
SECONDARY EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN: A PORTRAY OF POST- CONFLICT EDUCATION RECONSTRUCTION

Juan Manuel Moreno *¹

I. INTRODUCTION

This article presents a preliminary account of the status of secondary education in Afghanistan. No previous references (at least in English) can be found which include reliable and detailed statistical information or policy analysis of any kind regarding the secondary education sub-sector. Thus, more than accurate data collection and analysis, this paper can only attempt to open up the political dialogue about secondary education in the country by identifying the relevant policy issues and putting them into the context of secondary education policies in post-conflict developing countries.

Secondary education has been and to a great extent still is a neglected sector, especially in developing countries. International donors have duly emphasized primary and basic education, and in more recent times, long-term national strategic needs have been put forward to boost investment in tertiary education. Afghanistan is no exception to the rule. On the contrary, it could be presented as a flagship example: At present times, with an overwhelming flow of funds from every donor, primary education obviously continues to be the priority —after the huge success of the back-to-school campaign and skyrocketing enrolments in the first three grades— and tertiary education has already taken a comfortable second place, with

* The World Bank

¹ The views expressed in this article are exclusively those of the author and they do not necessarily reflect the official position of the World Bank.

more and more projects funded with development funds and a proposed increase in budget for 2004 which is arguably the highest of any sector in the country (Government of Afghanistan, 2004). In sharp contrast, and looking at that same document —proposed budget for education and vocational training of 2004 (Government of Afghanistan, 2004)—, only one priority specifically related to secondary education can be identified, namely, the upgrading of Science and Laboratory equipment for High schools. A declaration is also made under this program that ICT should be introduced in secondary schools and that libraries need to be updated.

As a result, secondary education is very likely to be shaped as the bottleneck of education expansion in Afghanistan. And, as is the case in most of the developing world, inequities and restrictions in access to secondary schooling may be working as a major barrier to human development, economic growth and poverty reduction. Secondary education has unique contributions to economic growth, health and social well-being, and democratic participation. In addition, secondary education has a direct impact on both primary and tertiary education, since, on the one hand, it creates a powerful incentive for students to complete and graduate from primary education; and, on the other, is the source to increase the number of qualified secondary school graduates ready to attend tertiary institutions. Therefore, a holistic view and a balanced expansion of education seems to be critical: as a matter of fact, Education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) can only be accomplished with a systematic policy for post-basic and even post-compulsory secondary education. Universal primary completion requires a balanced expansion of secondary, tertiary, pre-school, and adult basic education because there is a need to supply teachers, prepare primary entrants, reach youths and mothers and, as the pool of primary graduates expands, offer them opportunities for further schooling.

II. BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan, the policies —and the role of the relevant institutions— concerning education at the post-primary levels have not been systematically reviewed in decades. In the years of emergency reconstruction (2002 and 2003), the emphasis was placed in the campaign to «go back to school» , that is, primary

schools, and especially for girls. More recently, already in a post-emergency phase, both political debate and project development are getting quite frantic as far as tertiary education is concerned. Secondary education, in contrast, seems to remain as the forgotten sector.

Scanning through the many ongoing projects —and those under preparation for the coming two to three years— it becomes obvious that the international donor community, including both bilateral and multilateral agencies, are concentrating their efforts and their resources on primary and tertiary education. It is true that teacher education is also a top priority, and it purportedly includes secondary teachers, but these are a tiny minority, considering that only 9 percent of total student enrolment is attending secondary schools. As it has been and still is the case in many other developing countries, the impression is that, while primary and tertiary have strong *lobbies*, both national and international, the sub-sector of secondary education does not have one at all.

Sector work in secondary education in Afghanistan is therefore urgently needed. A fundamental reevaluation of the curriculum, objectives, and structure of secondary education is essential for the future of the country and of its education and training systems. It is true that current efforts concerning curriculum reform are in fact considering the secondary curriculum (both of lower and upper secondary education), but these changes are being proposed in an absolute policy vacuum: Issues of curriculum relevance to the needs of the workforce and employment opportunities are just not being considered at all to guide the undergoing curriculum reform; the short-term consequences of the growing demand for education seem to be taken for granted. In short, it would appear as if secondary education were to remain accessible only to urban boys who are being prepared to enter university.

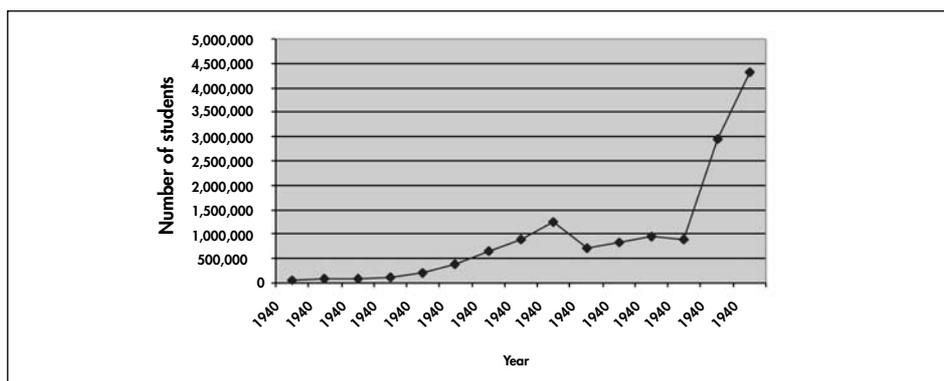
Another key issue which will certainly shape the nature and function of secondary education in the wider Afghan scene is gender. Co-education in secondary education does not seem to be viable so far, although the Government should seriously consider taking that step. There are entire provinces in which women will simply have no access to secondary and, therefore, to higher education. Creating new secondary schools for girls can only be done at a very high cost, and it does not seem that such initiative can be promoted as a policy priority. Addressing the issue of gender in a way that balances cultural concerns, increasing

access and equity, and cost-effectiveness, will require innovative and flexible approaches, including use of distance learning and technology. New venues for the education of girls at the secondary level must be sought after, including new access devices and new pathways, but making sure that they are not second-class options for girls, particularly in those provinces where the political, social and religious environment is preventing them from attending secondary school altogether.

