

Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework

28 February 2022

PROVISIONAL

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ACRONYMS

AESTF	Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework
ALC	Accelerated Learning Centre
ALP	Accelerated Learning Programme
AKVTI	Afghan Korea Vocational Training Institute
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
BGL	Basic General Literacy
CBC	Community-Based Class
CBE	Community-Based Education
CPAN	Child Protection Action Network
DPG	Development Partners Group
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EiE	Education in Emergencies
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EQRA	Education Quality Reform in Afghanistan
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict Affected Countries
FCDO	United Kingdom Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office
FSAC	Food Security and Agriculture Cluster
GATE	Girls' Access to Teacher Education
GEC	Girls' Education Challenge
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation

IPC	Integrated Phase Calculation
JENA	Joint Education Needs Assessment
LEG	Local Education Group
PFA	Psychological First Aid
PMU	Programme Management Unit
MHM	Menstrual Hygiene Management
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
MYRP	Multi-Year Resilience Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SMS	School Management Shura
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
STFA	Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan
TEF	(United Nations) Transitional Engagement Framework
TLS	Temporary Learning Space
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
TPM	Third Party Monitoring/Monitors
TTC	Teacher Training College
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TVET-A	Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme
WoAA	Whole of Afghanistan Assessment

INTRODUCTION

For children and youth's education in Afghanistan, 2021 has been a difficult year. Prolonged school and university closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict and displacement in the lead-up to the Taliban takeover in August 2021, and the subsequent political instability have all worked to undermine access to quality education in the country. The change in the political and policy landscape precipitated the suspension of most external aid to the sector on which the education system relied, thus interrupting education service delivery. Both humanitarian and development education actors in Afghanistan now operate in a context without a clear policy framework, financing mechanism to channel aid, or dialogue structure that is led by a government – all within a complex sanctions environment. Existing dialogue and decision-making mechanisms such as the Local Education Group (LEG), the Education in Emergencies Working Group (now the Education Cluster), and the grant-specific Steering Committees remained without government counterparts.

As such, humanitarian and development actors have come together for information sharing, joint advocacy, and strategic advice. An Inter-Agency Call to Action¹ was released to highlight critical interventions required to prevent the collapse of the education system and the loss of important gains made in education. The Education Cluster was activated², and the Development Partners Group (DPG) became the platform for decision-making for funding under the Global Partnership for Education (GPE).³ To ensure a clear operational framework to guide programming and investment, the DPG and Education Cluster facilitated the development of this sector transitional framework through a rapid but consultative process for a transitional period of two years. The Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework (AESTF) coordinates off-budget financing to the sector across key interventions, given the current policy environment, and will be reviewed annually.

The Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework serves to:

- Provide a high-level analysis of the current context and status of the education system,⁴ including understanding equity and inclusion challenges;
- Identify priority areas for support based on the current and anticipated gaps in the education system to sustain children's and youth's continued learning in the complex context;
- Coordinate and align programmatic approaches, strategies, and investments in the education sector across stakeholders to improve feasibility, value for money, and impact;
- Offer a framework for inclusive, multi-stakeholder consultation around key technical and thematic inputs;
- Synthesise data obtained through consultation to highlight evidence gaps and required research and to propose strategies and interventions;

¹ UNICEF, Save the Children, UNESCO, and World Food Programme highlighted key interventions for immediate action in November 2021.

² Clusters are part of the current international humanitarian coordination system and are comprised of key humanitarian actors in each sector. Previously the Education in Emergencies Working Group chaired by the Ministry of Education and co-convened by UNICEF and Save the Children, the Education Cluster was activated in 2021, following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, as a neutral body for coordination (co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children) of humanitarian education activities.

³ On 15 December 2021, the DPG agreed to invoke the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Fragile and Conflict-Affected States (FCAS) principles that will allow the DPG to fulfil the governance and oversight for GPE activities until any formal participation of authorities is re-established.

⁴ The intervention focus of the AESTF is directed towards children's and youth's education, including primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, TVET, university, community-based education (CBE) and youth and adult literacy programming. It lacks a focus on early childhood education beyond consideration of linkages to CBE, though this intervention area is recognised as a longer-term priority.

- Suggest viable financing and costing options for key interventions;
- Scope the legacy portfolio of funding in Afghanistan, understanding reprogramming and repurposing needs for major funds; and
- Seek opportunities for integrated programming through multi-sectoral approaches, recognising schools as an important entry point for a range of interventions.

PROVISIONAL

CONTEXT / SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

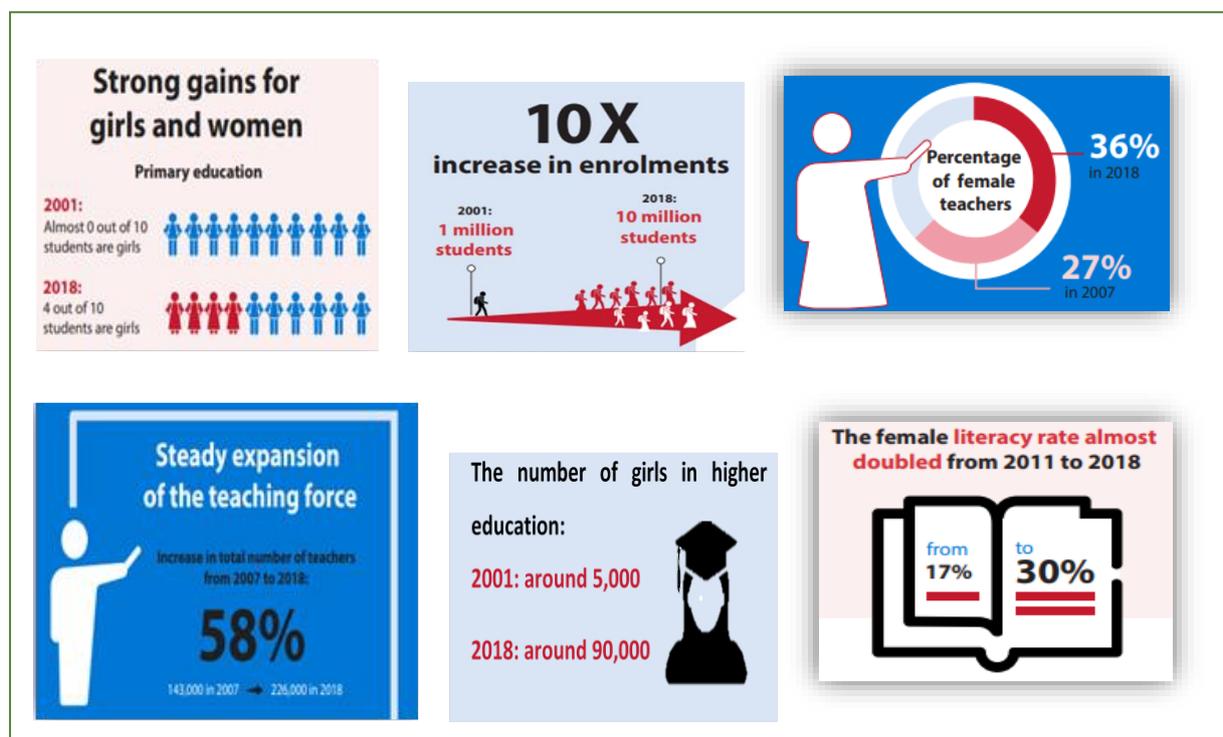


Figure 1. Extracted from UNESCO (2021) “The right to education: What’s at stake in Afghanistan? A 20-year review”: Snapshot of the education sector in Afghanistan pre-15 August 2021.

Over the last twenty years, significant gains in the education sector have been achieved. Participation in education increased from less than one million in school in 2000 (with less than ten per cent girls) to around 9.9 million students (39 per cent girls) in 2019.⁵ Impressive progress has been made in terms of gender equitable participation as well. While there were fewer than 100,000 girls in school in 2001, in 2019, an estimated 3.5 million girls were enrolled. Because of these efforts, the female literacy rate rapidly doubled between 2011 and 2018. In 2018, there were close to 400,000 students enrolled in higher education (both public and private) of which 24.6 per cent were women—in part due to scholarships and the inclusion of women as university lecturers.

Against the gains made, barriers to education remain. Structural and systemic concerns around the school environment, teaching and learning, and systems of support affect equitable access and quality which reflect perpetual low learning outcomes. Despite a tenfold growth in enrolment, about four million school-age children, nearly one-third of the total school-age population, remain out of school, many of them in remote and rural areas. Barriers to school include household poverty, gender, parental level of education, disability, migratory and nomadic ways of life, and conflict and insecurity, among other factors.⁶ In past three years alone, children’s learning has been interrupted by electoral violence, as schools were used as polling stations, earthquakes, floods, drought, extreme cold weather, the COVID-19 pandemic, military offensives and occupation of schools,

⁵ Inclusive of public and private school enrolled students. Based on [UIS](#) data, retrieved on 23 August 2021, 2020 Afghanistan MoE [Annual Progress Report](#), UNICEF Afghanistan reporting and UNESCO report entitled, “[The right to education: What is at stake in Afghanistan? A 20-year review](#).”

⁶ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, [Afghanistan](#).

terrorist attacks, and girls' education bans. Over two million of the 4.2 million out-of-school children⁷ are girls⁸ due to additional factors such as attitudes towards girls' education, child marriage, violence and harassment, insecurity, long distances to school, and a lack of female teachers.⁹ The total number of girls learning in the public education system has stagnated at 39 per cent for the last five years.¹⁰ Girls are less likely to attend schools than boys, particularly at secondary level. The gender gap in education persists with differences in gender parity between provinces¹¹ and within the urban-rural divide. At the primary level, girls and boys in rural areas are out of school at comparable rates compared to their urban-dwelling counterparts (multiplier of 2.5 and 2.3, respectively). At lower secondary level, rural boys are three times more likely to be out of school than urban boys, where rural girls are 2.2 times more likely, indicating that initial school attendance is a predictor of retention.¹²

Year	Primary			Lower secondary			Upper Secondary		
	Both Sexes	Female	% of Female	Both Sexes	Female	% of Female	Both Sexes	Female	% of Female
2001	773.6	202.5	160.0
2005	4,318.8	1,541.3	35.7	461.3	113.1	24.5	190.1	39.1	20.6
2010	5,279.3	2,076.9	39.3	1,476.8	494.9	33.5	567.3	159.4	28.1
2015	6,199.3	2,441.9	39.4	1,669.2	596.5	35.7	982.3	323.4	32.9
2018	6,544.9	2,549.6	39.0	1,982.9	708.6	35.7	1,081.0	367.5	34.0

Data Source: UIS Database (accessed on 31 August 2021)

Figure 2. *Number of students in Afghanistan, 2001-2018 by level and sex (thousand)*. Extracted from UNESCO, (2021), "The right to education: What's at stake in Afghanistan? A 20-year review", p. 18.

Although access to schooling has improved significantly in the last decade, Afghan children are not learning. Completion rates remain low with increasing gender disparities in the upper levels and in rural areas. Less than one per cent of children have access to pre-school education and activities,¹³ mostly in urban areas. Learning outcomes also remain low. For the children enrolled in primary school, 93 per cent in the late primary grades are not proficient in reading and are living in 'learning poverty' – unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of 10.¹⁴ After spending four years in primary school, around 65 per cent of Afghan students have only fully mastered grade one language curriculum and less than half have mastered grade one mathematics

⁷ 2.101 million primary and 2.136 million secondary out-of-school children. 'Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey' in *Afghanistan Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) Key Statistical Indicators (2020)*.

⁸ UNICEF. (2021). *Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Afghanistan* (forthcoming).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education*. 'EMIS 2019 Dataset.'

¹¹ For example, 13 per cent girls in school in Uruzgan, Southern Region and 87 per cent girls in school in Bamyan, Central Region.

¹² *Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, UNICEF, USAID, & Samuel Hall. Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children: Afghanistan Country Study*. (2018).

¹³ 2019 Girls Education Policy, p.226.

¹⁴ UNESCO. (2021). [The right to education: What is at stake in Afghanistan? A 20-year review](#).

curriculum,^{15,16} with a significant gender gap.¹⁷ Only half of Afghan youth (15-24 years old) are literate.¹⁸ Although learning outcomes are not yet measured in a systematic way nationally, monitoring and sample-based survey data suggest that learning outcomes in schools are constrained.¹⁹ The reasons behind the low performance are complex and relate to an education system lacking in all key school-level determinants of learning: skilled, motivated, and supported teachers, effective school management, school inputs that affect teaching and learning, and prepared and supported students²⁰ (see Annex B for a bottleneck analysis).

Following the Taliban's²¹ return to power on 15 August 2021, the education system faces unprecedented challenges. Pre-August 2021, the education system was fragile and aid dependent with half of all core public expenditure in 2019 financed through donor funding. As development funding contributed 49 per cent of the national education budget²² and has now been largely paused, the already fragile and under-funded public education system is at risk of collapse. Schools had mostly been closed since March 2020 due to COVID-19 and were recently closed again for summer holidays after a short period of teaching and learning in May 2021. While schools are now open, the Taliban have requested all secondary school-enrolled girls and female teachers to stay at home until a decision is made on how to continue the education of adolescent girls, based on Taliban leadership norms and values. After the Taliban took de facto control of the seat of government, former Ministry of Education (MoE) technical staff were side-lined²³, donor commitments to on-budget and development financing were put on hold, and many implementing partners suspended their operations to assess the new environment. As of this writing, education partners have largely restarted humanitarian programming and are considering implementation approaches to support essential basic services. The status of longer-term development programming remains unclear.

In addition, the **higher education system faces unique challenges**, as the Taliban have indicated gender segregation, thereby requiring reorganisation at universities. Due to the economic crisis, professors' salaries have been cut by 40 per cent on average with no benefits. Additionally, several highly qualified professors have left/fled the country, leaving behind a higher education system which needs support to sustain and improve the gains of the past 20 years and to prevent the 'brain drain' effect.²⁴

¹⁵ World Bank. [Afghanistan Learning Poverty Brief](#), October 2019.

¹⁶ By grade three, only 22 per cent of Afghan students obtain minimum proficiency in reading, and only 25 per cent in mathematics. (2016 Monitoring Trends in Educational Growth assessment, retrieved from [UIS data](#) on Oct 2021)

¹⁷ Using the Learning-adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS) metric, boys receive 5.3 years whereas girls receive 3.8 years.

¹⁸ World Bank. (2018). 'Afghanistan: Promoting Education During Times of Increased Fragility.' Available at: [Afghanistan: Promoting Education During Times of Increased Fragility \(worldbank.org\)](#).

¹⁹ Australian Council for Educational Research, Class 6 Proficiency in Afghanistan 2013: Outcomes of learning assessment of mathematical, reading and writing literacy, ACER, Australia, 2016.

²⁰ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/588881536147087211/AUS0000428-REVISED-SABER-SD-Afghanistan-digital-9-27.pdf>

²¹ United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Action (OCHA) uses the term 'de facto authorities' to reflect neutrality. Where 'Taliban' is reflected in this document, humanitarian partners and the United Nations will use 'de facto authorities.' Likewise, where 'de facto authority' is used, bilateral actors may instead use 'Taliban.'

²² UNESCO. (2021). *The right to education: what's at stake in Afghanistan?: A 20-year review*. Available at: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/afghanistan_v11.pdf.

²³ In particular, previous National Technical Assistance (NTA) development programme-focused staff, who were largely funded by the World Bank, are no longer financially supported. Anecdotal reports also indicate that most technical staff from the GIRoA MoE have been left out of decision-making due to distrust, though some have been asked to re-join the de facto MoE in recent weeks due to the lack of specialised technical expertise, particularly in navigating complex development programmes.

²⁴ Despite these obvious challenges, there is willingness at the de facto Ministry of Higher Education to stabilise the higher education system and resume studies at both public and private universities with women included at all levels.

Under these conditions, **55 per cent of the Afghan population** (24.4 million people) **is projected to require humanitarian assistance in 2022**²⁵, of which 54 per cent are children (9.7 million). An analysis of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification indicates that acute food insecurity, which forces many families to de-prioritise education in favour of contributions to the household income, is projected to affect 23 million people in the first quarter of 2022.²⁶ The most marginalised children in need of education in emergencies (EiE) assistance, which currently totals 7.9 million children, are at-risk of never entering or returning to the education system.²⁷ Contributing to this risk are pre-existing factors such as inadequate infrastructure and learning materials, safety concerns in and around the school, and poor teaching quality. Following August 2021, budget expenditures froze, as state assets and donor contributions were suspended, directly affecting expenditures in health and education. Teacher and education personnel have not been able to consistently rely on payment of salaries, though the de facto authorities have managed to pay salaries through import taxes and individual contributions in 2021,²⁸ **which has led to teacher absenteeism and, subsequently, student absenteeism or drop-out.**²⁹ In addition, other supply side barriers remain. Repairs to school buildings which were damaged during the escalation in conflict in 2021 are yet to be completed, making buildings unsafe for children and personnel to return. Lack of funding has interrupted the supply of teaching and learning materials, teacher trainings, and other administrative functions of the public system, including the Education Management Information System (EMIS).

