broad changes in gender relations especially in the public sphere, with a corresponding growth in girls' school enrolment: many parents realise the importance of education for both males and females in the current context. Mothers in particular note that households within a neighbourhood observe each other carefully and copy behaviour: when one family sends their children to school (boys and/or girls) others may be encouraged to follow suit.

Table 1. Percentage of school-age boys and girls enrolled in school (by research site)

RURAL				URBAN			
Chahar Asyab (13 households)		Belcheragh (13 households)		District 13, Kabul (12 households)		District 2, Kandahar (12 households)	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
100%	22%	47%	44%	68%	34%	77%	36%

Despite recent gains, however, a striking gender disparity in school enrolment persists in most rural and urban contexts (table 1). Schools included here are all government, except in Chahar Asyab where the Sanayee Development Foundation has established a small community school for girls (grades 1–4).⁴ Of particular interest is that the WFP-funded distribution of food supplements (fortified biscuits in the boys' school, and both fortified biscuits and take-home rations in the form of cooking oil in the girls' school) in rural Belcheragh (Faryab) has fostered greater equity in enrolment.

Why are boys and girls not enrolled in school?

When a child is not in school (has never been enrolled or has dropped out) there is usually

⁴ Charging a fee of 15 Afs per month, this successful school with only one (male) teacher is crowded with almost 40 primary school-age girls, and has a long waiting list (US\$1= ~50 Afs).

more than one reason for his or her non-enrolment. In most cases in the cities, and to a lesser extent in the villages, supply-side factors are not involved at all, while, on the demand side, both economic and social reasons play a crucial role.

Decisions about whether to send a son or a daughter to school are made within the context of a household's general livelihood strategy, which often involves complex resource allocation between members.⁵ Many households struggle to make ends meet, and the education of their children must fit in with the broader considerations of the family unit.

A household's major expenses are usually for food and medical care. Although government schooling is free, sending children to school does require monthly expenditure on school supplies (notebooks, pens, pencils, books), clothes, transport, pocket money and fees (in the case of private courses), all of which mean an ongoing commitment on the part of parents and the household in general.

Direct costs for education vary considerably between households depending upon the number of children enrolled, level of schooling, location and whether it is public or private.⁶ Rather than direct costs, however, it is more frequently the opportunity costs involved in sending a child to school which influence the decision to not enrol, as the boy or girl must work to supplement the household income instead.

Fathers and mothers may desire education for both sons and daughters, but they are often constrained by a combination of poverty (and the related opportunity costs of schooling) and fear of negative social pressure in relation to the preservation of family honour and the practice of seclusion of females. This often results in some (but not all) boys in a household being enrolled, and girls not being enrolled at all or being withdrawn at an early age (after primary school and prior to puberty). There are many variations on this general pattern and in some cases siblings who do attend school serve as tutors to their brothers and sisters who do not.

In rural areas, where educational facilities are lacking in both quantity and quality compared

⁵ In this study's sample of 50 households, estimated monthly incomes ranged from 2,000–12,000 Afs.

⁶ Respondents' estimates of their direct costs for education were 450–2,000 Afs per month, per household.

with urban areas, supply and demand issues often interact in both the decision to not enrol a child at all and the decision to withdraw a child from school. For girls especially, reasons such as a distant school location (more than one hour in areas where they are allowed to walk) and the presence of male teachers may combine with demands for the girls' help in household tasks (childcare, cooking, cleaning) and the fear of negative gossip – resulting in a decision against enrolment. For both boys and girls who have dropped out, parents' impressions that “they didn't learn anything” (that they cannot read and write) and that “the school is not good” (such as the presence of unqualified teachers, improper buildings and lack of supplies such as books)⁷ often combine with the demands for boys to tend livestock

and for girls to weave rugs – again resulting in non-enrolment.⁸

In general, security concerns⁹ did not enter into the decision to not enrol children in the study sample – except in Kandahar City where the kidnapping and murder of some young school children did lead to the non-enrolment of both boys and girls. Information received in Chahar Asyab via radio concerning the kidnapping of school children in Kandahar in the previous year also resulted in the temporary withdrawal of a number of students from the local boys' primary school, but they were soon re-enrolled after the head teacher established a sentry system in which teachers and older boys monitor the younger students' travel to and from school.