III. BASIC DATA AND PROJECTIONS FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

In 2002, April, when the first Comprehensive Needs Assessment in Education was drafted, 4.3 million students were enrolled in Grades 1-12, of which 3.9 million or 91 percent, are in primary schools. Female participation in primary schools (representing 34 percent of total enrollment) has exceeded the pre-Taliban period, something which comes as a very revealing indicator. Available data showed that secondary education GER was between 5 and 11 percent for boys and as low as 1 to 2 percent for girls. It should be noted that the last cohort of students who graduated from high school in a year without war and civil strife is now over forty years old. Looking at the figures (see Figure 1), it could legitimately be argued that, especially as far as secondary education is concerned, the situation in Afghanistan is not so much one of post-conflict *reconstruction* but of post-conflict *construction*.

Figure 1. The growth of student enrollment (1940-2003)

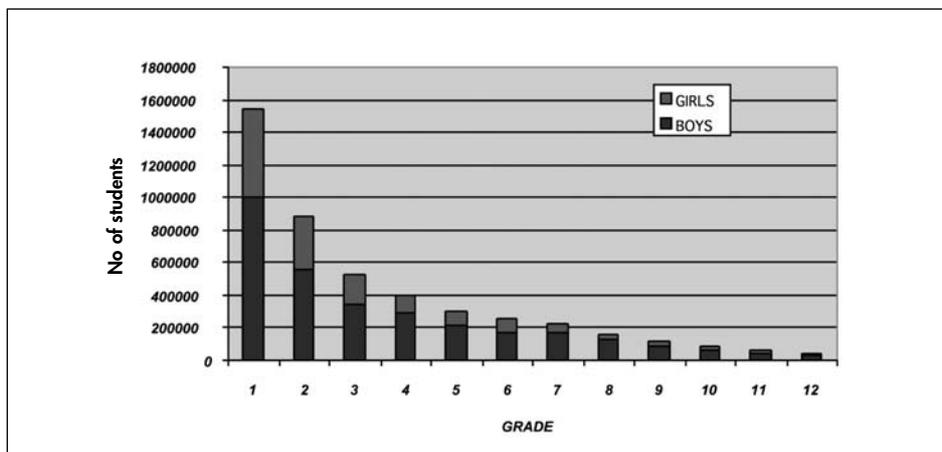


Source: Department of Planning, MOE, 2003

At present, there are approximately 400.000 secondary students in 1000 high schools around the country (although roughly 75 percent of them are in lower secondary). Back in 2001, the official figure was of 1100 secondary schools, but figures in that regard can be quite misleading because many so-called high schools are combined primary and secondary schools with grades 1-12 inclusive. Many of the identified schools exist only in name, as many have been damaged or destroyed in the war years. The exact number of usable secondary structures is unknown, but overall estimates indicate that 40 percent are destroyed and another 15 severely damaged (Ministry of Education, 2002: *Comprehensive needs assessment in education*).

Access to secondary education is open to every student graduating from the 6th grade; in other words, there are no competitive national examinations to allocate the scarce secondary school places; there are no examinations either to select students from lower to upper secondary schools. First, failure and drop-out rates very high in the last two years of primary education, so any further selection mechanism would be probably be superfluous. In addition to that, the fact that practically all secondary schools are located in urban and semi-urban areas, together with prevailing constraints for the access of girls, account for the extremely low percentage of the age group enrolled in secondary education.

Figure 2. Student enrollment by grade: 2003



Source: Department of Planning, MOE, 2003

CUMULATIVE ROLLMENT, SELECTED GRADES
Afghanistan 2003

Grades	Total	% of Total Enrolled	Male	% of Total Enrolled	Fermale	% of Total Enrolled
1 to 3	2,816,772	67.29%	1,789,747	42.76%	1,027,125	24.54%
4 to 6	964,243	23.03%	676,900	16.17%	287,343	6.86%
7 to 9	291,312	6.96%	223,225	5.33%	68,087	1.63%
10 to 12	113,690	2.72%	82,372	1.97%	31,318	0.75%
Total Enrolled	4,186,017		2,772,244	66.23%	1,413,873	33.78%

Source: MOE Department of Planning, 2003

Considering the increase of the demand for education over the last three years, together with present birth rates in Afghanistan, it is easy to anticipate a huge increase of demand for secondary education starting in 2007 (even if high repetition and drop-out rates persist at current levels). Adding to that is the fact that the recently approved Constitution has extended compulsory education until the end of lower secondary school, that is, the 9th grade. It will certainly take more than the formal adjustments to the secondary school curriculum now being undertaken to be able to cope with the rapidly approaching new secondary education scenario in Afghanistan.

Increasing numbers of children eligible for higher levels of education will surely have a further impact on public expenditure, quality, and efficiency of these levels of education in Afghanistan. It is therefore important to begin consideration of how the upper levels of the education system will be affected and how they might adjust. The questions remain the same as in other countries having gone through the same process:

- How should this anticipated expansion be dealt with by the school system?
- What balance should be struck between general secondary and vocational education?
- At which point would it be recommendable to establish an external examination with sorting and selecting purposes?

- How long should a common curriculum be maintained and, once curriculum diversification starts, which curriculum areas should still be common? And which specialized areas should be emphasized?
- How should the articulation point between secondary and tertiary education be regulated so that both equity and efficiency are ensured?