While the situation remains fluid, actors in the education sector have come together to coordinate a response to the crisis, aimed at preventing the collapse of the education system, to keep schools open and to ensure all teachers and children continue in the teaching and learning process – outlining these shared goals under one strategic framework.

²⁵ 6 million additional Afghan people are in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022 compared to 2021 (OCHA, 2022).

²⁶ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA). (2022). *Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview: Afghanistan*. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-overview-2022.pdf>.

²⁷ The 9.3 million children includes the 8.8 million children enrolled in public school according to EMIS 2019 and some 500,000 children in community-based education (CBE). While out of the 9.3 million children, 7.9 million children are recognised as being in acute humanitarian need, in food insecure families, and at high risk of dropping out (HRP, 2022).

²⁸ There are reports that the de facto authorities have paid civil servants' salaries from August to December 2021, including public school teachers' salaries. The payment was made in January 2022 for the months of November and December. Anecdotal reports highlight that teachers in some provinces/districts have still not received or been able to access salaries since the political takeover in August 2021.

²⁹ As noted in UNESCO's rapid data collection through Provincial/District Literacy Managers (PLMs/DLMs), facilitators and beneficiaries from 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

TECHNICAL STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES – BY THEME

The AESTF emphasises three key thematic areas: Access, Quality, and Sustaining Systems. The education sector's shared vision and commitment to uphold every child's right to learn and to ensure all children and youth in Afghanistan, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion, ability, or other factors, continue to equitably access quality, safe and relevant learning opportunities are organised around the three key areas with three cross-cutting themes. The design and methodology of the AESTF's development is detailed below. It highlights a meaningful and constructive consultation process that has resulted in the development of a clear and comprehensive framework to guide collaborative education sector efforts which aim to equitably enhance access, improve learning for all children, and sustain the education system to prevent collapse.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

AESTF Development Process

CATALYSTS

Following 15 August 2021, development and humanitarian education stakeholders, driven by co-leads of the Education Cluster and DPG, came together in an informal advisory group to discuss education sector priorities and coordinate advocacy in the evolving political space. To elevate urgent interventions aimed to prevent the collapse of the education system and the loss of development gains, several agencies³⁰ launched an Inter-Agency Call to Action in November 2021. This Call to Action outlined immediate priorities for emergency support whilst partners worked towards a framework which included medium and longer-term interventions.

CONSULTATIONS

The Inter-Agency Call to Action included an education stakeholder consultation in November 2021, which facilitated early inputs into the AESTF draft. Both written comments and feedback received in the virtual consultation with national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and funding partners were incorporated into a final draft, which informed the foundational humanitarian and critical system-sustaining interventions outlined in the AESTF. The priorities elevated through the Call to Action provided the momentum for the AESTF to facilitate additional consultations around a broader and more comprehensive technical framework, including both immediate (articulated from the Call to Action) and medium-to-long-term objectives.

Following the virtual global consultation on the Call to Action, the Education Cluster and DPG leads identified three thematic areas around which to structure the AESTF (Access, Quality, and Sustaining Systems). These thematic areas serve as key areas in Afghanistan's current educational landscape, underpinned by cross-cutting themes including *Equity and Inclusion*, *Do No Harm and Accountability*, and *Costing and Financing* to realise the implementation of the identified strategies under each thematic area. While these thematic areas are delineated within the framework, this delineation is meant as an organisational tool rather than a suggestion of mutual exclusivity. The thematic areas capture the key gaps and corresponding necessary interventions for the education sector in Afghanistan. Each thematic area is detailed into 'key strategic activities and approaches' and corresponding expected high-level results highlighted in an indicative framework (Figure 4).

Under each thematic area, the Cluster and DPG leads, with input from a small group of key education actors, drafted core questions for wide consultation via Google Forms for written inputs and virtual consultation

³⁰ The Call to Action was developed by the lead agencies of the Education Cluster (UNICEF and Save the Children), World Food Programme, and UNESCO.

sessions held on Microsoft Teams. The three thematic areas and the Costing and Financing cross-cutting area formed the basis to design four consultation sessions, in addition to online written responses. All inputs were captured and analysed to inform the approaches and strategies outlined in the sections below. The formative consultation process began on 18 November and concluded on 3 December 2021. The Cluster and DPG leads solicited feedback from national NGOs, international NGOs (INGOs), UN agencies, and bilateral donors who are active members of the Cluster and/or the DPG. Consultation questions and summaries of consultation findings are included in Annex A.

Following feedback from consultations (both written and virtual), the AESTF draft was circulated to Cluster and DPG members for written feedback. Major non-technical comments related to the purpose, operationalisation, and financing of the AESTF were presented and addressed during a final virtual partner consultation, which was hosted by GPE and Education Cannot Wait (ECW) on 15 February as part of their joint mission to Afghanistan.³¹ As key funding partners, ECW and GPE met with education stakeholders to discuss how to practically respond to the identified needs in the AESTF. The final AESTF draft was then presented to the DPG for a vote of no objection as the necessary step to endorse or affirm the AESTF to release GPE funding.

Children's voices

Save the Children, as co-lead of the Education Cluster, collected data from 1,209 households and interviewed 1,209 children to triangulate consultation feedback with on-the-ground realities.³² Selected responses are represented in textboxes throughout the AESTF as 'perspectives from communities' to elevate recommendations from community members and children (see Annex A for the assessment report). Feedback from the virtual consultation highlighted that children's perspectives are foundational not only to foster accountability but to ground recommendations in children's diverse lived experiences.

Cross-cutting Themes

The AESTF's three thematic areas delineate the key areas of focus to sustain the education system; however, integral to the framework are the cross-cutting themes which stand as core foundations of the thematic areas. The strategies and approaches outlined in the AESTF are underpinned by three cross-cutting themes: *equity and inclusion, do no harm and accountability, and costing and financing*.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

The main cross-cutting theme of the AESTF is equity and inclusion. It is essential that all levels of sector planning, implementation, and evaluation consider how to equitably provide quality education and how to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities. Within Afghanistan, multiple, often intersecting, inequalities exist. The protracted conflict, compounded with frequent natural disasters, and now the Taliban takeover, has continuously shaped children's access to basic services, including education. Every child has a right to education: from the child who lives in extreme poverty in a rural conflict-affected area with no access to a school—to the child whose parents both have full-time jobs and who attends upper secondary school but whose teacher no longer receives a salary.

³¹ ECW and GPE conducted a joint mission to Afghanistan in February 2022 to review the operating context, needs on the ground, and capacity of implementing partners, though GPE was unable to attend in person and therefore attended meetings virtually.

³² Data was collected discreetly as part of a multi-sector needs assessment, though only education-related responses are presented. Participants were sampled from Save the Children's operational districts in Balkh, Faryab, Kabul, Kandahar, Jawzjan, Nangarhar, and Sar-e-Pul.

Education activities must be designed equitably – providing quality and safe learning environments to children who are in most need and who will be most impacted by the consequences of losing opportunities for education. In practice, this means conducting comprehensive needs assessments, adequately budgeting for hard-to-reach areas, ensuring activities are tailored to include girls and children with disabilities, providing mahram,³³ where stipulated by the de facto authorities, and transportation allowances for female staff and teachers, and institutionalising inclusive and child-friendly feedback mechanisms, amongst many other considerations.

A note on girls' education: Without delineating specific girls' education interventions within this framework, the AESTF promotes an evidence and needs-based approach which requires stakeholders to systematically consider equity and inclusion across all interventions, resulting in prioritising children most in need, the majority of which are girls, and tailoring interventions to be responsive to those needs. The long-standing issue of girls' enrolment and retention in Afghanistan is multi-faceted and requires complementary strategies for reducing barriers on both the demand and supply sides. The AESTF provides the conceptual roadmap for challenging and mitigating inequities and exclusions in access, quality, and systems, underpinned by evidence.

DO NO HARM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Education partners must also seek to prevent the exacerbation of vulnerabilities and accept responsibility for mitigating any harm caused by interventions. As highlighted in the UN Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF), as a principle of engagement, all assistance must strive to do no harm or to minimize potential harm when being present and assisting. This is especially important under current conditions where 55 per cent of the Afghan population is in need of humanitarian assistance.³⁴ In practice, this means having a comprehensive understanding of the context, including the factors which have driven conflict, and diverse local perspectives. Beneficiary selection should rely on coordinated, transparent criteria, which is explained to stakeholders and implemented consistently. Women's meaningful participation in decision-making is a shared goal which is fundamental to improving access to girls' education; however, it should not be externally driven. The approach to elevating women's roles in school management shuras, for example, must rely on community engagement and feedback from women themselves about their safety and vision for these roles. Strategies should be revised in response to ground realities and feedback from communities and staff members.

COSTING AND FINANCING

While Costing and Finance was discussed as a separate thematic area within the consultations, the synthesis of the discussion underpins the implementation arrangements of the three strategic goals as shown below in the AESTF framework (see Figure 4). Preliminary costings of each intervention (unit cost) are provided to provide an indication of required budget to ensure efficient and effective implementation. Modalities to finance interventions will be defined by parameters of engagement. While recognising the need to ensure all investments are coordinated and monitored through a collective approach, the financing and costing of the AESTF key interventions speaks to or directly aligns with the UN TEF and the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) (see Figure 3). Prioritisation of AESTF interventions for financing will be determined through donor/funding-specific programme document development.

³³ The concept of mahram literally means the existence of "protection" or the realisation of a sense of physical and social security for women. This is often achieved by the assigning of a relative to accompany or chaperone a woman when she is travelling or moving outside their home. Traditionally, the role of the mahram is taken on by a woman's male family member.

³⁴ OCHA. (2021). *Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022*.

Figure 3. Guiding Financing Framework

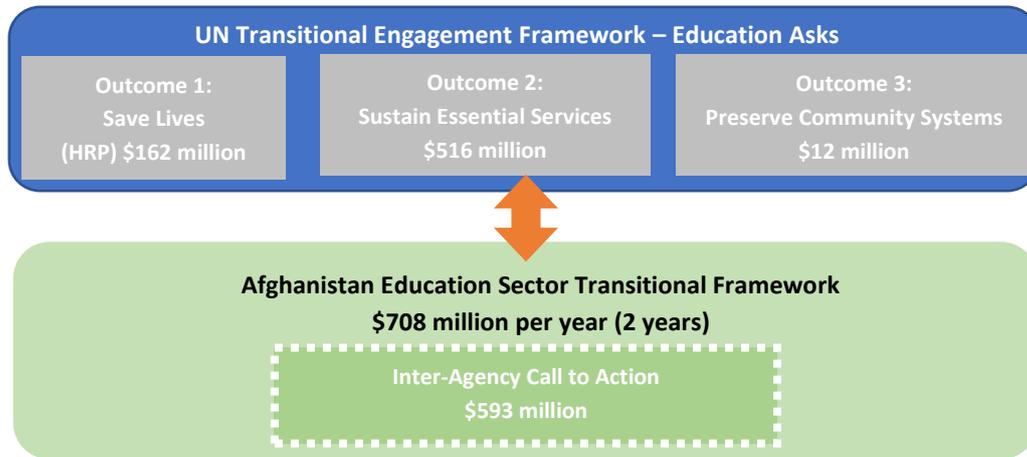
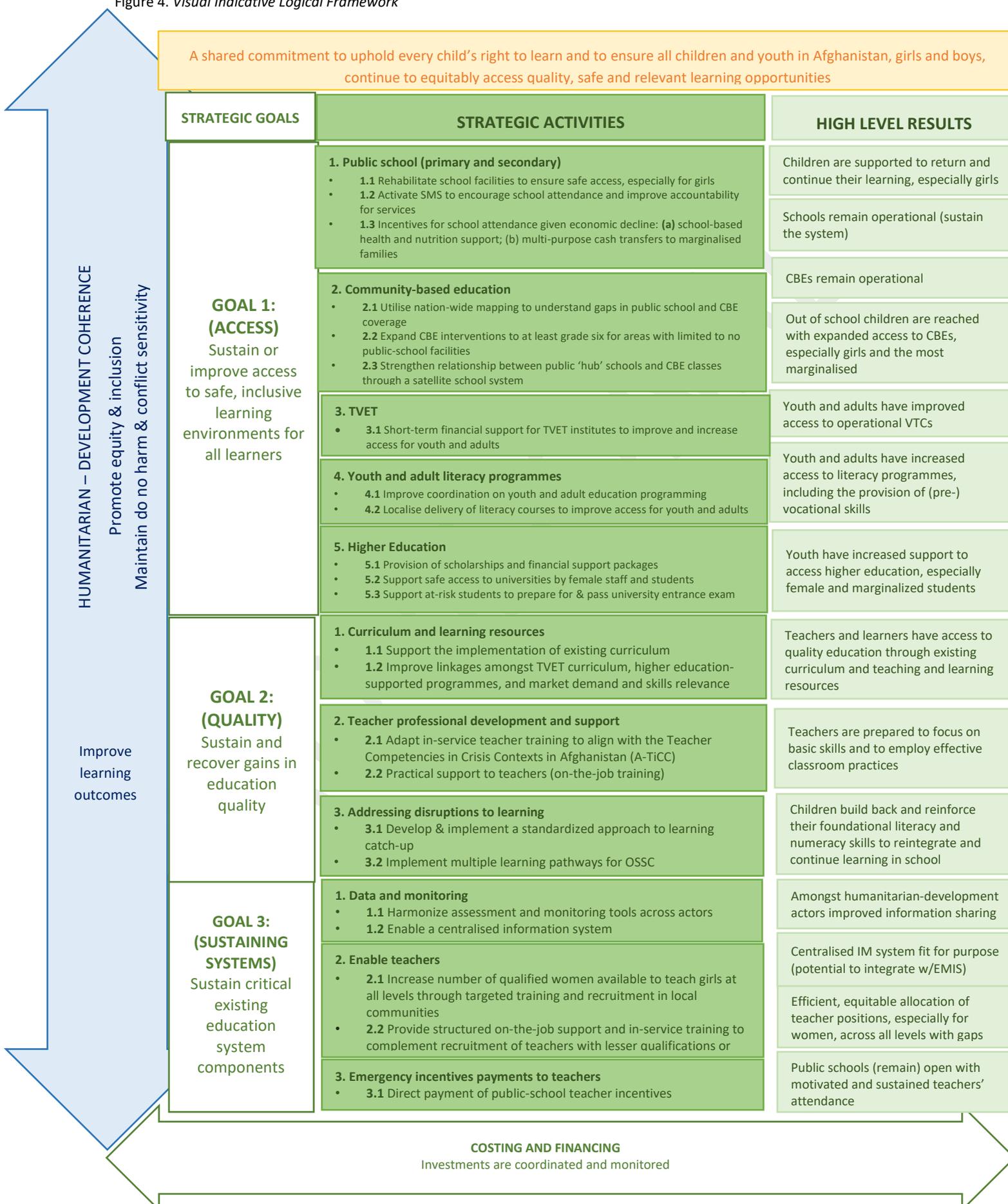


Figure 4. Visual Indicative Logical Framework



THEMATIC AREA 1: ACCESS

The Access theme refers to the potential of all children and youth, regardless of gender, ability, ethnicity, religion, or language, to exercise their right to learn in a safe, inclusive environment. Within the school-aged population, certain groups of children and youth are less likely to access education than others. The objective of increasing access to education aims to address multiple barriers to access and participation. The AESTF provides nuanced, equitable approaches for all children and youth, including those most impacted by inequality and discrimination, and suggests approaches which do not further entrench or widen inequalities. The strategic goal for access is also intentionally broad to promote increased access to diverse safe and inclusive learning environments: primary and secondary public schools, community-based education (CBE) (including Accelerated Learning Programming), Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET), universities, and youth and adult literacy programmes. To achieve this goal, coordinated, comprehensive needs assessment data are necessary to develop an accurate picture of the sector and to determine the scope of access and the available infrastructure (both public and CBE) (see [Systems Strategy 1.1](#)).