II. Key Themes: Examples from Village and City

...I started weaving rugs when I was ten. When we first came to Kabul three years ago [from Iran] we had a terrible life. Father said to weave rugs and I did, but now I'm so tired of this work. I weave from 6am until 5pm...I'm not going to school because I'm busy every day in weaving rugs. I'd really like to go, but my father doesn't let me. He says, "If you go to school, what will happen to our life?" I'm very interested in school, and I ask my mother to convince my father. But my mother says, "Your father has no way to send you to school. You see what kind of a life we have. If you don't weave rugs, how will we make money for food? You know your father is jobless.

14-year-old girl, District 13, Kabul City, never enrolled

Livelihoods, working children and poverty

A household's poverty and the opportunity costs involved in sending working children to school are primary factors inhibiting the enrolment of both boys and girls (especially girls). In both rural and urban contexts, working children may be their household's primary income earners, especially in cases where a father is unemployed. Out of a sample of 50 households interviewed in this research, half contained children who were working for cash or kind in a range of activities (table 2), involving an equal number of boys and girls. Most of these households are very poor and, in many cases, more than one child in the family is working. Comparing the four research sites, Chahar Asyab, a relatively wealthy farming community, contained the lowest percentage of working children.

Almost a third of working children across these samples – primarily boys – combine work with

enrolment in school. Most households in both villages and cities continue to hold high hopes for education as a way out of poverty, and they enrolled at least some of their children in school despite severe economic constraints.

Negative social sanctions: the power of gossip

In both village and city, negative social sanctions severely inhibit the enrolment of girls. If a daughter is enrolled in school, the fear of being shamed by extended family members in other households, neighbours and others is widespread. “People talk”, and often this is too humiliating for members of a household – both male and female – to bear.

⁷ Rather than any mention of the quality of the curriculum, it was the quality of the teaching that was referred to as negative by parents.

⁸ In both rural and urban research sites, many parents complained about the poor quality of their children's education but did not state they withdrew them from school because of these concerns. Only a few references to teachers' hitting of children were made, along with one reference to corruption: a mother noted that a teacher had told her son that if he bought him some shampoo he would give him a pass.

⁹ At the time when this research was conducted, the security situation in all four research sites was relatively calm – prior to the recent attacks on schools purportedly undertaken by the Taliban in early 2006.

Table 2: Working children (by research site)

	RURAL		URBAN		TOTAL
	Chahar Asyab (13 households)	Belcheragh (13 households)	District 13, Kabul (12 households)	District 2, Kandahar (12 households)	50 households
% of school-age working children in sample	9%	23%	59%	22%	23%
Gender	5 males 2 females	4 males 9 females	17 males 16 females	5 males 3 females	30 males 30 females
Total	7 children in 3 households	13 children in 6 households	32 children in 9 households	8 children in 7 households	60 children in 25 households
Type of work – males	stone quarrying	rug weaving, day labour, herb collecting	rug weaving, gardening	painter's helper, ice cream shop, helper, bakery helper, carpenter's helper, candy seller	
Type of work – females	tailoring	rug weaving, embroidery, tailoring	rug weaving	embroidery	
Number of children combining work with school	5 males	1 female	9 males 1 female	2 males	16 males 2 females (14% of all school-going children in sample)

A primary concern for families is the strengthening of their social networks, which is often accomplished through the marriage of their daughters. If a girl does not conform to the traditional ideal of the secluded female and attends school in the public sphere, who will marry her? Appearance in public and contact with non-kin males are seen as shameful and believed to lead to loose morals for females, with severe repercussions for the general extended family/kinship honour in the wider public sphere. Although these beliefs are prevalent in all major ethnic groups of Afghanistan, it is especially among the Pashtuns that female seclusion is traditionally considered the ideal. To a minority of

There are some people who copy from us. We send our children to school, and that's why they send their children to school as well. And if a [government] girls' school were to be built here in the village, I'm sure that people would send their daughters to school. I was the first person to send daughters to the mosque to learn the Holy Quran, and other villagers then copied me and sent their daughters too...If you don't study, you're like a blind person!