Afghanistan does not have user fees, as it was the case, for instance, in some African countries (Uganda and Kenya are good and recent examples) also pressed with similar expansion and enrollment pressures at the post-basic levels after rapid success in expanding enrolments in primary education. The Government of Afghanistan will have to consider how it will deal not only with the anticipated success of EFA, but also with how it can leverage the awaited success in basic education to further educate its graduates and engage the country more pro-actively in its own development. Efforts to expand and improve the education system of Afghanistan must therefore be holistic, flexible and responsive to potential demands from both students and the labor market, while improving equity, access, affordability, and linking it more carefully to all of the MDGs.

IV. THE PRESENT STRUCTURE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

There is no Law/Act in Afghanistan specifically concerned with secondary education. However, there is a legal document, called *Regulatory Framework* (still not translated into English), which deals with issues of student admissions and enrolments, organization of schools, roles of teachers, headmasters and principals, supervisory practices, night schools, and examinations. The Directorate of Secondary Education is the responsible instance for all these matters. In addition, there are the —recently reformed— national curriculum guidelines, which are the responsibility of the MOE Directorate General for Translation and Compilation.

The secondary school system in Afghanistan is public. There are no private schools and the new Constitution happily approved by the Loya Jirga in January 2004 only opens the door for the private sector at the tertiary education level. Nonetheless, private tutoring is a widespread phenomenon in Afghan secondary education level, and it is in fact the second job of many secondary teachers, according to the

information given by the Director of Secondary Education. Moreover, there are the NGO secondary schools, arguably of much better quality than the State schools, which are attracting the best teachers with the strongest academic backgrounds (salaries are on average five times higher than in the state sector).

General secondary education in Afghanistan is divided into two cycles, from the 6th to the 9th grade, or lower secondary, and from 10th to 12th grades, or upper secondary. Up to the 2004 academic year, the curriculum throughout the six years was absolutely uniform, with no electives for students to choose from, and no regional/local variations whatsoever. From the new academic year onwards, lower secondary will remain entirely with a common curriculum, but two different tracks are being introduced in upper secondary: Scientific and Humanistic-Social. This will entail some optional subjects for students in both tracks, and also different time allocations of the subjects which are still common to every student.

It is envisaged in MOE plans that 40 percent of lower secondary school graduates who aim to pursue post-compulsory schooling, will access general upper secondary schools. Government plans also foresee that 55 % of these new entrants will be in the scientific track, whereas 45 % will be in the humanistic-social track. Also, a high proportion of lower secondary graduates applying for upper secondary education—as many as 30 % according to some MOE sources—are now expected to go to the Teacher Training Colleges (TTIs) which, although not considered as part of the secondary school sector, are becoming de facto a part of it. On the other hand, the increasing shortage of teachers in Afghanistan requires very active measures and policies to attract students into teacher training. MOE authorities believe, and they may be very right, that students at the upper secondary level will be easier to retain in teacher training institutions and, even more importantly, into the teaching profession once they start teaching in schools.

The vocational sector at the secondary level: Vocational education used to be a flourishing enterprise in Afghanistan. The Department of Vocational Education (DVE) has existed for 80 years. During Soviet occupation, there was even a Ministry of Vocational Education (responsible for TVET at the secondary level). The past two decades, however, have seen the nearly total destruction of TVET in the country, and only two years ago has it started a very slow process of reconstruction.

Data offered by the DVE as of 2004 point to a total of 40 functioning schools (roughly the same number that MOE shows in the statistics available for the sector; see Table below), 17 of which are in Kabul, and the remaining 23 in 19 provinces. (This implies that there are 13 provinces in the country with no supply of TVET at the secondary level). The total number of students enrolled is said to be around 5.000. There is only one female vocational school, with a total enrolment of 400-500 students as of 2003. A total of 1.200 teachers work in vocational schools, of which only 10 percent are women.

**NUMBER OF TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS
EXISTING IN THE PAST**

Skills	Location	Grades 10-14	Grades 10-12	Grades 6-9	Total
Technical	Kabul	5	12	1	18
	Provinces	2	5		7
Agriculture	Kabul	1			1
	Provinces		10		10
Business/Admin	Kabul	1	4		5
	Provinces				0
Total		9	31	1	41

While these schools are identified as part of the MOE network, it would appear that they are actually owned and operated by other institutions, including provincial authorities and even other Ministries. It could very well be that the lack of direct funding from MOE has led to such a situation, and that, as a result, it is just not possible to ascertain how many of these schools are actually functioning. DVE Director and Deputy Director claim that the funding situation is desperate, despite the fact that MOE is projecting that 30 % of the graduates of lower secondary will be entering vocational schools. As of now, and according to the same sources, the absolute ceiling that these schools can absorb is the current 5000 students.

Broadly speaking, vocational secondary education students are of two different kinds: Firstly, those who are enrolled in three-year programs and go straight into the labor markets. They account for 80 % of total TVET enrolments. Secondly, those students, 20 % of the total, who are enrolled in 5 year courses and graduate

as «associate engineers». These graduates used to have a choice between going into employment or pursuing studies at the tertiary level. This latter possibility became almost impossible when, three years ago, the Ministry of Higher Education introduced the policy that only those vocational graduates with an average 90 points (out of a maximum of 100) and with two years of work experience could sit for university entrance examinations. It thus qualifies as more than a surprising anecdote that last year (2003), only one graduate from the vocational sector could qualify to enter university.

The public madrassah sector at the secondary level: MOE is responsible for a network of *madrassahs*, or religious schools, which admit students at the beginning of the 7th grade and offer a five year program until secondary graduation and a seven year program, until the 14th grade, for those who want to become teachers of Islamic religion. MOE's plans are for 10 percent of primary school graduates to attend these public *madrassahs*, although it is claimed that, should there be more demand for these schools, they will be willing to increase that percentage. As of 2003, such a percentage implies between 17.000 and 18.000 students enrolled in the 200 public *madrassahs*. Only two of these schools are for girls, with a total enrollment of 500 students (a mere 3 % of the total).