Despite the enormous growth in terms of access over the last twenty years, many children remain out of school. While CBE has proven to be an effective strategy for reaching out-of-school children, the planned transition from CBE to public school, as part of the MoE CBE Policy, is limited primarily due to an overstretched and under-resourced public education system. Repairs to school buildings, which were damaged during the protracted conflict, including the escalation in 2021, are yet to be completed, compounding the pre-existing limitations in safe and accessible education infrastructure across the country (supply side). At the same time, due to the aggravated economic situation, negative coping mechanisms and cultural practices have left children out of school (demand side). In line with the strategic goal, key interventions will focus on creating a safe environment that fosters confidence for continued access, particularly for girls, while encouraging community engagement and incentives to address demand challenges.

Strategic Goal 1: Sustain or improve access to safe, inclusive learning environments for all learners

KEY STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES

1. Public School

[Access Strategy 1.1: Rehabilitate school facilities to ensure safe access, especially for girls](#)

In the first half of 2021, 927 public schools were damaged or destroyed due to conflict,³⁵ and between June and December 2021, no data has been collected or verified, though the conflict escalation during the summer months likely increased this number significantly. Schools have also been used as military bases and as clinics during the height of COVID-19.

2019 data shows that 1 out of 3 schools are based in temporary spaces, tents, or even open air. In addition, nearly 49 per cent of schools lack adequate buildings, 62 per cent do not have surrounding walls, 31 per cent lack drinking water, and 33 per cent suffer from lack of functional latrines.

³⁵ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (2021) Afghanistan Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM).

After completing a needs assessment, light to moderate repairs are necessary to enable schools to function and be safe for children, teachers, and education personnel. Girls' and mixed schools³⁶ require boundary walls and separate latrines with menstrual hygiene management (MHM) facilities.³⁷ Repairs to schools can be integrated with livelihoods interventions and social assistance, such as (but not limited to) cash-for-work to include community members in the rehabilitation of schools in their community, thereby also increasing buy-in for education.

PERSPECTIVES FROM COMMUNITIES:

'A safe learning environment' was in the top three priorities for increasing access to schooling for the girls and boys interviewed.

Promoting a practice of School Improvement Plan (SIP) should be encouraged as a framework to plan and cost repairs and support, based on a rapid assessment of the key factors which inhibit access to education (i.e., lack of boundary walls, infrastructural damage, no teaching and learning supplies, poor quality teaching, etc.), as well as a tool for accountability as a hub school to CBE. The SIP activity can support both the need to increase the absorption capacity of public schools to enrol CBE students and identify needs for repairs and capacity building to enable safe access to and participation in the targeted school regardless of its connection to CBE.

This activity can also be done in tandem with a hazard mapping and engagement workshop with community stakeholders³⁸ to ensure that repairs are responsive to gender- and ability-specific hazards in and around the school.

Access Strategy 1.2: Activate school management shuras to encourage student attendance and improve accountability for services

School management committees, or *shuras*, have been a long-recognised part of the education landscape in Afghanistan and were broadly overseen by the Directorate of Social Mobilization and Shuras (DSMS) within the MoE; however, the approach to organising, training, supporting, and creating a feedback loop with shura members is unstandardized. Often, these shuras, which are purported to be key to the sustainability strategy of donor-funded projects, become defunct after project end dates. Likewise, school management shuras (SMS) have no institutionalised gender quotas (though 30 per cent women is typically suggested) and therefore often have no women as members, thus limiting their engagement with women and girls and limiting equitable outcomes.³⁹ The main role of an SMS varies, but generally includes:

- Mobilising community to increase enrolment and attendance in school (including TVET),
- Coordinating financial and in-kind contributions to improve education facilities,
- Advocating for additional resources to improve quality in schools,
- Facilitating safe access to and from school for children and teachers and reporting protection violations,⁴⁰ and
- Acting as an accountability mechanism to ensure community concerns are heard and receive responses.

³⁶ Mixed schools do not refer to mixed classes where boys and girls would attend together. Mixed schools have separate shifts for boys and girls but hold classes in the same facility/structure.

³⁷ Girls' Education Challenge (GEC)'s STAGES II project is a useful model to inform menstrual hygiene management practices in WASH construction and kit distribution. MHM has been linked to increased attendance and retention in school.

³⁸ Both ECW MYRP and GPE Accelerated Funding include school safety training as core project activities, which can be scaled up through Cluster coordination and education partner-led training of trainers (ToTs).

³⁹ Typically, an SMS includes elder members of the Community Development Council or local shura and a mix of religious leaders, students, parents, teachers, and school management staff.

⁴⁰ Previously jointly with Child Protection Action Networks (CPANs), which are reportedly defunct as of this writing.

The proposed strategy for SMS builds on the work of the DSMS Task Force,⁴¹ which was established in 2020 to standardise education partner and MoE approaches to SMS capacity building and management and to improve the feedback loop between SMS and local education authorities. In addition, given the recurring challenge of inactive and/or ineffective SMSs, the Task Force could convene to determine additional cost-effective and local approaches to extend and enhance SMS support.

PERSPECTIVES FROM COMMUNITIES:

“What is the best way to include children in school?”

One of the most common answers from children was to **increase parent and community awareness about the value of education.**

For the short-term, it is recommended to utilise the existing terms of reference for SMS as a guideline for engaging relevant stakeholders at the community level to participate in key ‘system sustaining’ activities, including monitoring attendance of students and teachers, organising the rehabilitation of schools, mobilising parents to enrol their children in school through back-to-school campaigns, and highlighting gaps in services and safety concerns to feed back to education partners. Likewise, SMSs can act as a barometer to determine attitudes and points of entry with de facto authorities to advocate for sustained access to education for all children.

In addition, to ensure that women’s participation in shuras is meaningful and to enable access to female stakeholders, depending on community acceptance, mixed or gender-separate SMSs should be initiated for men and women, respectively. Education partners have found that female teachers and elder women were more able to take active roles in SMSs, as they were already engaged with education activities outside the home, or they did not have as many child-rearing or housework demands. Partners have also drawn upon ‘mothers committees’ which engaged on cross-sectoral issues including WASH, protection, and education. Necessarily, working with male community members to accept and understand women’s roles in the shura will improve women’s meaningful participation. To ensure inclusivity of non-literate members, school management checklists and other monitoring forms can be represented through pictures. Roles and responsibilities between shuras should be equally weighted (i.e., women should be involved in all aspects of SMS, not only ‘women’s issues’).⁴²

Access Strategy 1.3: Provide incentives for school attendance given economic decline

a) School-based health and nutrition support

School-based food support is proven to contribute to increased enrolment, retention, and attendance; monitoring from 2020 shows a 33 per cent increase in enrolment of primary school children in assisted schools in Afghanistan. The Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) indicates that in the first quarter of 2022, 23 million people (55 per cent of the population) are expected to be in crisis (Integrated Phase Calculation⁴³ (IPC) 3) or

⁴¹ Members of the DSMS Task Force, which was initiated as part of the Swiss Development Cooperation’s Afghanistan Quality Learning Programme, include: Save the Children, CARE, Agha Khan Foundation, UNICEF, Creative Associates International (USAID Afghan Children Read), and MoE staff members.

⁴² Samuel Hall and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). (2014). School Management Shuras: A bridge between girls’ education and the communities? Case Study on Community Mobilization for the Promotion of Girls’ Education. [GIZ BEPA Programme]. Accessible at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Evaluation-of-the-GIZ-BEPA-Programme.pdf>.

⁴³ IPC is a “global system for classifying the severity and magnitude of food insecurity and malnutrition situation and identifying its key drivers...The IPC Classification System distinguishes and links acute food insecurity, chronic food insecurity and acute malnutrition to support more strategic and better coordinated responses.” Indicators include food consumption quantity, food consumption quality, livelihood change, malnutrition, mortality, and contributing factors. Guidance Note available at: [IPC Guidance Note on Indicators.pdf \(ipcinfo.org\)](https://www.ipcinfo.org/).

emergency (IPC 4) levels of acute food insecurity. Nine million Afghan people are projected to be in IPC 4 – the highest number globally. For the most marginalised, the school-based meal may be the primary meal of the day, and provision of this vital assistance can enable improved attendance and learning outcomes for primary and secondary school children, particularly girls. Food insecurity or malnutrition contributes to learning poverty, as children cannot learn effectively whilst hungry or may miss school altogether; however, research shows the effects of malnutrition can be reduced by early intervention.⁴⁴

A scale-up of current school-feeding programmes should prioritise areas where severe hunger, low enrolment and retention, and high gender disparities converge. In these areas, girls and boys should receive daily nutritious support. Given the drought-precipitated and conflict-aggravated food crisis, the current mid-morning snack (i.e., high energy biscuit) should be diversified in 2022 to include other locally procured products by linking schools to women’s gardening and food processing value chains, local retailers, and farmer organizations—in turn supporting local markets and livelihoods and increasing acceptance and buy-in by local communities. Partners could also consider cash-based support modalities to households where supply chains are unpredictable or inconsistent. In addition to the provision of a daily mid-morning meal or snack, the school-based platform addresses risks to the healthy physical and mental development of the child by providing integrated health interventions such as de-worming and education on optimal nutrition and hygiene behaviours.

PERPSECTIVES FROM COMMUNITIES:

Of the 1,209 households surveyed, 89% presented moderate to severe food insecurity. Children mentioned **food, cash, and education** as their top three priorities for assistance.

b) Multi-purpose cash transfers to marginalised families

In 2021, the Education Cluster reported that less than one per cent of education in emergencies (EiE) funding was related to cash-based activities (excluding the payment of CBE teachers). Similarly, the Whole of Afghanistan Assessment (WoAA) 2021 reported that less than 10 per cent of households indicated that education-related costs were a barrier to girls’ and boys’ access to schooling in the past year.⁴⁵ Historically, cash for education has not featured heavily in programming, as the regular school-related costs are relatively low and other barriers are more prohibitive to access; however, in the current economic decline following de facto authority control, multi-purpose cash transfers to families to remove financial and indirect (i.e., opportunity cost) barriers to supporting education are strategic.

The provision of a small cash transfer (or in-kind ration of priority necessities, including vegetable oil) will offer the means and encouragement for families, particularly woman-headed households, to prioritise children’s participation in school and mitigate any negative coping mechanisms such as child labour and child marriage. In other contexts, conditional cash to incentivise school attendance, coupled with community awareness raising, has demonstrated cost-effectiveness as a short-term intervention to households most in need, particularly if there is low baseline enrolment.⁴⁶ Cash transfers can be managed through a similar transparent process as teacher incentive payments, drawing from best practices in similar contexts such as Syria or Iraq, to ensure that

⁴⁴ University of Oxford. (2021). ‘Young Lives Study’. Available at: <https://www.younglives.org.uk/>.

⁴⁵ REACH. (2021). ‘Education in Emergencies HH Analysis October 2021.’ *Whole of Afghanistan Assessment*.

⁴⁶ CARE. (2021). *Cost-efficiency analysis: Conditional Cash for Education and Protection*. CARE Jordan. Accessible at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Conditional-Cash-Case-Study-Jordan-2021.pdf>.

García, S., and Saavedra, J. (2017). *Educational Impacts and Cost-Effectiveness of Conditional Cash Transfer Programs in Developing Countries: A Meta-Analysis*. NBER Working Paper No. 23594. Accessible at: https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w23594/w23594.pdf.

the intended recipient is vetted and receives the payment through money providers after children are enrolled in and begin attending school as verified through attendance sheets or following examinations.

Access Strategy 1.4: Implement multiple learning pathways for out-of-school children

Drawing from lessons during COVID-19 school closures, multiple pathways for learning can be employed to reach out-of-school children, including expansion of CBE to additional grades in areas without public school infrastructure (see Access Strategy 2.2). While television and radio programming may be accessible to some, mobile phone-based support by teachers and school shura members has been successful in reaching girls in rural areas where there is less access to technologies.⁴⁷ Community awareness and parental engagement is especially important to clearly communicate the goals in contacting students via phone and to encourage continued support for education during school closures. A phone hotline may also be set up to provide feedback from children and their families. Technology can extend but not replace in-person learning support; thus, support to caregivers or visits from project staff may also support at-home learning.

In the event of school closure or the absence of grade-appropriate learning opportunities, it is important to ensure children, particularly girls, are not deprived of their right to learn and further marginalised. Alternate learning pathways may be necessary to re-engage them while schools are closed—or where no secondary schools exist⁴⁸ in the community (see [Access Strategy 2.2](#)). Continued local-level advocacy to de facto authorities through community shuras is also key. Local Afghan perspectives, drawing on Islamic principles which emphasise the importance of education for both girls and boys, could be elevated to de facto authorities.

2. Community-based Education (CBE)

Community-based education (CBE), which includes community-based classes (CBCs) and accelerated learning programmes/centres (ALPs/ALCs)⁴⁹, has been a part of Afghanistan's formal education system since 2003⁵⁰ as a complementary modality for reaching children, particularly girls, without access to public schooling due to distance and other barriers. Given the inadequate supply and quality of public school facilities, the diverse geographic landscapes across the country, and the percentage of areas under armed opposition group control prior to August 2021, CBE has historically presented an outreach strategy to include children in the education system who live in remote or rural locations. See Annex D for a detailed description of the CBE modality.

Under the changed environment, there is opportunity to **expand the CBE modality** due to increased geographic access. First, there is a need to **develop a complete mapping of CBE investments**. An incomplete mapping remains as CBE has not been fully institutionalised by the former MoE and is administered through donor funding by national and international NGOs. As both development and humanitarian donors finance CBE, mapping of CBCs and ALCs has been largely siloed and no complete picture of CBE exists. CBE-enrolled children are estimated to account for approximately 5 per cent of the total enrolment.

⁴⁷ Girls' Education Challenge (GEC). (2021). *Afghanistan Country Briefing*. Accessible at: https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/u33nmds3/gec_country_briefing_afghanistan_march-21_final.pdf.

⁴⁸ Even if the requisite public schools exist, some caregivers are uncomfortable with sending their children, particularly adolescent girls, to public school but may be open to community-based alternatives.

⁴⁹ Community-based class (CBC) students typically complete one grade per academic year. Accelerated learning class (ALC) students have missed the opportunity to enrol in school and are therefore unable to enter public school in the appropriate grade. ALC students typically complete two grades per calendar year. See Annex D for a detailed explanation of the CBE modality.

⁵⁰ CBE modalities were introduced in the NESP (2003) and then codified in the first MoE CBE Policy in 2008.

Secondly, there is an opportunity to **improve the CBE model and promote its sustainability**. CBE has been a key strategy to reach out-of-school children in rural and hard-to-reach areas, including as part of humanitarian (EiE) response to provide access to formal learning opportunities for internally displaced, returnee, refugee, and shock-affected host community children. As part of the EiE response, short-term (6-24 months) CBE classes or temporary learning spaces (TLS) have been utilised to provide a protective learning environment for children affected by conflict, severe poverty, and natural disaster. Unfortunately, given the protracted nature of the crisis in Afghanistan, EiE interventions often provided short-term, interim solutions, as matriculation into public schools overall has been low. Without continued funding, EiE-targeted children were largely unable to continue their education.

CBE programmes often cater for specific cohorts and assume transition to public schools after funding ends, though short implementation cycles provide inadequate resources to effectively plan for transition. Analyses of CBE have cited that the assumption that hub schools have the capacity to absorb students, even without physical barriers to access, is problematic.⁵¹ Inadequate resources, including the supply of teachers, has presented a consistent challenge in absorbing CBE students into hub schools, though programmes often link CBE student transition with successful implementation and sustainability. Emergency or humanitarian funding in the current context should consider a longer project cycle and/or clear linkages to longer-term CBE and cannot be de-linked from ongoing, medium-term assistance, as there is limited functionality in the public system on which to rely for continuity.

In the present context of frozen development funding, public schools are even less likely to be able to absorb additional CBE students or provide any continuity of quality learning to transitioning students. While the gaps in public school infrastructure and resources are unlikely to be resolved under this framework period, the access strategies suggested are based on feasible, shorter-term approaches to equitably improve access to education which work with the existing public infrastructure (see [Operationalising the AESTF](#) for guidance).

Access Strategy 2.1: Utilise nation-wide mapping to understand gaps in public school and CBE coverage

An up-to-date snapshot of CBE and public school investment at the granular level will enable education partners to better target the following:

- Under-served areas without access to CBE or public schools which require long-term comprehensive intervention (i.e., school construction, Grade 1-12 CBE, youth and adult literacy programming, etc.) [see [Access Strategy 2.2](#)];
- Areas with inadequate education infrastructure (i.e., too few schools for school-aged population, no female teachers, low population density, high illiteracy amongst youth and adults, etc.), which will require longer-term CBE satellite support in the absence of school construction activities [see [Access Strategy 2.3](#)]; and
- Areas where public school infrastructure can absorb additional OOSC (i.e., CBE funding can be more impactful in another location).