Mother of two sons and two daughters, all enrolled in school, rural Chahar Asyab

respondents, the interpretation of religious tenets is involved in these negative social sanctions, as well as the belief on the part of some males that they should be able to provide economically for the female members of their household, precluding females' schooling and subsequent employment in the public sphere.

The harassment of girls on their way to and from school by men and boys of other households is seen as another problem, especially from the perspective of the male relatives of a girl, and this may result in either non-enrolment or withdrawal from school when she approaches puberty. Cases of harassment – either perceived or real – can also lead to verbal or physical conflict between households, which can be avoided if girls do not appear in public.

Gossip about female school attendance may also indicate jealousy between households, in which some individuals fear that others will “get ahead” and succeed through the education of their children in the rapidly changing context of present-day Afghanistan. Deviation from the traditional norm of the secluded female is, in this way, perceived as a threat by many households.

However, both villagers and urban-dwellers are aware that widespread changes are occurring in gender relations in both the public and private spheres, and many parents – fathers and mothers – choose to ignore gossip, take the social risk and send their daughters to school.¹⁰ Of the households studied which enrol all their school-age children (both boys and girls), the children's father is usually literate and has completed at least primary school, if not higher levels. No specific generalisation can be made about the socioeconomic standing of these units, however none are extremely poor. Some, but not all, were refugees in Pakistan. In other households which send at least one daughter to school, the father's attainment of some education is also often related to this decision. In addition, educated women who have married into the community, and some local women with strong personalities, have positively influenced their households' decisions to enrol their daughters.

Parents who do send their girls to school often note that they attempt to treat their sons and daughters equally, and they also attempt to develop positive gender relations between siblings (such as promoting respect between brothers and sisters and encouraging siblings to help each other with household tasks and homework). These households serve as positive role models for others in the community, and play an important part in the complex process of sociocultural change.

Other educational options¹¹

In Afghanistan's urban areas, private educational options are becoming increasingly popular. These include many small private centres offering courses in English, computers, mathematics and literacy, as well as larger private schools which provide complete curricula for primary, intermediate and secondary education (these are less common). In contrast to government schooling

which is free, these private facilities charge a fee (50–300 Afs per month) which households of various economic standings choose to pay. This willingness to make an economic sacrifice clearly illustrates the high value placed on education.

Out of the sample of 50 households in the study, children (primarily boys but also a few girls) from 34 percent of households were enrolled in private institutions (a number of small centres and one large school). Many of these households were returned refugees from Pakistan and Iran which had encountered the wide range of private educational facilities available in those countries, and to which some of them had sent their children. Both the relevance of the curriculum and the quality of teaching in these private settings was noted by parents, as well as the availability of accelerated classes for over-age students.

Some students (especially boys) who attend government schools supplement their study with private courses in computers, English, mathematics and other subjects – often believed to be the key to “getting ahead”. Attendance is either before or after school, and sometimes during vacations. Another group of students – mostly boys but also a few girls – who had missed out on basic education when they were younger due to the war attend private courses in basic education and literacy, sometimes in combination with employment.

Private schools at the primary level and higher are not very common at present but, where they do exist in Kabul and other large cities, their classes are often full. Despite some concerns about the legitimacy and government endorsement of such schools, parents who send their boys and girls to these schools do so because they believe they provide higher quality education (better teaching, better curriculum and smaller classes) than the government schools, and they are willing to pay for this.

¹⁰ Almost half (42%) of the households in the sample had enrolled at least one girl in school.

¹¹ Many children in the sample – both boys and girls – attend mosque schools or Quranic classes in their communities. The national learning spaces survey by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF found that of the 6,784 learning spaces surveyed in 32 provinces, 69% were government and 31% were non-formal (community and home-based schools, mosques and NGO schools) (A. Evans, 2004, *A Guide to Government in Afghanistan*, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit).