Far from being a dead-end option in secondary education, the public *madrassahs* seem to be faring very well in terms of the future prospects of its graduates. After graduating from the 12th grade, these students can get into the contest to enter tertiary institutions, but only in the fields of Law and Theology. According to MOE officials responsible for these schools, as many as 90% of their graduates make it to higher education, the remaining 10% staying for the extra two years needed to become teachers of Religion. Further research would be appropriate here, because if their success rates are this very high, and their costs appear to be comparatively low, the cost-effectiveness of public *madrassahs* should be analyzed to see if some of the factors that account for it are replicable in other sectors of the secondary school system.

The ongoing curriculum reform is also affecting the public *madrassahs*. New subjects are to be introduced, beginning this year, thus reducing the weight and time of the different religious studies heretofore emphasized in this type of schools. Math, Chemistry, Physics, Geography, History and English as a foreign language

have been added to the traditional curriculum (or increased their time allocation). Three core religious subjects and in depth study of Arabic remain.

It is well known that there are a good number of non governmental community-based *madrassahs* in Afghanistan, and their role in Afghan society, especially in some provinces, raises some concerns. No data are available that allow us to grasp the relative importance of these schools; not even the number of students enrolled. It is known that they are open only for boys, funded by the communities themselves, and that there are no formal regulations in terms of age of admission, curriculum requirements or the like. However, it is interesting to note that the MOE has recently opened the possibility that students of these schools can transfer to the public *madrassahs* or even to the teacher training institutes (TTIs). For those who want to do so —and according to MOE sources, there are many—, the *equivalence* or correspondence between the community *madrassahs* and the public ones implies that they lose one year when making the transfer, and for those who want admission into the TTIs, the loss is two years. The reason for this arrangement is that the students from the community *madrassahs* need to catch up with the non-religious subjects.

Non-formal secondary education: In these pos-war years, access to education to over-age students has also become a key issue. Many children, adolescents and young adults whose education was interrupted by war and conflict and are now eagerly demanding their right to complete their education and get a diploma. Accelerated —catching up— special programs and courses are a priority for the Government of Afghanistan, and this is very clearly in the MOE Budget, also in 2004. The more substantial part of this over-age student demand has to do with lower secondary education and with vocational education at the upper secondary level.

V. EXPANDING AND REFORMING SECONDARY EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Supply and demand constraints: Access to secondary education is constrained by a number of factors, particularly the number and location of secondary schools, catering mostly for urban students. Moreover, the number of schools in relation to school age population is lower in the southern and western regions. Current emphasis on primary and tertiary education, to a certain extent promoted and

actively fostered by donor organizations, does not anticipate that new investments on secondary schools will be made in the foreseeable future.

Gender inequality in access to secondary education is basically determined by residence, i.e., the enrolment of girls varies sharply from 34 to 0 percent depending on the region or province. But there is also a demand-side constraint concerning girls' access. During the previous regime in Afghanistan, the only secondary education available to girls was in the two northeastern provinces outside Taliban control. Even as of today, there are still entire provinces where there is not even one single girl enrolled in upper secondary education. Cultural and religious tradition in these provinces demands that girls are taught by women in female-only schools. Although the proportion of female secondary school teachers in the country is not as low as it could have been expected (up to 36 percent in upper secondary education), they are again unevenly distributed throughout the country, with a high concentration on the Kabul urban area and the two aforementioned northeastern provinces.

Supply and quality of secondary education teachers: In addition, when we look at the figures of the distribution of teachers in the country (see table below), it is quite striking to see that there are good numbers of secondary school teachers, i.e., more than half of the teaching force is *registered* as lower or upper secondary, and this is so when the percentage of the age group entering secondary education as of 2003 does not even reach 8 %. It necessarily has to be assumed that the majority of those secondary teachers are now working in primary schools, but in a few years from now, the pressure of enrolment figures will be falling on the secondary school years. The strategy of rapidly training teachers to meet the demand is more difficult at the secondary school level than it is for primary education, because the teachers at secondary level must have a more advanced knowledge of subject matter and still a good knowledge of what is generally referred to as pedagogy (teaching skills, classroom management skills, etc.). This is certainly not easily achieved just with some *accelerated* training.

CUMULATIVE NUMBER OF TEACHERS
Afghanistan 2003

Grade	Total	Male	%	Female	%
1 to 6	38,515	30,056	78.04%	8,459	21.96%
7 to 9	19,554	13,801	70.58%	5,753	29.42%
10 to 12	22,714	14,550	64.06%	8,164	35.94%
Total	80,783	58,407	72.30%	22,376	27.70%

Curriculum change and curriculum reform. Lots of work is being carried out concerning the reform of the primary school curriculum in Afghanistan. A new national curriculum will be ready for approval in 2004, after years of work and the involvement of numerous bilateral and multilateral donors (Ministry of Education, 2003) (See annex 2). Even if with less resources and with virtually no participation of the different stakeholders, a modest reform of the secondary curriculum is also under way in 2004. As described above, the secondary school curriculum is to evolve towards greater diversification, flexibility and relevance. It is geared to follow the world trend of making secondary education a more self-contained sub-sector with its own goals and functions within the education system and in relation to the labor market.

Even in its new version, the Afghan secondary curriculum includes too many subjects, is too academic, and there is very little time allotted for some key subjects and learning areas (such as, for instance, physical education, with just one class period a week all through secondary school). In lower secondary schools, this extreme encyclopedic approach means that students have 16 different subjects (see Annex with the new National Curriculum), and optionality is almost non-existent. The time allocation adds up to a total of 36 class periods a week, which may seem a lot, if not for the fact that class periods in Afghanistan are 45 minutes in the summer and 35 minutes in the winter. In many schools in Kabul, where up to three shifts per day have been arranged, class periods last only for 30 minutes. This means that, for those students, the average time on each subject per week is just a bit over one hour. Time on task and opportunity to learn do not seem to be very high in secondary education in Afghanistan, and the choice to have an overloaded curriculum might not be the wisest one.