⁵¹ KonTerra Group. (2019). *Mid-Term Evaluation of the Increasing Access to Basic Education and Gender Quality Programme (Afghanistan) (2015-2019)*. UNICEF. Accessible at: <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/reports/mid-term-evaluation-increasing-access-basic-education-and-gender-quality-programme>.

Education Cannot Wait. (2018). *Education Cannot Wait Facilitated Multi-Year Programme, Afghanistan*. OCHA Humanitarian Response. Accessible at: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ecw_facilitated_my_p_afghanistan_revised_2018-06-02.pdf.

Based on this assessment, education partners will be able to design interventions which address the specific needs and context of OOSC and account for supply side limitations indicated by the mapping.⁵² Flexible budgeting and coordination with other education partners, including well-planned transitions between partners, improves continuity of education, reducing the likelihood of drop-out and associated protection risks and decreasing disruption to a child's life.

Access Strategy 2.2: Expand CBE interventions in areas with limited-to-no public school facilities

Given the increased geographical access for partners and the limited opportunities for many children to reach public schools, the indicated approach is to extend and expand CBE, including ALCs.⁵³ First, in communities where children are currently attending CBE classes, children can be supported to move to the next grade, where public school transition is not feasible. Likewise, ALCs are designed to accelerate learning for out-of-school, over-age children to integrate into the appropriate grade in public school; however, where there are no public schools or families do not support transition, especially for girls, ALCs should be extended. Second, with the establishment of CBE in communities, demand for education has been created and should be sustained by opening new classes based on the out-of-school population and the availability of accessible public schools.

Finally, under-served areas may not have received any education investment in the past 20 years. Specifically, children and youth who live in areas formerly controlled by non-state actors⁵⁴, particularly girls, may have had no access to education in their lifetime or may have only received a primary education due to lack of facilities, teachers, or demand. Given these conditions, careful consideration to enable new CBE class establishment in these locations is necessary to ensure learning continuity for children and to do no harm.

Community mobilisation and awareness raising, drawing on Islamic and culturally relevant values, is a foundational first step to establishing CBE in new areas. Forming a school management shura or community education council (see [Access Strategy 1.2](#)) is also necessary to maintain or improve local buy-in and accountability. The supply of community members with the minimum level of education required to become CBE teachers, particularly female teachers, may also be a barrier to implementation in some communities. Transportation stipends, mahram allowances, and additional incentives for teachers from neighbouring districts to teach in under-served communities may be necessary to ensure that these areas are not excluded from programming due to local supply challenges. See Quality thematic section for additional value-add activities to strengthen CBE delivery and management at the local level.

Access Strategy 2.3: Strengthen relationship between public 'hub' schools and CBE classes through a satellite school system

Public schools are characteristically overcrowded and under-resourced, which is often cited as a barrier for children to attend school or to transition from CBE to public school.⁵⁵ The relationship between CBE classes and

⁵² For example, an education partner could use the mapping to identify many OOSC in an under-served area with few public schools.⁵² Short-term humanitarian funding which targets the most vulnerable children may provide TLS for ten months. At the outset, the mapping may indicate that a public school is within three kilometres of the target community, so the education partner would plan to transition the targeted children to the public school (after doing consultations with the relevant stakeholders) or upgrade the TLS to a longer-term CBE class where there is need (if the school is unable to absorb additional children).

⁵³ See sub-theme 4 and 5 on non-formal TVET and literacy programmes for youth.

⁵⁴ The Taliban, or what was commonly referred to as 'armed opposition groups,' controlled or occupied approximately half (50%) of Afghanistan prior to the announcement of U.S. troop withdrawal in April 2021 ([Long War Journal](#), 2021).

⁵⁵ REACH. (2021). Whole of Afghanistan Assessment EiE Household Dataset.

public ‘hub’ schools should be symbiotic rather than one-directional given the historical and current limitations on public school capacity.

A satellite model for CBE where there is a public school in walking distance could mitigate some of the pressure on public schools to provide quality services with funding disruptions under the de facto administration, though the pull factor from public schools to CBE would require evaluation and mitigation. Likewise, to improve synchronicity between CBE and public schools, multi-grade classes or cluster CBCs, which include children of different ages and grade levels, can be implemented to improve access to education for under-served communities and improve cost efficiency. Multi-grade or cluster CBCs have been trialled in rural parts of Afghanistan and other contexts where there are few teachers, especially women, with success.⁵⁶ Existing best practices from ongoing multi-grade classes should be reviewed and synthesised for education partners through an open source platform to use in standardising implementation, as multi-grade teaching is a new practice for many teachers.⁵⁷

[See Quality thematic section for guidance on approaching disruptions to learning]

3. Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET)

Access to TVET in Afghanistan has been significantly affected following the current political instability since August 2021, especially as TVET is highly reliant on external development funding and gains in access have been relatively recent. In addition, continued and improved access for women to TVET is fragile and at-risk.

Formal TVET is currently accessible to male students only, while 46 non-formal vocational training centres operating under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) have been closed since August. The Afghan Korea Vocational Training Institute (AKVTI), which was the only non-formal TVET institute open for male students after August, has temporarily stopped operating as of December 2021. The compromised access to TVET signals a significant setback from a remarkable progress made during the past two decades. The number of formal TVET institutions and students enrolled had increased from 41 to 301 and from 1,510 to 61,663 between 2002 and 2018 respectively. The number of non-formal vocational training centres had also increased notably from near non-existent to 46, while the number of students and instructors were near 68,000 and 1,000 respectively as of early 2021. It will be important, therefore, to ensure re-opening of TVET institutions for all to prevent the loss of the recent gains made on TVET provision and skills development.

Access Strategy 3.1: Short-term financial support for TVET institutes

Short-term intervention will be necessary to support re-opening of the TVET institutes that are currently closed. A majority of TVET institutions, typically dependent on foreign aid for a large portion of its expenditure (i.e., salary and operation cost), currently face significant challenges in re-opening due to a lack of funds.

⁵⁶ CARE, Agha Khan Foundation, and Save the Children, and GEC STAGES II implementing partners have piloted or are currently implementing multi-grade CBE classes in Afghanistan. Multi-grade CBE has also been implemented in similar contexts in Pakistan and India (Agha Khan Foundation) and Egypt (CARE), amongst other countries.

⁵⁷ For example, see UNESCO’s (2015) Practical Tips for Teaching Multigrade Classes. Accessible at: <https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/ilfe/generic/Sp4.pdf>.

Immediate intervention should prioritize financial support for salary and operation costs for TVET facilities. A rapid needs assessment will be needed in collaboration with TVET Authority (TVET-A)⁵⁸ and MoLSA to collect data on the current operation and financial status of TVET institutes that are currently closed. The importance of ensuring access to TVET is high, particularly for vulnerable population (i.e., women and youth) that will be more severely affected by the ongoing disruption in the labour market and slowdown of the national economy.

PERSPECTIVES FROM COMMUNITIES:

Vocational training, especially for **children who identified as having a disability**, was listed an opportunity to overcome current challenges in Nangarhar province.

The short-term intervention aims to initially support vocational training centres, students and instructors by enabling re-opening of non-formal TVET institutions that are entirely closed, by providing them with financial support to cover salary and operation cost. Mid- to long-term intervention will benefit targeted vocational training centres and enrolled students by providing them with relevant and responsive curriculum based on the needs assessment, and potentially benefit institutes and students with access to ALCs and skills-based literacy that will have access to the renewed curriculum.

4. Youth and Adult Literacy Programmes

In 2018, UNESCO/UIS estimated Afghanistan's illiterate population (age 15+) at 12 million (7.2 million female, 4.8 million male) from a total of 36 million population. The literacy rate was 43.02 per cent, (female 29.81 per cent and male 55.48 per cent) and the gender gap was 25.67 percentage points. The illiteracy rate increased a staggering eight percentage points since 2016-2017. The literacy rate for the age group 15-35 (consisting of 10 million people) is only 58 per cent. Some 4.2 million learners⁵⁹ of the priority group⁶⁰ (aged 15-35) are therefore in urgent need of youth and adult basic education, including the provision of (pre-)vocational skills.

Adult basic education and skills-based literacy in Afghanistan is provided by either the government or Youth and Adult Education partners throughout the country. The government classes are provided in 69 literacy schools, 18 community learning centres and literacy facilitator's homes through 3,315 permanent literacy facilitators. Due to the regime change since August 2021, majority of youth and adult literacy classes have been halted or semi-operational. Basic General Literacy (BGL) is delivered through 9-month courses using the BGL (level 1) curriculum and in some areas the (outdated) LAND Afghan curriculum (due to limited governmental budget to print and distribute BGL).

There remains a lack of coordination of youth and adult education interventions. Interventions are mostly centralized with a minimal community-based approach. Most vulnerabilities for illiterate youth and adults have further worsened since the regime change in August 2021 and there is not enough data available on the status of youth and adult education in the country and on the capacity of Youth and Adult Education partners working on the ground.

Further, there is a lack of resources for Literacy Schools, with school facing moderate to severe infrastructural problems and the literacy courses taught at literacy facilitators' homes often lack the basic equipment needed for a quality teaching and learning environment (i.e., lack of equipment for literacy facilitators, including

⁵⁸ TVET-A is an independent body and oversees formal TVET.

⁵⁹ The population included in this age category is calculated at over 10 million, and the literacy rate of this age category is estimated at around 58 per cent. This indicates that 42 per cent of them, almost 4.2 million people in Afghanistan, have remained illiterate for various reasons.

⁶⁰ Priority will be given to the learners aged 15 to 34, especially the economically active and most marginalised (e.g., women and adolescent girls, IDPs, etc.).

winterization equipment for the cold climate regions), and there is a need to improve COVID-19 prevention in classrooms. Furthermore, throughout the country there is a significant lack of teaching and learning materials in most Literacy Schools and literacy courses previously provided by the government.

Access Strategy 4.1: Improve coordination on youth and adult education programming

Since August 2021, the previously established National Alliance for Literacy, which was chaired by the MoE, is formally without a mandate. To respond to the urgent need for coordination of investment in youth and adult education, UNESCO established a National Platform for Youth and Adult Education in November 2021, comprised of international and national literacy stakeholders, which will further ensure the coordination for all youth and adult education actors and interventions in the country.

The Platform needs to become fully operational as a national coordination body for youth and adult education interventions, ensuring improved access and quality and contributing to an enabling environment for youth and adult education provision. To achieve this, the Platform members should develop a joint assessment of the youth and adult education sub-sector, followed by a national youth and adult education strategy to further identify urgent and longer-term needs and ways to address them. Furthermore, the Platform should be the central entity for knowledge management and information sharing through establishing and managing a national repository for evidence-based knowledge on youth and adult education. In addition, the Platform can serve as a validating entity for the development of teaching and learning materials, such as the youth and adult education curriculum. Finally, the Platform should ensure improved coordination among members, with a clear mapping of members' operational capacity and regular snapshots of their previous, ongoing and future interventions. This will allow the Platform to identify gaps, ensure better coordination and improve joint fundraising efforts.

Access Strategy 4.2: Localise delivery of literacy courses to improve access for youth and adults

A community-based approach for the delivery of literacy needs to be taken to ensure improved access to and demand for Youth and Adult Education, especially for women and adolescent girls. The identification of learners, training of literacy facilitators and delivery of the curriculum is currently provided through a top-down approach, being less responsive to learners' needs. A community-based approach will therefore allow for increased flexibility to the daily realities of learners and ensure sustainability through establishing community networks such as District and Village Literacy Committees.

To understand the current landscape, education partners should map and assess capacity building needs of the existing Provincial and District Literacy Committees, establish Village Literacy Committees, and the recruit community mobilizers (both male and female). Community mobilizers need to be recruited and trained to establish Village Literacy Committees in the districts and to ensure increased access for youth and adults to the courses, especially for female learners. Basic General Literacy courses should be provided with integrated pre-vocational skills for unskilled youth and adults with zero to basic literacy skills. Skills-based Literacy courses should be provided for those who have basic literacy skills.

5. Higher Education

Currently, public higher education is provided through 39 public universities in Afghanistan, comprising around 6,284 (14 per cent female) university professors, around 7,000 administrative staff, and over 205,480 students, of which (30.5 per cent female), enrolled in various academic disciplines. There were 77,671 new coming students in 2021. Concurrently, private higher education has experienced remarkable growth in academic programmes, employing more than 24,000 professors/lecturers and non-academic staff of which 20 per cent are women, and with over 210,000 students (20 per cent of whom are female), enrolled in 131 private higher education institutions with 24 branches across the country—covering all provinces.

Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, most public universities halted operations, while many private universities have remained open, conducting separate classes for female and male students or using partitions to divide them in compliance with de facto authorities' instructions. On 30 January 2022, the Acting Minister of Higher Education announced that public universities in warm climate provinces would reopen on 2 February 2022 and those in cold climate provinces on 26 February 2022. While reportedly, there have been instances of continued female participation in higher education in private universities since August 2021, the situation remains fluid. In particular, the higher education sub-sector, including both private and public institutions, has continued to face major challenges in financing and technical support. It is essential to sustain the higher education sub-sector to prevent the loss of an educated/skilled labour force, particularly for women, and the further deterioration of the economy.

Access Strategy 5.1: Provision of scholarships and financial support packages to both public and private university students (based on vulnerability criteria), with a focus on female and vulnerable students

While public university students do not need to pay tuition fees to go to public universities, they do need to pay for necessary expenses such as learning materials/textbooks and the cost of transportation for commuting. Due to the increasingly dire economic situation, some public university students may be at risk of dropping out because of not being able to cover those costs. Scholarships to public university students, who meet an agreed-upon vulnerability criteria, can ensure continued enrolment and learning.

Private universities have lost 40 per cent of their students who have dropped out due to loss of household income, which affected their ability to pay tuition fees. Without receiving tuition fees from students, many private universities are facing financial difficulties. It is estimated that 15-20 per cent are at the risk of collapse if the loss of finance continues. With the high number of students benefitting from quality higher education in private universities, scholarships to both female and male private university students can help students to continue learning. These scholarships can cover the tuition fees and parts of the necessary expenses such as the procurement of learning materials/textbooks and transportation costs.

Access Strategy 5.2: Support for safe access to universities by female staff and students, including needs-based rehabilitation of learning spaces and accommodation facilities

Since the reopening of private and public universities in the warm climate provinces, many female and male students and teaching staff have reportedly returned to campuses. However, there are some concerns particularly by female students and teaching staff about their safety in commuting to and from the campuses. Education partners are recommended to facilitate dialogues with the local communities to set up a supporting mechanism in the provision of transportation to ensure safety of female students and teaching staff during commuting.

Recent communications by de facto authorities have indicated that higher education must follow the gender-segregated practices. While the de facto Ministry of Higher Education has adopted practices in private universities to ensure segregation through separate shifts in the same building, and partitions/curtains in classrooms with small number of students, there is a need to review the operational needs of public universities if learning spaces or separate buildings for male and female students may need to be rehabilitated. Additionally, dormitories as safe spaces, together with provision of food, for students, particularly females, may also be considered to enable continued attendance.

Access Strategy 5.3: Support at-risk students to prepare for and pass the university entrance exam

For many upper-secondary school students, the Kankor (university entrance exam) preparation is expensive and access to Kankor centres can be difficult. For this reason, supporting vulnerable students⁶¹, including female students and girls and boys living in rural or remote areas, with Kankor exam preparation fees and transportation to and from the centres would help them prepare for the exam adequately and safely and enter universities in greater numbers.

THEMATIC AREA 2: QUALITY

Over the next two years, improving the quality of teaching and learning will continue to be prioritised. Rather than seeking to achieve longer-term quality goals, which have largely fallen short in the last twenty years, the AESTF focusses on meeting children and teachers where they are after multiple periods of disruption and stress due to COVID-19, prolonged conflict, drought, and displacement, amongst other factors. Simplifying and standardising approaches to remediation and catch-up so that students are able to return to learning at the right level and integrating psychosocial support tools into the classroom will help enable a return to stability and continued academic growth during this transitional period.