III. Why Consider Demand-Related Issues?

At present, many of Afghanistan's schools lack basic buildings and facilities, classes are frequently overcrowded, and teachers (often inadequately trained) receive their low salaries only intermittently. These pressing supply-side problems are numerous and call for immediate attention. However, in order to improve the education of Afghanistan's children, and to encourage enrolment and foster student retention, focusing only on supply-related issues is not enough. All of those active in the education sector – policymakers, educators and the international community – must look beyond the boundaries of the school setting and consider the demand-side of the equation too. Demand-related issues (such as working children and negative social sanctions) are often central to decisions concerning school enrolment and retention, and supply-related reasons may not be involved at all.

The stakeholders' perspective – that of parents and other household members – is also crucial. Stakeholders' opinions of their children's education, whether positive or negative, influence their ongoing demand for this schooling. The quality of education has been shown to be very important to parents – both fathers and mothers – and what parents think about their local school is extremely significant in their decision-making about enrolment.¹²

At present the positive effects of the "Back to School" campaign persist, and many parents continue to hope that their children will benefit from school. However there are many concerns about the quality of education that still exist among both fathers and mothers, and those involved in education must begin to pay more attention to these key stakeholders' opinions, and be prepared to act on any

changes in these demand issues. If parents' negative opinions about the quality of their children's education grow, withdrawals from school will increase.¹³ Demand-side considerations are crucial not only for enrolment, but also, just as significantly, for retention.

For those parents who have not attended school and are non-literate themselves, the question of how they can best help their school-going children, or the lack of anyone in the household to assist with homework, is very important. Furthermore, in both city and village contexts, parents' relations with their children's schools and teachers are often characterised by social distance and lack of trust. With no organised school events, contact between communities and their schools is limited and informal. Many adults also believe that they lack the necessary leverage with government and NGOs to allow them to become active participants in the education of their children and, correspondingly, in the management of their local schools.

Currently, the degree of competition that the government public school system is facing from the private sector in Afghanistan is not extensive, but, with growing demand, private educational options are increasing throughout the country. As has been the case in neighbouring Pakistan in recent years, private institutions may succeed while government schools languish, potentially leading to a two-tiered educational system in which households of economic means have much greater access to quality education. This is another reason for policymakers and others to seriously consider the stakeholders' opinions now and continue to try to improve government-provided education.

¹² Parents generally interpret "quality education" to include the following: daily homework for their children, the presence of kind teachers who know how to teach, a child's enjoyment of school, and his or her ability to read and write. In addition, adequate buildings, uncrowded classrooms and the presence of school supplies and books for all students are important. No mention was made of specific subjects taught or the relevance of the curriculum in public schools by respondents in this study.

¹³ In the study sample, 5% of the total numbers of boys ever enrolled in school had dropped out, compared to 39% of the total number of girls ever enrolled. Few national statistics exist, but it is estimated that 56% of boys and 74% of girls drop out of school by grade 5 (Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, 2004, *Report Card: Progress on Compulsory Education Grades 1–9*, Kabul).

IV. Some Ways Forward: Looking Beyond the School Walls

In addition to pursuing a range of supply-side improvements in education, policymakers and others working in the sector must also examine important demand-related issues. It does not cost much to look beyond the school walls and consider the local community context, but it does demand a degree of dedication and patience. Recommendations resulting from this research, many of which strongly reinforce a number of ongoing activities of national and international actors in the educational sector, include the following:

Train head teachers and teachers in basic leadership techniques and community organising skills. In conjunction with other efforts to improve their teaching skills within the classroom, local educators should also be trained in brief decentralised participatory sessions to consider the wider community context in order to improve their work. As effective leaders and community organisers, head teachers and teachers can build on parents' interests and concerns about their children's education by encouraging their constructive participation in the local school. To foster trust and ownership, school visits by parents should be arranged, along with small-scale class functions, awards events and parent–teacher meetings. For secluded mothers, meetings and events can be held in local homes. Teachers should be encouraged to identify interested fathers and mothers and encourage them to foster positive relations between all households and the local school.