The new division at the upper secondary level between natural sciences and social sciences leaves students in the latter section with almost no education in math and science. Most subjects are only superficially covered, and this, once again, has to do with the drive to include new areas into the curriculum without giving up any of those that were there before. Only religious subjects —formerly up to four different ones— have been substantially reduced. But the heavy emphasis on languages has remained untouched (up to five different modern languages are to be studied). The new subjects finding their place into the curriculum are ICT or computer science, and Technology.

A central quality concern is the lack of textbooks and other teaching and learning materials for secondary schools. In 2002, textbooks for science and math subjects come from the International Rescue Committee (IFC), and geography and history from UNO. However, no systematic effort has been made concerning general secondary education or, for that matter, vocational training at the secondary level.

National examinations, monitoring and evaluation policies: It was mentioned above that there are no national examinations at the beginning or the end of secondary education; neither are there in the transition point from lower to upper secondary school. As far as its selection purposes are concerned, such examinations would not be needed at all. In secondary education, Afghan students must pass school-based examinations at the end of each year. Students used to be required to pass every subject or repeat the entire year; recently, it was decided that promotion was possible with a maximum of three failed subjects in the previous year. Still, available data about failure and drop out are dramatic: Not only are failure rates very high but also very different among boys and girls, and across regions, provinces and municipalities. These disparities go as far as to range between a 99 percent pass rate in grade 9 in a given province (see Annex 3 for a full account of pass and failure rates) and down to 0 percent in others. This is a remarkable phenomenon, since the highly centralized governance of the school system and the extreme uniformity of the secondary curriculum would have made anyone expect that evaluation practices —and outcomes— be more consistent.

In any case, pass rates all throughout secondary education are unjustifiable low, even more so when considering that the percentage of the age group enrolled is one of the lowest in the world.

The issue of evaluation practice and instruments at the classroom and school levels should be carefully reviewed and reformed. The already extremely fragile sub-sector of secondary education simply cannot endure such high failure rates and, as a result, wastage of resources.

The MOE has just decided to establish a new national examination after the 9th grade (lower secondary school leaving exam) with a double function: certification of compulsory studies and sorting students to one of the three profiles available at the upper secondary level —natural or social sciences in the general schools, or vocational schools. The creation of the first external (not school-based) national examination in Afghanistan is in itself good news, as it can influence and align evaluation practices and instruments used at the classroom and school level. In designing the new examination, these types of effects and potential incentives on the network of secondary schools and on teachers' attitudes and behavior in the classroom should be carefully explored.

VI. SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Position secondary education in the political agenda of Afghanistan: The Ministry of Education (MOE) has proposed to include a sub-component in the new education project concerning the «Development of Science and Math education in grades 7-12», that is, in secondary education. The World Bank and other international donors involved in the reconstruction of Afghan education should take this opportunity to suggest that this subcomponent be upgraded to a more ambitious one related to the improvement of secondary education, where the emphasis is placed on equitable access to lower secondary, the beginning of a reform of the secondary school curriculum (notably Science and Mathematics) and the training of science and math teachers at the secondary level.

A central policy goal of the MOE is to «develop an integrated system of education including basic schooling, vocational and higher education in order to achieve the objectives of individual sectors and to develop investment outlays in a coordinated manner across all sub-sectors» (Ministry of Education, 2004). This goal, which is to be highly praised, should explicitly mention secondary education as a —literally— central sub-sector of education, one which is being left as a

bottleneck which, as demand skyrockets, will hinder access to and quality of both primary and tertiary education.

Sector-wide policy issues considered and described in the 1383-1385 (2005-2007) National Development Budget include «achieving gender parity in primary education» and to «promote access and geographical equity in the provision of education». These are goals that will need to be pursued consistently for a long time in Afghanistan. It is recommended, in line with MDGs, to explicitly include secondary education as far as gender parity and geographical equity provision are concerned. This has budgetary implications leading to the eventual reconsideration of public expenditure in both primary and secondary education. The rationale for the FTI Indicative Framework benchmarks on spending for education is that for a country with a six year compulsory education system, about 50% of the budget should be spent on primary education, in order to allow adequate financing for secondary, tertiary and pre-school.

Afghanistan has recently decided to extend the period of compulsory education until the end of the 9th grade, that is, from 6 to 15 years of age. In other words, the goal is to universalize lower secondary education. The task for the future is to implement the final stages of universal 9-year schooling. Achieving universal lower secondary enrolments requires a targeted approach: provision must focus on the specific provinces, districts and ethnic groups that will not share in the overall rapid rate of growth.

The strategy for upper secondary should be even more ambitious. Students are enrolled in upper secondary by choice, not because enrolment is compulsory. Upper secondary has to play multiple roles and fulfil different functions. Instead of a single, standardized curriculum, it must provide choice for a diverse clientele. Upper secondary is non-universal in its enrolment coverage and diverse and selective in its curriculum options. The changing objectives and function of upper secondary schools need to be recognized in a new concept. In place of the existing schools, with their traditional academic curriculum, upper secondary schools should evolve into diversified or comprehensive high schools. This will involve reform of the curriculum, of the approach to teaching and learning, and of the examination system.

Rearranging TVET at the secondary level. The vocational education sector should be modernized, with a reduction in the number of professional profiles, an greater curriculum emphasis on skills and competencies which will ensure the long-term employability of graduates and, once again, the multiplication of access opportunities for female students. Government plans do predict the use of vocational high schools to provide skills training for the young people who had their education interrupted by the succession of conflicts in the country (over-aged and returnees). And it is claimed that their demand for places in these institutions is huge. Multiple re-entry points are needed for over-aged students and returnees to the system, especially women. Thus, more flexibility in the system overall and in the curriculum in particular is to be achieved.