Strategic Goal 2: Sustain and recover gains in education quality

KEY STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES

1. Curriculum and Learning Resources

Quality Strategy 1.2: Support the implementation of existing curriculum

Prior to 15 August 2021, the curriculum of Afghanistan was undergoing a reform process including the drafting of key documents such as new curriculum framework, syllabi, and learning resources. While advanced drafts of both the curriculum framework and syllabi were agreed upon, they were not yet finalised and endorsed by the former MoE. The curriculum development work has been suspended. As curriculum reform will not be a focus of this transitional period, supporting and mitigating gaps in existing curriculum implementation is a priority.

Quality teaching and learning materials are foundational to achieving equitable learning outcomes. Through a centralised information system (see [Systems Strategy 1.1](#) and [1.2](#)), education partners can collect and synthesise data on the availability of teaching and learning materials, especially textbooks and teacher guides, and their use in classroom practices. Accordingly, partners can aid the provision of existing textbooks and teacher guides, which are not in conflict with human rights principles, for every student and teacher, ensuring equal resources are provided for girls and boys. To address the gap in social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies in the existing curriculum and the heightened period of uncertainty in recent months, partners are recommended to provide complementary SEL materials and training to teachers in both public schools and CBE classes. To also mitigate the lack of active, contextual, and inclusive pedagogy in the curriculum, comprehensive in-service teacher training needs to be supported to improve teaching methodology in core subjects (see [Section 2](#)).

Quality Strategy 1.2: Improve linkages amongst TVET curriculum, higher education-supported programmes, and market demand and skills relevance

⁶¹ Vulnerability criteria should be established to prioritise children with cross-sectoral humanitarian needs.

In the medium- to longer-term, interventions should aim to promote provision of TVET that is relevant and responsive to the evolving labour market demands and tailored to address the skills development needs of women.

A needs assessment and engagement with the private sector will be necessary to identify the changing labour market demands by occupation and skill set on the demand side as well as to examine the skills development needs of the potential beneficiaries on the supply side. In the longer term, the results of the needs assessment will guide development of curriculum and learning materials tailored to the needs of the target group. The provision of TVET based on the developed curriculum and learning materials can be explored through linkages to alternative learning centres and skills-based literacy to facilitate provision of locally relevant skills, to enhance employability and productivity of women and youth.

As for higher education, it is essential that quality improvements in the higher education continue, and degree programmes are supported with the induction of latest curricula, additional faculty members, research programs and scholarships, and more robust university student support services. Support for these factors would strengthen the universities and prepare them to take in new and higher numbers of students every year, thereby enriching and diversifying the labour force.

2. Teacher Professional Development and Support

Teacher professional development is not only an approach in development settings and is, in fact, even more recommended in contexts where multiple, compounding stresses such as conflict, insecurity, and poverty impact teachers. Research shows that institutionalised standards, teacher collaboration, ongoing teacher support through multiple modalities, and school leadership development are most effective for improving teaching quality.⁶²

Quality Strategy 2.1: Adapt in-service teacher training to align with the Teacher Competencies in Crisis Contexts in Afghanistan (A-TiCC)⁶³

Development: Based on a review of previously developed training materials, education partners seek to develop a standardised training package for teachers through a joint Cluster-DPG technical working group to be rolled out in both CBE classes and public schools. Core topics could include subject-specific teaching skills⁶⁴ (related to the curriculum and drawing from recent investments such as USAID’s Afghan Children Read), safety and well-being (including Psychological First Aid (PFA) and SEL and underpinned by child rights), classroom management (including positive discipline), planning and assessing learning (including formative assessments), and inclusive and learner-centred approaches to teaching and assessment, amongst others, acknowledging that the scope should focus on **needs-based competencies**. The previously developed national teacher competency

⁶² Burns, M. and Laurie, J. (Eds.). (2015). *Where It’s Needed Most: Quality Professional Development for All Teachers*. New York: Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies. Available at: https://inee.org/system/files/resources/Where_Its_Needed_Most_Teacher_Professional_Development_2015_LowRes.pdf.

⁶³ The A-TiCC (2020) was conducted by the International Rescue Committee as part of the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) Multi-Year Resilience Programme. The A-TiCC evaluated the Afghanistan National Framework for Teaching Competencies against the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)’s minimum standards for teacher competencies. Results were complemented by teacher surveys, classroom observations, and consultations with MoE officials. The A-TiCC recommendations, namely to include competencies on well-being and social and emotional learning, have yet to be adopted. Available at: <https://inee.org/resources/assessment-teacher-competencies-crisis-contexts-afghanistan>.

⁶⁴ Popova, A., Evans, D.K., Breeding, M.E., and Arancibia, V. (2022). ‘Teacher Professional Development around the World: The Gap between Evidence and Practice.’ *The World Bank Research Observer*. 37(1). 107-136. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/wbro/article/37/1/107/6292021>.

framework⁶⁵, with revisions in line with Assessment of Teacher Competencies in Crisis Contexts in Afghanistan (A-TiCC) recommendations, should be utilised as a guide for deciding on ‘core’ training materials to constitute a standard package.

Roll-out: A standardised teacher training package may be utilised for the training of newly hired teachers or selected modules could be delivered during summer or winter breaks to existing teachers who require additional support (as identified through a rapid needs assessment). Increased investment in in-service teacher training through master trainers will be a necessary activity to ensure that teachers with limited skills/experience receive ongoing supervision and structured support. In areas with limited existing master trainers, education partners could hire master trainers to support teacher supervision and support to promote equity across geographic locations in the quality of education delivery. Student learning assessment data – aggregated through the centralised information management – may offer indicative trends on the relationship between level of teacher education and student academic performance (accounting for other factors). These trends can be used to inform further revisions to the training package in the longer term.

Quality Strategy 2.2: Practical support to teachers (on-the-job training)

Given the urgent requirement to scale-up teacher recruitment, capacity and equalise teacher knowledge/skills across the country, a basic ‘menu of options’ for continuous support to teachers is recommended, particularly for new and/or underqualified teachers, such as in-service teacher training (see [Quality Strategy 2.1](#)), peer learning circles, supervision and support. Peer learning circles may be organised at school level and supported and supervised by a master trainer or senior, experienced teacher (gender segregated; if travel is required, considerations given around any restrictions for women). Public school and CBE teachers (where possible) may integrate into local-level support groups, at the school-level or cluster-school level, to improve knowledge sharing.

In addition to on-the-job training, prior to August, supervision and support by academic supervisors required strengthening. Historically, the MoE’s and education partners’ approach to teacher professional development was not standardised and lacked systematised feedback loops between school management and teachers.⁶⁶ Efforts should be made to strengthen existing academic supervision and ‘hub’ school management support to teachers in both public schools and CBEs. Support to academic supervision should be aimed at identifying classroom management issues, using a standardised teacher and classroom observation (picture-based) checklist. These tools can be developed through the joint Cluster-DPG technical working group using existing materials from education partners. This information may be used to improve support to teachers or to address issues within the school or classroom environment and not to act as a performance evaluation metric.

To close the feedback loop, education partners should train SMSs or other community-based bodies (such as community development councils) on a standard observation tool (where and as feasible, observation forms can be uploaded to a centralised information system database) to improve accountability to children. Trainings could include modules on conflict resolution and communication to equip SMS members to follow up with school management or teachers to make progress towards improved teacher competencies.

3. Addressing Disruptions to Learning

Quality Strategy 3.1: Develop and implement a standardised approach to learning ‘catch up’

⁶⁵ The Afghanistan Teacher Competency Framework.

⁶⁶ Ahmadi, M.J., Fadil, M., and Miri, M.A. (2021) ‘Feedback loops in teacher professional development: A qualitative study in Herat Province of Afghanistan.’ *Cogent Education* 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2021.1954466>.

In Afghanistan, learning outcomes have historically been low.⁶⁷ This has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict escalation, and the political shift⁶⁸. As children return to school, it will be important for them to re-connect with learning—at the right level. A standardized approach to learning ‘catch-up’ is recommended to equalise baseline knowledge at the beginning of the academic year (or whenever classes resume). Given the uncertainty of school reopening for secondary school girls, for example, an equity approach should necessarily be applied, acknowledging the significant gap in classroom learning time between girls and boys at the same grade.

During periods of school closure, distance learning modalities have not been universally accessible,⁶⁹ so a ‘refresher’ period—either built into the school day or as additional class time before or after regular hours—is ubiquitously beneficial. The standard approach to catch-up classes does not need to be grade-specific, but rather should guide the teacher to select core content from the curriculum to review (previous material) and teach (new material) in a structured series of catch-up classes. For children in early grades or with low levels of learning, catch-up linked to basic skill development has been proven to be a more effective use of time than curriculum review.⁷⁰ Catch-up classes should include social and emotional learning (SEL) activities⁷¹ to help students to re-acclimate to the learning environment and express their feelings about the disruption in their lives in a safe and productive way. It is recommended for a joint Cluster-DPG technical working group to review existing materials and research and to design a menu of options/technical products for catch-up, depending on resources and context.

THEMATIC AREA 3: SUSTAINING SYSTEMS

Given the complex legal environment, the AESTF provides ways of sustaining practices which are integral to the functioning of the sector as a whole and which pre-date the current political situation. These systems enable sustained access and quality; thus, they correlate to Thematic Areas 1 and 2. The Systems approaches are designed to outline a shift in focus to school-based systems in the absence of a recognised government.

Strategic Goal 3: Sustain critical existing education system components

KEY STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES

1. Data and Monitoring

Systems Strategy 1.1: Harmonise assessment and monitoring tools across actors

Education partners have a unique opportunity to transverse the siloed, project-based data collection approach and instead harmonize tools to create a coherent and harmonised monitoring system which builds onto previous investments.

To avoid creating an incompatible parallel system, partners should utilise existing EMIS tools as a basis for data collection to feed joint monitoring and evaluation processes in support of better planning, programming, and implementation. Cluster and DPG leads could conduct a workshop to develop an assessment toolkit for a Joint

⁶⁷ UNESCO, (2021).

⁶⁸ Correlated with fear to return to school, school closures for secondary school girls, teacher absenteeism related to irregular salary payment, and increased levels of food insecurity.

⁶⁹ Save the Children. (2020). *Policy Brief: School children in Afghanistan: Inclusive pathways to learning during COVID-19*.

⁷⁰ Pratham. ‘Teaching at the Right Level’. Available at: [Teaching at the Right Level – Pratham](#).

⁷¹ Modules have been developed under ECW MYRP, which can be cascaded through a training of trainers and scaled.

Education Needs Assessment as a shared baseline for humanitarian and development actors, as all interventions under Access and Quality thematic areas require accurate data as a basis for prioritisation and planning.

Systems Strategy 1.2: Enable a centralised information system

In the absence of a functioning government-owned EMIS, into which extensive historical investment has been made, a sector-wide information management system must be established, which should re-institutionalise EMIS tools and data analysis. The short-term aim should be to improve information sharing amongst humanitarian and development actors, and in the long-term, to establish a centralised information management database fit for purpose, allowing education partners access to real-time data generated by standardized indicators, thus guiding investments based on need and enabling monitoring of core aid principles.

Using the EMIS toolkit, a manual database could be established to present data against indicators in the EMIS toolkit. This database could be hosted by a third party (i.e., research firm or university) or by a UN or INGO partner. Cluster partners who currently report monthly via the 5Ws⁷² tool would now also report using the EMIS toolkit to this centralised information system or the 5Ws could be expanded to include EMIS indicators, where relevant. Education partners who currently collect and report data based on project-specific requirements could be asked to submit reports in line with the EMIS toolkit indicators. For partners with access to the web-based database, data could be submitted online. For partners who are unable or unauthorised to update online, soft copy or paper-based data sets could be shared with the database's information manager to manually input into the database. For new projects or for reprogramming efforts, donors could be encouraged to build in funding for monthly reporting to the centralised information system, as this will greatly improve the availability of up-to-date, comprehensive data on the sector, thus improving budgeting and planning.

For immediate analysis, a Joint Education Needs Assessment (JENA) is suggested to provide a baseline overview of the education sector utilising the tools developed in the Cluster and DPG workshop. The JENA should include a comprehensive mapping of CBE (both EiE and development), public schools, TVET institutions, and universities across the country to inform [Access Strategy 1.1](#). While for ongoing data collection, DPG and Cluster leads could develop guidance for partners to follow on conducting assessments utilising the EMIS toolkit (via paper- and technology-based modalities). This guidance could include principles of assessment, minimum standards for inclusion and gender equity, limitations on stakeholder engagement (noting differences between humanitarian and development actors), and expectations for sharing data with centralised information system (see [Systems Strategy 1.2](#)).

2. Sustaining a qualified education workforce

Systems Strategy 2.1: Increase number of qualified women available to teach girls at all levels

The insufficient supply of female teachers, particularly in rural areas, has been a longstanding issue in Afghanistan and was previously highlighted under the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP). This issue requires a commitment to streamlining the disparate approaches to female teacher recruitment under a common overarching framework, underpinned by real-time data on gaps.

In collating successful female teacher recruitment programmes, the following activities are suggested:

- **Needs assessment** - Education partners could identify target numbers of teachers to recruit and post in identified schools and assign pre-service, in-service, and/or on-the-job training plans based on

⁷² **Who** does what, **Where**, **When** and for **Whom**. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) tool for mapping and monitoring Cluster interventions and outputs.

qualifications and job requirements. Targets could be shared through the centralised database to avoid duplication and highlight remaining gaps in coverage.

- **Support to public school teachers** - If there are no candidates that meet the minimum standards for recruitments within local communities, education partners could support teachers from nearby districts or provincial centres by providing transportation, meal, and mahram stipends (where indicated). This should be coupled with community engagement to ensure buy-in and acceptance of non-local teachers.
- **CBE teacher recruitment** – In communities where there are no women applicants who meet the minimum standards for CBE recruitment (Grade 9 education), humanitarian and education partners could enrol (on a voluntary basis) women who have achieved at least Grade 7 education in a six-month accelerated learning and teacher apprenticeship programme and should provide continuous support as described under [Quality Strategy 2.2](#).⁷³ After graduating from the programme, these women will be eligible to teach CBE classes and will have completed two additional grade levels. After one year of teaching CBE, these teachers could be recruited by the de facto MoE to teach at public schools with teacher supply issues.
- **Teacher training** (see [Quality thematic area](#) for more details)– Education partners should promote the expansion of existing teacher training programmes which target increased women’s participation in the teaching workforce (i.e., Girls’ Access to Teacher Education (GATE)). If pre-service or in-service training is required, partners could provide tuition, transportation costs, and mahram allowances. Likewise, if master trainers are required to travel to oversee and support teachers, due to a lack of master trainers in the community, then stipends could be provided.

PERSPECTIVES FROM COMMUNITIES:

“We don’t have enough teachers. They are all absent now.”

-Boy from rural community in Balkh

Systems Strategy 2.2: Direct Payment of Incentives to Public Education Personnel

Public Schools and TVET - Even prior to the de facto authority leadership change, the MoE was frequently unable to pay teachers on time or in full, which has been directly linked to teacher absenteeism.⁷⁴ Teacher incentives are an essential response to keep the education system afloat and all children learning without assuming the role of paying salaries. Currently, public school teachers have not been able to rely on regular payments since August 2021⁷⁵ and the prospects that they will be consistently paid in the coming months are in doubt given the lack of external funding. Teachers are essential to keep schools functioning at a minimum level; however, with teachers unpaid and left to cope in a worsening economic situation, there is a great risk that they will stop teaching in search of more stable income for their families.⁷⁶ The teaching profession is also the main sector to employ women. Without dependable income, female teachers may be forced to find alternative sources of employment, which will be detrimental for girls’ continued access to education.

To avoid a collapse of the public school system and ensure that all public schools remain open and accessible for all girls and boys, all public teachers in primary, secondary and upper secondary schools, TTCs and formal TVET

⁷³ Adapted from Girls Learning to Teach – Afghanistan (GLTTA), a Save the Children intervention which combines a six-month ALP with a structured teacher apprenticeship programme designed to increase the number of female CBE teachers.

⁷⁴ Global Out-of-School Initiative: Afghanistan Country Study (2018). p. 51.

⁷⁵ Public school teachers have received salary payments from the de facto MoE from August through December 2021, albeit with delay and without certainty of continued payment, as of this writing.

⁷⁶ For cold climate provinces, a new school year commences in March and extends through November/December. While for warm climate provinces, the school year runs through September to June.

institutions should be prioritised to receive monthly incentives.⁷⁷ The proposed support can be in the form of incentive or stipend based on a standardized flat rate per teacher or grade level.⁷⁸ The provision of public teacher incentives will serve to encourage and motivate teachers to continue teaching, offer them a sense of security to remain in the teaching force, and help to sustain their basic needs. If possible, expanding payments to other education personnel who support the delivery of education should also be included in the incentives scheme.