This process should result in a deeper understanding of local households' decision-making behaviour about school enrolment and the specific interplay of supply and demand issues in their community. Efforts can be made to improve relations with those who do enrol their children, and to undertake outreach to those who do not. Experienced NGOs, in partnership with the government, are well suited to lead these activities.

Establish active local Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs) in more communities, and strengthen existing associations. With school staff trained in community organising and leadership skills, they can more effectively facilitate the formation of local PTAs or other

community-based groups focused on education. Separate organisations for males and females may be necessary, and much time and patience are required to encourage the ongoing participation of both literate and non-literate individuals. This effort is worthwhile, however, because active and successful PTAs can play an important role in expanding access to quality education at the community level.

A sense of ownership of, and commitment to, the local school on the part of the community is critical, as is the accountability of the school to the community. Educators should encourage communities to become more involved in the functioning of their local schools, with roles of all participants clearly defined. General planning exercises for schools should include both staff and PTAs. Parents and teachers can work together on activities such as home visiting and outreach, monitoring, management and provision of security, with the types of community contributions varying as necessary.

Under the overall guidance of the Ministry of Education, the head teacher and local leadership should carefully coordinate this, and all interested parents and community members should be involved. Local and district educators should initiate public awareness campaigns about PTAs to increase parents' and communities' awareness of new school-related responsibilities and opportunities.

Provide practical gender training to all teachers and encourage positive community involvement in this area. Male and female teachers should have basic gender training so that they can more positively influence their students and, correspondingly, encourage more households to enrol both boys and girls. A curriculum which stresses positive gender relations in the home and in society is necessary, and recent improvements in this area hold promise. Both male and female educators need to discuss local perceptions of social risk related to enrolling girls in school openly with students, parents and the community, and work with them to change these perceptions in a

culturally sensitive way. Supportive households and parents could be identified by teachers, and they could be encouraged to become local advocates in these efforts.

Target outreach to children not enrolled in school. Outreach is critical for those children not enrolled in school and, for this to be successful, educators must know the community and its households well. There is a pressing demand for non-formal activities such as home-based schooling, accelerated learning opportunities and literacy training, with potential reintegration of the students into public schools. These activities should target specific groups. For example, in the case of school-age rug-weavers (both male and female) an NGO could coordinate its education efforts with a supportive rug-weaving agency contracting the work, at the same time as pressuring commercial vendors to improve the working conditions of children. With the Ministry of Education focused on formal education, the involvement of

experienced NGOs in these targeted programmes is necessary.

In addition, specific projects involving child-to-child learning hold potential for reaching those who are not formally enrolled in school – both girls and boys. Instruction can occur between siblings and between neighbours, and this may involve the formation of children's committees within communities. Concerned teachers and supportive parents can serve as advisers in these out-of-school, non-formal activities.

Expand and refine the existing school food supplementation programme. The WFP-funded food supplementation activities encourage the enrolment of both girls and boys in school. The provision of take-home rations is a particular incentive to parents to send their girls to school. Especially appreciated by the very poor, this programme needs to be expanded and regularised.

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research organisation that conducts and facilitates action-oriented research and learning that informs and influences policy and practice. AREU also actively promotes a culture of research and learning by strengthening analytical capacity in Afghanistan and by creating opportunities for analysis, thought and debate. Fundamental to AREU's vision is that its work should improve Afghan lives.

AREU was established by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, UN and multilateral agencies and NGOs.

Current funding for AREU is provided by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the European Commission (EC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Stichting Vluchteling (SV), and the governments of the United Kingdom, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Denmark.

For more information and to access publications, contact AREU:

Flower Street (corner of Street 2)
Shahr-e Naw, Kabul, Afghanistan

telephone +93 (0)79 608 548 **website** www.areu.org.af **email** areu@areu.org.af