Nonetheless, if the vocational education sector is called upon to play a role in adult training and re-training —and on the *catching* up of many of students—, its status within the system needs to be carefully considered. There is a certain contradiction in expecting as many as 30 percent of lower secondary graduates to enter TVET schools, and then articulate a set of measures which, in practice, prevent any TVET graduate from having access to university, thus turning vocational schools into a dead-end lane of the education system.

Present financial constraints, together with the nearly extinct state of the infrastructure, the shortage of teachers and the lack of meaningful practical training, would suggest one could choose different options for the immediate future of the secondary vocational sector. One option could be to transfer some of these schools —those clearly devoted to adult retraining— to the Ministry of Labor, and to reintegrate the rest in the general secondary school system, keeping vocational training as one of the curricular streams or tracks provided at the upper secondary level.

Private sector participation in secondary education. Even though the new constitution does not contemplate the emergence of a private sector in secondary education, it is true that the legal door is open for home schooling, distance education alternatives, community-based schools, etc. And these are in turn amenable to private sector involvement in different ways. In a few years, all these options, and probably many others, will be needed to cope with the demand for secondary education, especially in some geographical areas.

Investing in textbooks and teaching materials: This is an urgent need for secondary education as very little has been done so far. Changes in the curriculum will require lots of work and investment, and not only in textbooks, since ICT is being introduced as a subject in upper secondary schools. Foreign language teaching —basically English— is also upgraded as it is going to be taught from earlier grades in primary schools. Again, curriculum development and new teaching materials are needed. International development agencies can make a difference concerning these two curriculum areas.

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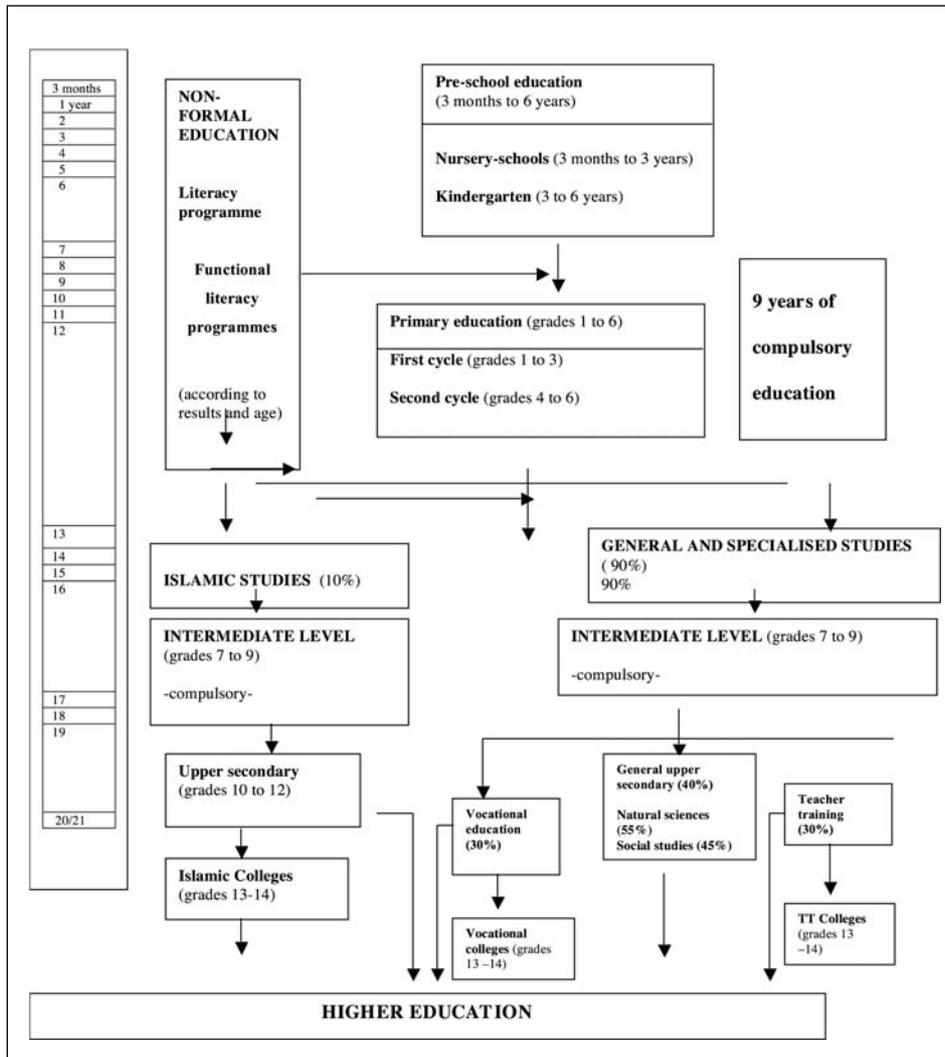
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STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM (Prospects: 2004)



Annex 2
STUDY PLAN FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Curriculum areas and subjects	Primary education		Intermediate school		Upper secondary school	
	First cycle	Second cycle			Natural sciences	Social studies
ISLAMIC STUDIES	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9		0 1 2	0 1 2
Holy Qu'ran	2	2	1	1		
Islamic Education	2	2	2	2		
Holy Hathit (Sayings of the Prophet)	-	-	1	1		
Intepretation of Holy Qu'ran	-	-	-	-		
Faiths	-	-	-	-		
LANGUAGES						
First language ¹	8	6	4	4		
Second language ¹	-	3	3	3		
Foreign language ²	-	3	4	4		
Arabic language	-	-	2	2		
MATHEMATICS						
Arithmetic	5	5 ³	3	-		
Geometry	-	-	2	2		
Algebra	-	-	-	3		
Trigonometry	-	-	-	-		
Geometry and Trigonometry	-	-	-	-		