To facilitate the direct payment of teacher incentives to public teachers and ensure due diligence, the transfer of funds should be centralised to avoid duplication and done directly to verified teachers through licensed financial sector providers including banks, money service providers, and mobile money operators. Third party monitoring is also suggested to ensure accuracy of the public teacher registry and verification of payments. Personal data of an individual teacher payment should be hosted and managed ensure the application of global data protection standards. To ensure accountability and transparency, the centralised transfer system should have an embedded a feedback mechanism so that teachers (recipients) can provide feedback on the service for improvement.

Public Universities - Some professors and lecturers of public universities were provided with two to five month salaries between August 2021 and February 2022; however, it was reported that there was a 40 per cent reduction in salary compared to before August 2021. To support professors to be motivated and to focus on continuing their teaching and research assignments, the provision of financial support packages to complement reduced salaries will help to retain professors and lecturers of public universities. In addition, such financial support packages will ensure that professors and lecturers are committed to the extra workload involved for implementing double shifts, for example, to ensure women have access to the same offerings as their male peers. This temporary provision of financial support packages is anticipated to provide an interim gap-filling measure while the de facto authorities work to ensure sufficient funding can be allocated to keep teaching staff fully paid on a regular basis. While the de facto Ministry of Higher Education personnel and payroll records of teaching staff of public universities should be accessed and utilized, the actual provision of financial support packages may use the same mechanism used for public school teachers (as above), ensuring the funding will not go to or through the de facto authorities. The same mechanism can also be used to provide financial support packages to administrative staff, who are also crucial members of the higher education community in ensuring public universities are operational.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

This section details considerations around implementation, including the use of alternative financing modalities, due diligence measures, projected costing frameworks of proposed interventions and coordinated monitoring given the dynamic financing context.

1. Operationalising the AESTF

The AESTF is intended to provide guidance for donor investment during an off-budget, transitional period and suggests key interventions across the humanitarian and development space, including provisions for life-saving education assistance and protecting critical development gains and key systems. As such, the AESTF does not

⁷⁷ There is a total of 187,203 public primary, secondary and upper secondary school teachers (some 35 per cent females or 66,500 females), 3,824 formal TVET instructors and 2,852 TTC teachers (some nine per cent females or 257 females) (EMIS, 2019).

⁷⁸ The current public-school teacher salary range is around US\$ 80-300 depending on the level and experience.

provide a prioritisation of strategies and approaches, as this exercise would need to consider risk tolerance and donor appetite, which is outside of the scope of the AESTF. Funding prioritisation and risk analysis should be considered in the development of donor-specific programme documents, utilising the AESTF as the overarching technical guide for education sector investment. Partner capacity should also be factored into the development of programme documents, as the AESTF proposes the technical direction for programming towards sector goals whilst noting that partner capacity will limit the scope and scale of interventions.

In addition, many of the AESTF strategies and approaches require multi-year programming to achieve results. As the duration of the AESTF is two years with a mid-term review, it will be necessary to utilise the AESTF review cycle to update interventions based on the changing context and link continuing investment (beyond the transitional period) to an updated AESTF or relevant sector plan.

COORDINATION

As the two coordination bodies for the education sector, the DPG and Cluster bring invaluable resources and technical expertise to strengthen both information and analysis; in addition, they help to advance an understanding of implementation constraints. While the DPG encompasses development actors and funding partners, the Cluster membership includes mainly implementing partners, the majority of which are Afghan national NGOs, which necessarily grounds and localises the operationalisation of the AESTF. Both coordination bodies therefore complement in each other in decision-making and are required to work concurrently through the transitional period.

The need for robust coordination is even greater in crisis situations when fundraising brings in needed capital but does not necessarily correspond with a comprehensive plan for implementation. As the operative investment guide, the AESTF is an important mechanism for aligning actions and ensuring that external efforts are complementary, do not duplicate or use different standards or approaches, and add up to a coherent whole that addresses key priorities. This requires utilising the AESTF as a roadmap for the education sector to map, analyse, plan, and monitor so that humanitarian and development actors harmonise their efforts. The DPG and Cluster will also lead the **review of the AESTF against a mutually agreed terms of reference on an annual basis**, or in response to a significant context shift, and share findings and revisions transparently with their respective memberships and stakeholder groups. The DPG and Cluster will be called upon to assist with mapping projects and fundraising towards the AESTF. The DPG and Cluster will also be active in operationalising the AESTF, including helping to develop a fit-for-purpose coordination mechanism which avoids creating additional layers of bureaucracy without overburdening existing coordination functions.

MONITORING

The AESTF also serves the function of providing a funding architecture in which to align off-budget investments with a common high-level results framework, which will be developed through DPG and Cluster joint leadership.

To actualise the AESTF and prevent the proliferation of siloed, ad hoc programmes (which can easily occur with off-budget investments), donors are expected to use the AESTF high-level results framework to measure progress. The coordination mechanism for monitoring progress towards the results framework, measuring funding received against AESTF objectives, and continuously assessing the operating environment should be articulated through joint DPG-Cluster leadership. At the time of this writing, several ongoing discussions are occurring, which are focused on agreeing 'principles' of engagement and defining the parameters of responsibilities towards monitoring. The AESTF creates space for these conversations without prescribing an expected outcome(s).

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

In the context of complex and changing sanctions regimes, donor investment and education partner implementation are necessarily guided by shared principles. Whilst the AESTF recognises that individual donors have their own respective risk thresholds, general, collective guidance along shared principles is suggested to preserve humanitarian space and protect the maintenance of general operating principles for education partners.

As the de facto authorities' knowledge and experience of international partners is limited, all education partners' activities influence perception and access. Likewise, in operating within Afghanistan and implementing the AESTF, some degree of transparency and coordination with de facto authorities is required in project implementation; thus, coordination amongst partners on the approach to information-sharing helps to manage expectations. The DPG and Cluster have jointly developed an Education Implementing Partner Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) (Annex E), based on and as a complement to the OCHA Joint Operating Principles, to outline key considerations for principled engagement with the de facto authorities. This document is recommended as a guide for all education implementing partners.

To avoid removing accountability from local authorities to deliver basic services whilst avoiding legitimisation, clear communication with the de facto authorities about the proposed alternative financing modalities, including the expectation on the duration of support and scope of activities, is essential, though the approach should first be agreed with donor(s). Individual interventions which require coordination with the de facto authorities in order to implement without impediment may be articulated without referencing the broader architecture of the AESTF or any donor-specific commitments.

2. Alternative Financing Modalities

The AESTF provides a technical framework for investment and programming in the current context where there is a varied policy environment, humanitarian needs have increased, and basic services are disrupted. Due to the complex legal environment—principally, counterterrorism and sanctions regimes⁷⁹—new ways of financing are required.

As a large part of donor funding was previously channelled through on-budget or development mechanisms such as the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) and the Education Quality Reform in Afghanistan (EQRA) project, which are currently frozen, alternative means need to be sought to channel funding to education.

There are several pathways for funding the AESTF:

- (1) Channelling or reprogramming frozen funding through existing mechanisms* such as ECW MYRP or GPE or through bilateral agreements with implementing partners;
- (2) Funding the United Nations Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF) trust fund (Outcome 1 through HRP; Outcomes 2 and 3 through UNDP Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA));
- (3) Multi-donor pooled fund(s), managed by one or more partners; and/or
- (4) Multiple bilateral funding arrangements with active education partners (individually or in consortia) using the AESTF as a 'menu of options' for designing investments.

⁷⁹ United Nations Security Council [1988 \(2011\) sanctions regime](#) prohibits making funds, financial assets, or economic resources available, directly or indirectly, for the benefit of listed individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities in Afghanistan. Currently, several individuals listed under the 1988 sanctions regime hold leadership positions in key line ministries in Afghanistan. Country-specific sanctions regimes also target financial assets, travel, or arms purchases.

*The HRP 2022 also reflects the proposed humanitarian approaches in the AESTF; thus, existing mechanisms which fund the HRP are also contributing towards AESTF operationalisation.

What remains key is to ensure a strong mechanism of coordination and joint monitoring between the different partners involved: *implementers, including local partners (e.g., civil society, SMS, etc.), coordinators and/or funders*, to ensure efficient and effective implementation, in line with country priorities and in adherence with internationally agreed measures in terms of support to the de facto authorities.

NOTE ON ASSURANCES AND DUE DILIGENCE

In pursuit of operating as a unified international community, implementing partners have expressed difficulty in navigating donor limitations on funding when they are not clearly articulated. Therefore, a shared top-line agreement on minimum due diligence measures is useful and will prevent implementing partners from designing multiple assurance mechanisms tailored to each donor. However, it is recognised that bilateral donors are accountable to domestic legislation and country-specific sanctions regimes, so the specific restrictions and assurances will likely require additional funding-specific risk mitigation. Funding or donor-specific due diligence measures should be articulated at the programme document level.

3. Costing Frameworks

CBE STANDARD COSTING FRAMEWORK

The CBE Costing Framework, the development of which was led by the Education Cluster in 2019-2020 and endorsed by the MoE, provides grade-specific classroom and student-level costing data for CBE implementation to standardize activity costs across education partners and promote equity with the public school system. In the current context, the CBE Costing Framework is now outdated. Market price increases, access to hard-to-reach areas has improved, public school transition is less likely, and operating costs have increased, which requires a revision of the Framework while aiming to enable sustainability in the medium to longer term.

The Education Cluster is currently leading the CBE Costing Framework revision effort through a taskforce to conduct a market analysis and revisit what constitutes a standard CBE package (with value-add activities) under the current conditions.

COSTING OF PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS

With financial inputs to be made in a systematized manner, ensuring no funds are channelled through the de facto authorities, a consideration for standard minimum and maximum costs per school and student categorised by type of school/grades, gender, location, and core activities is needed.

As a longer-term step, education partners could review existing public school budget parameters to develop a public school standard costing framework for use in off-budget support to the public school system. Partners could agree on integrated activities (i.e., WASH, protection, health, nutrition, etc.) and standard costing ranges for gender and disability-specific activities. The DPG with support from the Cluster is recommended to lead this exercise in consultation with MoE (for partners with the mandate to engage).

The table below offers indicative and broad costings by intervention area and strategy, which will require further breakdown and agreement by the education sector. A standard operating procedure or guidance note on which costs/activities can be considered under each strategy may be useful to track investments towards particular interventions. At this time, the indicative budget contains the best financing estimates possible and clearly states the constraints and assumptions made around both costs and financing to facilitate funding dialogue and

partnership in the education sector. These estimates are derived from existing sector budgets, including the HRP and the TEF, and applied to the relevant AESTF interventions.

Table 1 Indicative budget

Thematic area	Strategic interventions	Target	Unit	Unit cost \$US	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Strategic goal 1: Access to safe, inclusive learning environments is sustained or improved							
(1) Public school	1.1 Rehabilitate school facilities to ensure safe access, especially girls	6,731	school	26,000	87,503,000	87,503,000	175,006,000
	1.2 Activate SMS to encourage student attendance and improve accountability for services	35,059	SMS	200	3,505,900	3,505,900	7,011,800
	1.3 Provide incentives for school attendance given economic decline						
	1.3.a. School-based health and nutrition support	1,050,000	child	95	99,750,000	99,750,000	199,500,000
	1.3.b. Multi-purpose cash transfers to marginalised families	250,000	family	180	22,500,000	22,500,000	45,000,000
(2) CBE	2.1 Utilise nation-wide mapping to understand gaps in public school and CBE coverage	1	lumpsum	3,000,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	3,000,000
	2.2 Expand CBE interventions to at least Grade 6 for	30,000	CBE	4,000	60,000,000	60,000,000	120,000,000

Thematic area	Strategic interventions	Target	Unit	Unit cost \$US	Year 1	Year 2	Total
	areas with limited to no public-school facilities						
	2.3 Strengthen relationship between public 'hub' schools and CBE classes through a satellite system	1	lumpsum	3,000,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	3,000,000
(3) TVET	3.1 Short-term financial support for TVET institutes (salaries and operations costs)	301	TVET	100,000	15,050,000	15,050,000	30,100,000
(4) Youth and adult literacy programmes	4.1 Improve coordination on youth and adult education programming	1	lumpsum	435,000	217,500	217,500	435,000
	4.2 Localise delivery of literacy courses to improve access for youth and adults	1,200,000	youth	20	12,000,000	12,000,000	24,000,000
(5) Higher Education	5.1 Provision of scholarships and financial support packages to public and private university students	20,000	Student	1,200	24,000,000	24,000,000	48,000,000

Thematic area	Strategic interventions	Target	Unit	Unit cost \$US	Year 1	Year 2	Total
	5.2 Support for safe access to universities by female staff and students, including rehabilitation of additional learning spaces and facilities	1	Lumpsum	15,000,000	7,500,000	7,500,000	15,000,000
	5.3 Support at-risk students to prepare for and pass the university entrance exam	1	Lumpsum	5,000,000	2,500,000	2,500,000	5,000,000
Subtotals					337,526,400	337,526,400	675,052,800
Strategic goal 2: Sustain and recover gains in education quality							
(1) Curriculum and learning resources	1.2 Support the implementation of existing curriculum	1	lumpsum	8,000,000	4,000,000	4,000,000	8,000,000
	1.2 Improve linkages between TVET curriculum and market demand and skills relevance	1	lumpsum	2,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	2,000,000
(2) Teacher professional development and support	2.1 Adapt in-service teacher training to align with the Teacher Competencies in Crisis Contexts in Afghanistan (A-TiCC)	187,203	teacher	300	56,160,900	56,160,900	112,321,800

Thematic area	Strategic interventions	Target	Unit	Unit cost \$US	Year 1	Year 2	Total
	2.2 Practical support to teachers (on-the-job training)	187,203	teacher	430	80,497,290	80,497,290	160,994,580
(3) Addressing disruptions to learning	3.1 Develop and implement a standardised approach to learning 'catch up'	2	lumpsum	300,000	300,000	300,000	600,000
	3.2 Implement multiple learning pathways for out-of-school children	1	lumpsum	500,000	500,000	500,000	1,000,000
Subtotals					142,458,190	142,458,190	284,916,380
Strategic goal 3: Critical existing education system components are sustained							
(1) Data and monitoring	1.1 Harmonise assessment and monitoring tools across actors	1	lumpsum	500,000	500,000	500,000	1,000,000
	1.2 Enable a centralised information system	1	lumpsum	500,000	500,000	500,000	1,000,000
(2) Sustaining a qualified education workforce	2.1 Increase number of qualified women available to teach girls at all levels through targeted training and recruitment in local communities	10,019	teacher	1,500	7,514,425	7,514,425	15,028,850

Thematic area	Strategic interventions	Target	Unit	Unit cost \$US	Year 1	Year 2	Total
(3) Emergency incentive payments to education personnel	3.1.1 Direct payment of public teacher incentives	194,000	teacher	1,308	253,752,000	253,752,000	507,504,000
	3.1.2 Direct payment of public university incentives	13,400	Staff	1,800	24,120,000	24,120,000	48,240,000
Subtotals					286,386,425	286,386,425	572,772,850
Total AESTF costing					766,371,015	766,371,015	1,532,742,030

ANNEX A: THEMATIC CONSULTATION TOOLS AND FINDINGS

The DPG and Education Cluster held four virtual consultations with education stakeholders from local and international NGOs, bilateral donors, and UN agencies. Prior to the online consultation, DPG and Cluster co-leads circulated thematic consultation scoping questions via Google Forms to enable wider feedback. After receiving inputs online, the co-leads synthesised the feedback into a summary of common responses per question or sub-topic and highlighted points of discussion for responses that presented competing approaches. These were then presented to the online consultation for discussion. The written responses and the feedback from the virtual consultation formed the basis of the AESTF. The complete scoping questionnaire and summary of responses (consolidated from written and virtual consultation) is detailed below.

Key Scoping Questions for Consultation

ACCESS

CBE:

- 1) What do partners think are the immediate and longer-term priorities for out-of-school children? What role does CBE play in addressing these issues in the immediate and longer term?