NATURAL SCIENCES	-	-	-	2	2	2	-	-	-	-
Men and environment ⁴	-	-	-	2	2	2	-	-	-	-
Physics	-	-	-	5	-	-	2	2	2	2
Chemistry	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2
Biology	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2
HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Social studies (History, Geography & Social studies)	-	-	-	2	2	2	-	-	-	-
History	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2
Geography	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2
Ethics	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	-
Civics	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
Economics	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Logic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
LIKE SKILLS⁹	2	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arts, practical work and technological education	2	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Calligraphy	2	2	2	2	2	2	-	-	-	-
Drawing and Home economics	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
Information and Communication Technologies/ICT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

¹⁰

¹¹

PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	12								
TOTAL	4	4	4	2	2	3	3	3	3
OPTICAL COURSES / ACTIVITIES									
Students can choose between:	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
• Sport activities	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2
• Environment education									
• Peace and human rights education									
• Mine awareness									
• Life skills									
• Computer education									

¹ Students' first language is one of the official languages, Dari or Pashto, in compliance with their mother tongue. In the case of students of other ethnicity (Uzbek, Turkmen, Balochy, Pashae and Nooristani) they will study their own mother tongue (local language) in three ours a week in primary education.

² Students who will study Dari as first language will learn Pashto as second language, and vice versa.

³ The foreign language will be chosen by schools, with the approval of the Ministry of Education.

⁴ In the second cycle of primary education, mathematics will comprise of arithmetic and elements of geometry.

⁵ Including health education.

⁶ As an integrated subject in primary education.

⁷ As an integrated subject in primary education.

⁸ In the near future, in the intermediate schools too.

⁹ History, Geography, Civics, Economics will be part of an integrated subject called 'Social studies'.

¹⁰ Ethics, Civics and Economics will focus on the development of life skills.

¹¹ Life skills is a new subject area in the curriculum, aiming at helping students to get familiar with their social, natural and artificial environment and to develop important skills for their personal, social, intellectual and emotional development.

¹² For girls' schools only.

¹³ For girls' schools only.

¹⁴ Students will also practice sport activities at the beginning of the school day and in other situations.

¹⁵ In addition to the weekly timetable, at students' request, and in compliance with the school profile and local resources and circumstances.

Annex 3
Examination Results: Grade 7-9 (% Pass Summary)

Province	Grade 7 Boys			Grade 7 Girls			Grade 8 Boys			Grade 8 Girls			Grade 9 Boys			Grade 9 Girls			
	Admit	Pass	% P	Ad.	Pass	%P	Ad.	Pass	%P	Ad.	Pass	%P	Ad.	Pass	%P	Ad.	Pass	%P	
Year 2002																			
Badakhshan	3765	2253	60%	1055	1044	99%	2645	1653	62%	1173	880	75%	2026	1310	65%	824	683	83%	
Badghiss	307	216	70%	43	26	60%	153	100	65%	10	9	90%	121	81	67%	7	7	100%	
Baghlan	4030	2469	61%	758	641	85%	2850	1773	62%	748	618	83%	1618	1086	67%	394	337	86%	
Balkh 4718	3122	666	3338	1756	53%	2834	1598	56%	1884	752	40%	1937	1209	62%	609	45%	38%		
Bamiyan	1207	483	40%	142	86	61%	816	294	36%	96	54	56%	467	252	54%	39	15	38%	
Farah 731	239	33%	52	415	48%	410	195	48%	25	14	56%	327	188	57%	14	18	129%	46%	
Faryab	2019	837	41%	866	766	88%	2058	1739	84%	398	333	84%	1504	1285	85%	230	227	99%	
Ghazni	3537	2810	79%	81	81	100%	610	468	77%	43	43	100%	253	187	74%	31	31	100%	
Hilmand	1702	1075	63%	1861	74%	4397	1951	44%	1674	789	47%	2769	1482	54%	828	490	59%		
Hirat 6450	3372	52%	2502	386	51%	1933	1096	57%	620	353	57%	1356	745	55%	467	265	57%		
Jozjan 2799	1614	58%	753	197	111%	1990	1308	66%	229	70	31%	1211	736	61%	49	36	73%		
Kabul 2844	1852	65%	177	12900	9631	75%	17706	9400	53%	11554	4895	42%	12202	6190	51%	4667	3033	65%	
Kabul City	1043	0	0%	61	0	0%	378	0	0%	0	0	0#DIV/0!	584	0	0%	2147	0	0%	
Kandahar	3129	2160	69%	303	209	69%	2458	1606	65%	182	145	80%	1909	1196	63%	122	91	75%	
Kapisa	515	37%	79	25	32%	833	348	42%	26	15	58%	595	203	34%	16	0	0%	0%	
Kunar 1383	2337	1474	63%	469	401	86%	1577	1349	86%	178	165	93%	759	603	79%	159	155	97%	
Kundooz	2734	1157	42%	69	19	28%	1544	854	55%	0	0	0#DIV/0!	1003	583	58%	0	0	0	
Laghman	1322	68%	78	5	6%	1163	1158	100%	38	0	0	0#DIV/0!	1117	48%	17	0	0%	100%	
Logar 1952	2571	1823	71%	4	4	100%	1570	1279	81%	0	0	0#DIV/0!	1178	0	0%	17	0	0%	
Maidan Warda	229	0	0%	53	0	0%	185	0	0%	51	0	0%	3349	3739	112%	163	137	84%	
Nimrooz	6675	3053	46%	564	374	66%	4340	2234	51%	433	139	32%	0	0	0#DIV/0!	0	0	0	
Ningarhar	414	265	64%	0	0#DIV/0!	171	109	64%	0	0	0#DIV/0!	75	54	72%	0	0	0		
Paktika	1577	587	37%	0	6#DIV/0!	851	331	39%	0	0	0#DIV/0!	623	216	35%	0	0	0		
Parwan	5965	3890	65%	411	242	59%	4867	2732	56%	268	105	39%	3983	2199	55%	115	45	39%	
Samangan	1415	547	39%	165	95	58%	383	233	61%	85	50	59%	275	157	57%	67	40	60%	
Saripul	296	228	77%	40	32	80%	195	152	78%	45	18	40%	130	105	81%	36	28	78%	
Takhar 3024	1727	57%	607	663	109%	1864	1097	59%	609	313	51%	1259	854	68%	355	300	85%	0	
Urozean	401	0	0%	12	0	0%	248	0	0%	0	0	0#DIV/0!	179	0	0%	0	Error	0#DIV/0!	
Zabul 200	137	69%	0	0#DIV/0!	108	72%	80	74%	0	0#DIV/0!	63	48%	48	76%	0	12356	6660	54%	
Total	90237	52814	59%	25997	18747	72%	61872	35547	57%	20686	9880	48%	43889	26595	61%	12356	6660	54%	

Summary for 'Year' = 2002 (30 detail records)

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta una visión preliminar de la situación de la educación secundaria en Afganistán en los años inmediatamente posteriores al cambio de régimen de 2001-2002. No existen todavía referencias previas (al menos en inglés o en español) con información estadística fiable y detallada o con análisis político de ningún tipo en relación con el sector de la secundaria en Afganistán. Por tanto, el presente artículo, construido sobre un estudio de campo llevado a cabo en Enero de 2004, sólo puede aspirar a abrir el diálogo político sobre educación secundaria en el país, identificando los temas más relevantes y colocándolos en el contexto de las políticas de educación secundaria en los llamados países post-conflicto del mundo en desarrollo.

Teniendo en cuenta el aumento de la demanda de educación durante los años 2002-2004, junto con las tasas de la natalidad, es fácil anticipar un incremento espectacular de la demanda de educación secundaria en Afganistán a partir de 2007 (incluso en el caso de que se mantengan las altas tasas de repetición y de deserción que son ahora la norma). A esto contribuye, también, sin duda el que la Constitución aprobada a comienzos de 2004 ha extendido la escolarización obligatoria hasta el final de la secundaria de primer ciclo, esto es, el grado 9º. Hará falta, sin duda, algo más que pequeños ajustes formales en el currículo de la secundaria, como los que actualmente se están llevando a cabo, para hacer frente al nuevo escenario de la educación secundaria que tan rápidamente se está acercando a Afganistán. Este trabajo pasa revista a cada uno de los distintos sub-sectores del sistema escolar de secundaria, lo que, aparte de las escuelas generales, incluye a los institutos de formación profesional y a las «madrasas» que son financiadas con fondos públicos.

El acceso a la educación secundaria (la tasa actual de escolarización está en el 8 por ciento) en Afganistán se ve limitado por varios factores, en particular el número y la localización de las escuelas, que en su mayoría son urbanas. Hay importantes disparidades regionales, de tal modo que el número de escuelas secundarias en relación con la población escolar es sensiblemente más bajo en las regiones del sur y del oeste del país. La desigualdad de género en el acceso a la secundaria continúa siendo muy importante: Dependiendo de la región o la provincia, la tasa de escolarización de las niñas en secundaria varía desde el 34 por ciento hasta el 0. Todavía hoy hay provincias enteras en que ni una sola niña está matriculada

en la escuela secundaria superior. A todo esto se une la limitación impuesta por el escaso número de profesores —y sobre todo de profesoras— de secundaria tanto en determinadas regiones y provincias como en ciertas áreas curriculares (matemáticas y ciencias especialmente).

El casi exclusivo énfasis actual, en buena medida impulsado por las distintas organizaciones donantes, sobre la educación primaria y en la universitaria, no permite anticipar que se vayan a llevar a cabo las reformas y las inversiones necesarias en el sector de la secundaria. Y no es necesario insistir en que ello puede llevar a desequilibrios importantes en el sistema educativo afgano, que al no poder hacer frente a la demanda de secundaria, podría ver cómo disminuyen —o no siguen creciendo como es necesario— las tasas de graduación en la primaria, cómo se amplía el déficit de profesorado tanto de primaria como de secundaria, y cómo continúan sin abrirse las puertas de la educación superior a las mujeres. Conseguir universalizar la educación secundaria de primer ciclo —ya obligatoria, como se ha dicho— va a requerir políticas muy decididas y orientadas a colectivos específicos. La provisión de escolarización habría de concentrarse en provincias, distritos y grupos étnicos muy específicos, además de las mujeres, que en principio no tienen asegurada su inclusión en un sistema que está en rapidísimo crecimiento.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Sistema Educativo Afgano. Expansión de la Educación Secundaria. Reconstrucción. Reforma del Curriculum.

ABSTRACT

This article presents a preliminary account of the status of secondary education in Afghanistan. No previous references can be found which include reliable and detailed statistical information or policy analysis of any kind regarding the secondary education sub-sector in Afghanistan. Thus, more than accurate data collection and analysis, this paper can only attempt to open up the political dialogue about secondary education in the country by identifying the relevant policy issues and putting them into the context of secondary education policies in post-conflict developing countries.

Considering the increase of the demand for education over the last three years, together with present birth rates in Afghanistan, it is easy to anticipate a huge increase of demand for secondary education starting in 2007 (even if high repetition and drop-out rates persist at current levels). Adding to that is the fact that the recently approved Constitution has extended compulsory education until the end of lower secondary school, that is, the 9th grade. It will certainly take more than the formal adjustments to the secondary school curriculum now being undertaken to be able to cope with the rapidly approaching new secondary education scenario in Afghanistan. This article reviews the different sub-sectors of the secondary education system, including vocational training and the public maddrassahs, and concludes with specific recommendations focusing on the critical role of the secondary school sector in the construction of a balanced and forward-looking education system in Afghanistan.

KEY WORDS: Afghanistan education system. Expansion of Secondary education. Post-conflict reconstruction. Curriculum reform.