Feedback summary: There is a general agreement that CBE is an effective approach for reaching out-of-school children and providing education in hard-to-reach areas. CBE can be an entry point for the provision of other services such as PSS, health, school feeding/nutrition, etc. CBE is not a solution for all out-of-school children, as expansion of public school infrastructure is necessary; however, in the short-term, CBE works well for over-aged children and for children without access to public schools, if the grade offer is expanded. CBE is a modality to reach out-of-school children which needs to function as an outreach activity rather than a parallel structure to public schooling. In the longer term, CBE needs to link more strongly to hub schools or upgrade facilities to account for the gaps in school construction. CBE also offers the option to work around de facto authority policy gaps to offer schooling to girls and marginalised groups, though it needs to remain 'on policy' while being 'off budget.' Importantly, CBE has improved community buy-in for education, which needs to be built upon in any future strategy for education access expansion.

- 2) What is the exit strategy for CBE? Will CBE expansion link to public school transition? If so, what complementary support to public schools should be provided?

Feedback summary: 'Exit strategy' is likely not the right term. Currently, CBE is a complementary modality and a safety net and cannot be used as a replacement for public school or a parallel system given partner capacity and donor funding limitations. Given these limitations, CBE expansion should be focused on offering multiple grades and upgrading facilities to satellite schools if no public schools are available in the community. Transition to public schools will continue to rely on capacity building of teachers and resources for school rehabilitation and materials, which were previous barriers. The current cohort in CBE will not be able to be transitioned to public schools given the current environment, so additional grades need to be added to existing CBE programmes to ensure continuity of learning. Consolidation of the system and an emphasis on strengthening existing mechanisms will help to ensure that CBE expansion is not unsustainable. This may include initiatives including rotation of staff between CBE schools/classes and the nearest public schools, co-training and planning between CBE teachers/managers/shura and de facto counterparts, and a system in place which tracks and supports children through transitions between CBE and public schools.

- 3) What data will be used to inform approach to CBE expansion? For communities that were previously unreachable by education actors, what is the strategy to map and respond to these needs?

Feedback summary: Community-supported school mapping (including children in the mapping process) is essential to map both OOSC and determine the needs for CBE. This can be supported by NGOs and multilaterals - and such processes are already being engaged in by various development partner organisations and through conducting surveys from local community (Community Development Council (CDCs), and District Development Council (DDC)) by NGOs. Current CBE enrolments are recorded in hub schools, as CBEs are meant to be satellites, which means that data can be collected from hub schools and shuras in the absence of partner data. A comprehensive mapping of existing CBE (both development and humanitarian) would also be useful. For areas that were previously not reachable under armed opposition control, the de facto authorities should guarantee access to data and mapping exercises. Establishing new CBE classes should rely on the existing CBE Policy guidance.

4) How will CBE expansion link to existing funding or reprogramming?

Feedback summary: Current CBE cohorts should not expect to transition to public schools within the academic year given the freeze in development funding. CBE classes should be expanded to at least Grade 6 ideally while links to the public school system is reinforced or CBE classes are upgraded due to enrolment size. Funding for CBE must be linked to public school support to ensure learning continuity.

5) What risks do you foresee in the potential to expand CBE in the current contexts?

Feedback summary: The main risks identified are sustainability and the creation of a parallel system. Sustainability is a risk given that most CBE programmes are currently short-term which was not adequate and will continue to be inadequate in the current landscape. Donors should commit to multi-year funding for both development and humanitarian CBE interventions. Expansion of CBE needs to also link with coordination with public schools, which necessitates coordination with de facto authorities. Risk and assurances need to be ironed out between donors and implementers to ensure that children's learning is not disrupted due to poor planning. Likewise, CBE needs to continue to be linked strongly to public school, even if grades are expanded, so as not to create a parallel system which is aid dependent and siloed by project/donor.

6) Does the CBE Policy need to be updated due changes in the context? If yes, how should this process proceed, given that it was previously led by the MoE with EiE WG?

Feedback summary: No, it should not be updated as it is fit for purpose. Precipitating discussions on policy change could create opportunities for changes in an unfavourable direction and should be avoided. As the AESTF is for two years, policy reform should not be the main focus, though partners should monitor the policy space closely.

7) Are there any considerations needed to ensure girls will participate in CBE?

Feedback summary: Community awareness raising and buy-in is critical, especially with parents who may be afraid to send their daughters to school under the current circumstances. Community advocacy to local education authorities should be supported rather than pursuing donor or NGO-led advocacy. There is a need for physical infrastructure to allow the participation of girls: separate classrooms for girls and boys, separate washrooms for girls and boys, classrooms near girls' homes in secure locations. Likewise, the prioritisation of female teacher recruitment and capacity building must be an integral part of programming to include girls in all activities. In addition, integrated activities which may act as an incentive for girls to attend school (i.e., cash transfers, food, transportation) will help to encourage families to prioritise education for girls instead of reverting to early marriage or labour.

Current donor-supported cohort (ECW, GPE, AHF, ECHO, Sida, Girls' Education Challenge, etc):

- 1) Catch up: How should gaps in access to schooling due to COVID, drought, conflict, displacement, closure of girls' secondary schools be addressed?

Feedback summary: It is important to first understand the previous versus current barriers to girls' and boys' access to school. Many barriers now will likely be economic, so learning material provision and cash transfers may be appropriate to incentivise attending school. Depending on the barrier, a menu of options for activities to address barriers should be offered (i.e., awareness raising, school feeding, winterization, advocacy to de facto authorities, hiring female teachers, etc.). In addition, remedial or catch-up classes (in-person or remote) should be offered based on foundational learning benchmarks and flexibility to upgrade to the next grade should be discussed with local education authorities.

- 2) What is the continuity plan for TLS/CBE/ALP students after current funding ends, especially if public schools cannot absorb CBE students?

Feedback summary: It is highly unlikely that the current cohort of CBE classes will continue without external funding, as communities cannot support the costs, even if they support continuation of education. Public schools can operate in multiple shifts to accommodate additional students, CBE students can use Masjid as an alternative space, or CBE programmes should be expanded until at least Grade 6. Advocacy for the continuation of learning for CBE classes should not happen on a donor-by-donor basis but should be coordinated through existing platforms (i.e., Cluster or DPG) to ensure there is not significant provincial disparity. Donors should prioritise supporting the public school system to absorb additional students while expanding CBE to offer additional grades.

Community mobilisation:

- 1) What are the priority demand side issues for girls' and boys' enrolment and attendance?

Feedback Summary: There are many unknowns related to how the education landscape has changed with the Taliban takeover given the lack of clear policies and signposting from de facto authorities and the disruption in systematic information gathering. However, the worsening economic situation indicates that families require economic support to prioritise education, especially for girls. Safe, accessible spaces, learner-friendly environments, quality teaching, access to nutritious food are amongst the priority issues. Awareness raising about the importance of education with caregivers, emphasising the safety of classrooms and prevention of COVID-19, is an important demand concern.

- 2) How has the economic decline contributed to OOSC (re: negative coping skills like child marriage, child labour, etc.)?

Feedback summary: Education will be deprioritised if resources become scarce. Child marriage and labour are common negative coping skills, so incentives to send children to school will need to be provided. Integration of nutrition/school feeding into the classroom could help to keep children in schools. It is important to prioritise children in large families who may not have the resources to purchase learning materials and clothing for all children.

- 3) What are the key issues for communities in preventing or enabling boys and girls (and women and men) to return to (or go to) school/literacy courses? How has this changed under the de facto Taliban authority?

Feedback summary: The preventative factors are deepening financial insecurity, safety and insecurity, COVID-19, and prohibitive and uncertain regulations/policies and insecurity in political leadership change. The enabling factors are increased awareness in communities in order to lobby de facto authority as well as following the de facto authorities' policies such as Hijab, separate classes for boys and girls, etc. It is important to advocate with the MoE and coordinate with the community to improve access to schooling.

- 4) How do you envision the role of school management shuras/community education councils? What external support is needed to enable these outcomes?

Feedback summary: Shuras and related bodies can play an even more important role in a more decentralised education system; however, they do need technical support in regards to their roles and responsibilities. In addition, more realistic roles need to be articulated for school shuras which are tied to concrete activities to improve student attendance or support the delivery of school improvement plans/school grants. It is important to note that thus far, school shuras have operated through a top-down approach, as the education system is centralised, and capacity building efforts were often project-based and not sustainable. Expectations for shura members, as many are not literate and have received little training, should be appropriately managed.

Support to public schools:

- 1) What are the priority supply side needs at the central and provincial levels for getting schools up and running?

Feedback summary: Teacher salaries as well as school staff salaries (head teachers, master trainers, administrators), maintenance of buildings, textbooks, appropriate latrines, and school libraries are among the key needs for public schools.

- 2) What is prioritised in the short-term and long-term to keep schools operational?

Feedback summary: In the short-term, payment of teacher incentives, adequate teaching and learning material provision, enabling of a safe environment, and active school management shuras are suggested. In the long-term, school grants to provide support to locally identified financial gaps, teacher training and education and support for school management and infrastructure are suggested.

Inclusion and girls' access to education

- 3) Which groups are at increased risk of being unable to access schools?

Feedback summary: Girls (adolescent girls, secondary school girls), children with disabilities who are unable to access to school, minorities (ethnic and language-wise; special attention should also be paid to Dari-speaking communities, as Pashto is being used exclusively by the de facto authorities), children on the move (including nomad/kochi children), IDPs, returnees, refugees, child-headed households/poor families, orphaned children, children who work/beg on the streets, child labourers.

- 4) How will partners support girls to continue learning when schools are closed?

Feedback summary: Principally, advocacy is the most important avenue to ensure that girls return to school. In the short-term, a reference group could be set up to support out-of-school girls and distance learning modalities such as television and radio are options. However, it is important not to create an 'easy out' for de facto authorities to justify keeping girls' schools closed. Community pressure is integral to convince de facto authorities that girls need to return to school. In the longer term, it is important to consider how to improve CBE responsiveness and improve mixed modalities for reaching children out of school.

- 5) What advocacy should be pursued to reopen girls' schools, given that it seems to be in the pipeline?

Feedback summary: The de facto authorities should be reminded that Afghanistan has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. On a practical level, implementers should continue to deliver and mitigate barriers (i.e., pay teacher incentives and support girls' education). If separate spaces for boys and girls are required, partners should plan for this and source additional teachers. Partners should be cautious of pushing agendas which are not mirrored at the community level.

- 6) How will partners support girls and other marginalised groups to catch up once schools are reopened?

Feedback summary: Adolescent girls who were out of school may require catch-up or remedial classes, though 'catch up' may not be the approach term, given the quality of education provided prior. This may look like extra hours of teaching, support through radio or paper-based materials, utilising winter break for intensive, activity-based education (winter camps). Given the low learning outcomes in Afghanistan, the focus should be on broad-based, holistic approaches that use principles of universal design where children achieve minimum foundational standards, rather than tailoring it to specific knowledge loss. Female teachers should also be provided with incentives to work additional hours to support catch-up.

TVET:

- 1) What is the current status of accessibility of provincial vocational training centres (VTCs) to local population?

Feedback summary: None are currently operational except for AKTVI and they are only open to males. The majority of them are running in poor condition.

- 2) Is the current access to VTCs equitably distributed across the working-age labour force, particularly for vulnerable population (i.e. low-educated, low-skilled, women and youth)?

Feedback summary: Currently, youth participation in TVET is higher for adolescent boys/men than girls/women. There is such a large youth population in Afghanistan and they have a low level of skills and are more likely to be unemployed. There is a need for TVET with a curriculum that is relevant to youth and which takes into consideration security concerns for girls' participation.

- 3) What are the main barriers hindering access to non-formal TVET?

Feedback summary: Lack of basic numeracy and literacy skills, interest in the curriculum, and relevance of skills to job market. Formal TVET has less support than non-formal TVET, but funding is a consistent issue.

Youth and adult literacy:

- 1) What do partners think are the immediate and longer-term priorities for expanding youth and adult literacy in the country?

Feedback summary: There is an immediate need to reopen the nine months literacy course (level 1) and in mid and longer-term it needs to provide the level 2 and 3 literacy courses. It is important to continue to focus on literacy for women, as this has previously been shown to be very effective to empower women. In addition, literacy programs provided match the demands of current job or employment opportunities. In the longer-term, these programmes need to be decentralised and community centred. They should also go beyond numeracy and literacy to skill-based learning and prevocational skills linked to the local economy.

- 2) How can the Literacy Schools and Community Learning Centers be used to expand the literacy courses in the country?

Feedback summary: These centres can be used as a hub or partners can use Masjid as temporary spaces. Where centralised literacy programmes cannot reach larger populations, they should be expanded from level 1-3 in community learning centres.

- 3) What could be a strategy to map and respond to needs/barriers to youth and adult literacy, especially for women and girls, especially in underserved areas?

Feedback summary: This can be part of the centralised information system, though UNESCO is currently gathering information from literacy schools. The National Platform is another mechanism by which to aggregate data on out-of-school youth and literacy needs across actors.

Learning resources:

- 1) How do we assess the current gap in access to learning resources like textbooks, notebooks, teaching aids etc.?

Feedback summary: We can use existing data from DED and PED level and triangulate it with partner monitoring and data collection. There was already a significant gap in teaching and learning materials, which provides a useful baseline.

- 2) What strategies can be adopted to make learning resources available to learners?

Feedback summary: A needs assessment and subsequent procurement and distribution, potentially using a third party, may be successful. There are several past investments which have looked at supply chain of textbooks (i.e., USAID Afghan Children Read) which may be informative.

QUALITY

Learning:

- 1) What quality standards are important to monitor in the curriculum? How will these standards be monitored across the country?

Feedback summary: The scope and sequence should be monitored vertically and horizontally with each subject and grade. Curriculum and pedagogy should go beyond developing basic skills to prepare students for the real world as responsible members of society. The investment from USAID Afghan Children Read should be retained as a cornerstone for effective teaching and learning. Monitoring of standards may be achieved through project-based coordination rather than a centralised system in the interim. Likewise, if subjects are being omitted at the provincial level (i.e., reports of life skills being omitted), then this information should be shared through DPG or Cluster.

- 2) What technical support do you envisage being needed in the event of any curriculum changes?

Feedback summary: A technical team is needed to liaise with the de facto authorities. This should include a curriculum specialist and education planning staff to ensure that the curriculum is aligned with teacher training and learning assessment. These activities should build off of the work that UNESCO has done. It should be noted that the legal environment does not support capacity building to the de facto authorities, so this is not in the scope of the AESTF. Likewise, any change in the curriculum would necessitate printing

and distribution of new materials (of which there is already a huge dearth) and the de facto authorities do not have the budget to do this.

- 3) How urgent is curriculum reform in comparison to other priorities? Can the existing curriculum be supported in the short-term?

Feedback summary: Curriculum reform is not an urgent priority under the AESTF. The previous curriculum should suffice, as it was never fully implemented and seems acceptable thus far to de facto authorities. It is important not to open a dialogue about curriculum changes when there may be an ideological interest in enhancing the Islamic content at the expense of foundational skills. The existing curriculum can be utilised in the short-term, and the UNESCO-supported revision can be discussed in the medium-term when the policy environment is clearer.

- 4) What teaching and learning materials are needed to support students to catch up on learning after the COVID-19 closures, drought, conflict and as schools open for girls? (Link to 2a and 5b)

Feedback summary: Remedial classes and materials have been trialled under GPE Accelerated Funding. The focus should be to provide complementary learning materials to help children catch up, which can be provided through multiple modalities depending on access and resources (i.e., paper-based materials, tablets, taped lessons, additional textbooks for home).

Youth and adult literacy skills and development:

- 1) What quality standards are important to monitor the Youth and Adult Literacy and Basic Education curriculum (level 1)?

Feedback summary: As the curriculum was developed by UNESCO, it was designed to be learner centric, competency-based, and activity-based. Quality standards should be monitored from a learning outcome perspective. Likewise, quality should not be one-size-fits all, as different learners have different learning styles.

- 2) How does the TVET curriculum link with skills for work and life? Should Skills for Work and Life be further integrated in Youth and Adult Literacy and Basic Education curriculum (level 1)?

Feedback summary: It is important to differentiate between vocational training (non-formal) and the TVET curriculum that is post-secondary. The best strategy to prepare for work is to introduce life-skills into general education and make sure foundational skills are acquired. To respond to the changing climate, leadership skills for girls should be prioritised.

- 3) How should TVET programmes link to evolving labour market demands?

Feedback summary: TVET provides another avenue for children and youth to gain access to education. It would be interesting to better understand the evolving labour market but also the skills that are relevant for economic development at the community level. TVET also can provide a bridge between basic education and higher education – all of which lead to meeting market demand. Increased child labour and community perceptions of TVET should also be explored.

- 4) What is the plan for the National Alliance for Literacy, previously chaired by the MoE?

Feedback summary: Even before the Taliban takeover, the National Alliance for Literacy (which was co-chaired by the MoE and UNESCO) was considering steps to be more inclusive and less centralised. In

November, given the lack of a government counterpart, UNESCO launched the National Platform, which has completed a mapping of 20-25 partners and is working on a joint assessment on youth and adult literacy capacity. This will be the mechanism to coordinate youth and adult literacy actors and interventions going forward.

Teacher Professional Development:

- 1) What are the immediate gaps in teacher competencies as it relates to curriculum, teacher education, and academic supervision/mentoring?

Feedback summary: There are major gaps in all of these areas, particularly in teachers' capacities to facilitate learner- and learning-centred teaching, positive classroom and behaviour management, and inclusive assessment. The gaps in teachers' competencies are reflected and reinforced by gaps in school managers' and school shuras' capacities. Previous training investments (i.e., INSET 1 and INSET 2) are outdated and should be revised, though this is a longer-term goal. Historical context is also important in understanding the gaps in teacher competencies, as investment has gone to TTCs which have been undermined by the shift to higher education for pre-service rather than TTCs. There has been significant project siloing when it comes to teacher education, which has led to a body of out-of-work qualified teachers but a critical gap in teacher supply.

- 2) What specific training support is needed for female teachers to close any predicted gap between boys and girls teaching?

Feedback summary: Women should be prioritized for in-service teacher training and on-the-job support. Scripted lessons, low-tech materials, and utilisation of teacher guides should be scaled up. Incentives for teachers in rural areas or for girls' schools should also be considered.

School safety:

- 1) What specific groups might need enhanced safeguarding in the current context?

Feedback summary: Groups that are negatively impacted by power dynamics including, but not limited to: (adolescent) girls, over-aged girls, ethnic and language minorities, learners with disabilities, children living in poverty, etc.

- 2) What would a standard approach to comprehensive school safety include and would a standard approach be useful? How could it be operationalised at the national level?

Feedback summary: The Comprehensive School Safety Framework has been completed (led by the Education Cluster) but has not been endorsed by the previous MoE. The previous CSSF relied on capacity building of local education authorities, which is clearly a political issue now. The CSSF can still be used across agencies, as several partners, including Save the Children, have operationalised this Framework under various grants. The Framework should be responsive to community needs and flexible to changing security concerns. Foundational topics should include holistic school safety assessments, community-based risk management activities, gender-specific risks and mitigation strategies, etc. School safety should focus on building community resilience by creating activities and tools that are able to be institutionalised at the community level rather than utilised by government counterparts.

- 3) Should there be a minimum package for psychosocial support in CBE and public schools and, if so, what would it include? How should psychosocial support to students and teachers factor into the classroom environment?

Feedback summary: Programmes should be designed to improve learning and wellbeing equally. On the PSS piece, partners recognise that there has been significant disruption in the last few months which has undoubtedly had a negative effect on children's wellbeing. Many current programmes currently implement PSS activities using INEE materials adapted to the context. Individual partners have PSS and social and emotional learning (SEL) tools which can be shared through the Education Cluster and DPG as a common approach. Resources need to be provided to standardize PSS tools across actors, as they are largely siloed by project, though included as a standard CBE teacher training module. Teacher well-being also remains a gap to be addressed.

School management:

- 1) What mechanisms are in place to support public school management under de facto authorities? Vetting practices etc?

Feedback summary: School management is largely unchanged since the de facto authorities took over. It is not clear which previous local education authority mechanisms remain functional; however, the systems which were in place previously to support school management were inadequate. School improvement plans, which are a common feature of CBE programmes, should still be part of the offer given that they enable children to transition into formal public schools as well as benefitting existing students. In terms of vetting, agencies are exploring due diligence tools to vet where money goes at the school level and have thus found that no money has been channelled to the de facto authorities as schools operate largely in a decentralised manner (but under a centralised policy framework). Regardless, it is still important to understand how school management has changed since the de facto authorities have come to power.

- 2) How can school block grants be used transparently and effectively to address school needs?

Feedback summary: Partners have extensive evidence of how school block grants can be used transparently and effectively. If led by the community and assessment data (i.e. from a School Improvement Plan activity), school block grants can be an impactful method of improving school infrastructure and strengthening accountability with school management staff. Community members should also be involved in repair and material delivery to improve transparency. It is equally important that donors come together to agree on top-line assurances that safeguard investment in the complex legal environment. For example, if repairing windows and doors enables more children to return to school, but furniture for head teachers' offices is questionable, donors could come to an agreement on guiding principles or minimum standards for school improvement activities based on improving quality and access.

- 3) Based on partners' current work on school management/leadership capacity building, what are the most important areas for prioritised development? What should be the approach to operationalising these standards/approaches?

Feedback summary: The priority work should focus on developing competencies which support high quality inclusive schools (in part through training and supporting school managers in ensuring their leadership encourages such development and reinforces teachers' acquisition and expression of core competencies, and in building strong, positive school-community relationships). Essential to these goals is a whole-school approach to training, mentorship, and support. Standardized approaches to school grants, simple results monitoring tools, institutionalised local supervision, and engagement of shuras are also key pillars of school

management improvement. In addition, focusing more on the child and teacher rather than higher level processes will allow schools to ensure they are working effectively and fostering an inclusive and safe environment. Mental health and psychosocial support, especially during the last year, should be important elements in any school management framework. Likewise, we need to better understand the role of shuras and their sustainability outside of the project cycle.

Children with special needs/disabilities:

- 1) What are the priority unmet needs for children with disabilities? What strategies have worked well?

Feedback summary: The majority of public schools in Afghanistan are not physically accessible for children with physical disabilities. There is a profound lack of assistive devices and strategies for including children with disabilities in learning. At the community level, disability is still highly stigmatized which may prevent children, especially girls, from ever enrolling in school. This requires awareness raising with community leaders, parents, and other students. Disability is also measured by donors and partners as a binary (with/without)—or monolithic—when it is more nuanced, though there are few resources and little teacher capacity to support children with cognitive disabilities. School or classroom level interventions such as teacher training on differentiation techniques, coupled with consultations to improve the accessibility of classrooms, have proven useful. National level campaigns and policy work has had limited impact.

- 2) What are partners' current capacities to support children with disabilities (hearing, visual impairment, physical disabilities, etc.)?

Feedback summary: Across the education space, disability inclusion has been limited due to fluctuations in donor and government interest/support; however, several agencies (Norwegian Afghanistan Committee, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, Humanity & Inclusion, Save the Children, UNESCO, UNICEF, etc.) have done work on visual and hearing impairment through developing sign language and braille translated curricula and teacher training materials. A small number of special education schools exist, though at the Kabul level. Lessons can perhaps be derived from working with these schools, though knowledge needs to be proliferated to rural areas.

SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING

Information management:

- 1) What gaps currently exist across coordination bodies in terms of data collection, monitoring, and evidence-based decision making?

Feedback summary: The EMIS has been suspended since the Taliban took control in August, which means that there is no up-to-date sector information outside of project monitoring and reporting (which is not centralised). The latest EMIS data is from 2019. Previously, there were issues with data reliability and cohesiveness. Instead of reinventing the wheel, actors can use EMIS tools but update definitions for OOSC, for example, given the change in context. The Education Cluster continues to use the 5Ws to collect data from its EiE partners, but this accounts for a relatively small portion of the sector and does not cover public schools.

- 2) In the absence of EMIS, what system will monitor education statistics for development?

Feedback summary: In the current absence of a formal EMIS, a more centralised process/mechanism is needed for data verification, quality assurance and third-party monitoring. It should be noted that any

parallel system created should speak to or be able to feed into the EMIS. Coordination with de facto authorities on data collection, while following guiding principles, is also necessary, as NGOs need letters of introduction from the MoE to be able to enter public schools. A temporary parallel system could be hosted by the UN or an NGO or academic institution, but partners could collect data using either paper-based or web-based modalities and enter it into a manual database. In addition to the regular EMIS cycle, in the short term, a joint needs assessment should be conducted. This could be owned by the Cluster, DPG, or a single agency.

3) Is there a need for a unified results framework/logical framework as part of this Framework?

Feedback summary: Yes, but it should be high-level and disaggregate by gender, level of education, ability/disability status, and displacement status. Logical frameworks have, in the past, misrepresented the complexity of the sector, as they do not often facilitate synergies or links between outcomes. The framework should avoid being overly detailed or prescriptive, while still setting out guardrails for what supports or is outside the framework. The framework should seek to avoid arbitrary and outdated bifurcations of access and quality, and instead elevate key outcomes focused on continued learning in alignment with SDG 4. In order to hold stakeholders accountable, the framework should be achievable and measurable within a two-three year time period. Other existing results frameworks should be easily mappable to the unified results framework.

Teacher payroll and attendance tracking:

1) What should the priorities be to support public teacher salaries? What will be the immediate and longer-term strategies to supporting teacher salaries?

Feedback summary: Payment of teacher salaries is an immediate need given that teachers have not been paid for months. Donors need to agree on risk thresholds with taxation so that this does not delay payment for essential basic services. The priority should be to ensure non-discrimination in teacher payment and management system so that female teachers receive equal pay for equal work at all levels of instruction. The system should have multiple safeguards in place and oversight capacity to protect against corruption. It will be important to have a unified system which could be led by the UN (and aligned with sectors other than education). As previously, the majority of MoE budget went to paying teacher salaries, salaries or incentives need to be a significant portion of donor funding; however, it should not be a standalone activity. Paying teacher salaries alone will not enable students to return to school. In addition, teacher salaries need to be paid across the country rather than in one project or province, as this will exacerbate inequalities. In the longer-term, expectations need to be clearly communicated to de facto authorities in terms of accountability and responsibility to deliver core services through existing systems.

2) How will teacher attendance be monitored from the local to national level?

Feedback summary: School shuras with complementary third-party monitors are the best way of monitoring and supporting teachers at the local level. It is unlikely that the national level system will be functional during the transitional period, though this is technically the responsibility of the MoE. The previous practice utilised a group of about ten people per province who formed a committee to monitor teacher attendance on a daily basis through phone calls and generate a weekly report to local authorities. Third party monitors are also be useful for data verification, as school shuras are not always established or functional, but a unified ToR should be drafted. It should be noted that the use of technology may not be supported by the de facto authorities, so low-or-no tech options should be considered to monitor attendance.

- 3) How can payments to teachers be done transparently without breaching sanctions?

Feedback summary: Consensus on this is important across sectors (i.e., health workers) so as not to set negative precedents. Teacher salaries can be paid through the banking system (subject to availability) or through hawalas/mobile money providers after verifying teacher attendance lists. Lists can be checked against counter-terrorism databases to ensure financial assets are not being transferred to proscribed/designated individuals/entities. Most partners only pay CBE teachers (not public school teachers), and many either pay taxes for those who meet the threshold or avoiding sharing teacher salary payment information with authorities.

- 4) What risks might be foreseen in paying teacher's salaries, and what mitigation strategies might be put in place?

Feedback summary: Giving legitimacy and perceived support to the de facto authorities is a major risk. At the community level, there are risks connected to injecting money in the hands of individuals (risk of sexual exploitation and abuse, risk of violence and attacks on teachers). For female teachers, there is the risk of intimate partner violence if they are the sole breadwinner in the household. Thus, teachers need to be involved in the design of the payment and distribution system and provide feedback on implementation so improvements can be made. Third party monitoring may also confirm that funds have reached the intended recipients and identify any bottlenecks in the process.

Teacher training (pre- and in-service):

- 1) How will the lack of female teachers be addressed in practice, given shortcomings in teacher education and availability of qualified women in rural areas?

Feedback summary: There has been significant investment in female teacher recruitment and rapid training across multiple donors. Likewise, there are trained female teachers who have not been hired in schools (TTCs, GATE), and this needs to be assessed and remedied. In the short-term, the focus should be on retaining and building the capacity of the current workforce, as increased female participation in teaching has been a long-term development goal. At the CBE level and on an emergency basis, apprenticeship programmes such as Girls Learning to Teach – Afghanistan (Save the Children, Girls' Education Challenge) can provide rapid capacity building to enable women in communities to teach lower grades. In addition, other organisations such as Aga Khan Foundation have provided transportation for teachers from central districts to travel to more rural areas to teach. In the longer-term, incentives can be given to Grade 12 graduates in rural communities to attend university and become teachers to meet supply gaps.

- 2) Are the minimum standards for recruitment still valid or can exceptions exist to address through pre- or in-service training?

Feedback summary: The consensus remains that the minimum standards for recruitment are valid, but they need to be applied on a case-by-case basis, especially for female candidates. If candidates are hired who do not meet the minimum standards, they need to be linked to continuous professional development and in-service teacher training opportunities and receive on-the-job support. The CBE Policy, which allows for exceptions in emergency settings where there are no eligible candidates, should be applied more widely and to public school teacher recruitment processes, recognising that exceptions ultimately lie with the de facto MoE to endorse. The previous government also allowed *Haq el Zahma*, which allows teachers who are not eligible for permanent recruitment and who are not on the payroll to be hired temporarily where there is a dearth of teachers available.

- 3) What are the immediate gaps in teacher competencies as it relates to teacher skills/competencies in CBE and public schools? How can these gaps be addressed systematically?

Feedback summary: While there are significant gaps, during this transitional period, it is more important to understand what is urgently required versus what is desired. Children have lost valuable time in the classroom over the last two years and need to restart the learning process, so basic teacher competencies related to remedial learning, formative assessments, revision, and classroom management should be the priority focus. There will also be a need to embed social and emotional learning (SEL) more strongly in the classroom. The current 12-day teacher training manual for CBE teachers provides an introductory survey of core concepts, but can be supplemented to respond to community needs (i.e., increased PSS, risk mitigation, WASH). The IRC-led Teacher Competencies in Crisis Contexts report (2020) also sheds light on gaps in the current practice, which can be utilised for further analysis and intervention. At the public school level, coordination with de facto authorities will likely be required to assess gaps and conduct in-service teacher training.

FINANCING AND REPROGRAMMING

Programme design and costing:

- 1) CBE Costing Framework: Does the CBE costing framework need to be updated due to market conditions? If yes, how should this process proceed, given that it was previously led by the MoE with EiE WG?

Feedback summary: Yes, unit costs have changed due to price fluctuations in the market. A market price assessment should be conducted (led by the Education Cluster) to understand changes in costs. In addition, new areas have opened up which were previously inaccessible to implementing partners. These communities have had little to no exposure to education and will therefore need to be prioritised. Reaching hard-to-reach areas, given their proximity from provincial centres, often means increased costs, which may deter partners from targeting these areas. The costing framework should be updated to ensure that the cost of reaching these populations is not prohibitive. It will also be useful to weigh costs of CBE versus costs of public schools, as this was a previous concern of the MoE. The addition of core activities such as PSS/SEL can also be considered in the core costed activities.

- 2) Integrated Programming: What integrated programming options need to be considered to ensure a whole of child approach? What initiatives in other sectors should education actors be aware of to integrate approaches (e.g. protection, nutrition, WASH)?

Feedback summary: (Child) protection, nutrition, health, and WASH are integral to education programming, and schools/CBEs can be used as a point of service delivery to maximise benefit to children and minimise cost. At the UN level, it is important that agencies are speaking to one another and sharing data from needs assessments. Beyond supportive activities, standard integrated programming should not become too technical, as it will require partners to specialise or to implement activities for which they do not have adequate technical capacity or skills (poor quality, potential of harm). To ensure that vulnerable groups return to school (i.e., adolescent girls), integration should be designed carefully to incentivise learning and foster a safe environment. Activities should also not be conducted in siloes, as community shuras may be engaged in multiple sectors and can be utilised for multiple sectoral objectives.

Transparency and accountability:

Assurances and due diligence

- 1) What assurances and due diligence measures do bilateral donors need from implementing partners/grantees to safeguard investments in terms of counter-terrorism legislation/sanctions?

Feedback summary: It is important to strike a balance between feasibility/practicality of due diligence measures and risk minimization. There have been few changes in staffing at the functional and technical levels within the MoE, and partners continue to work with the same school management and teachers. Due diligence measures should be designed with low administrative burden but should ensure the transparent delivery of activities and transfer of funds (no financial assets to de facto authorities). While donors are not a homogenous group and governments have different domestic counter-terrorism legislation, it would be useful for partners to have a general consensus from donors on safeguards and conditionalities for programming (which is aligned with other sectors). This will ensure that the international community acts in unity and aid is not delayed. For example, different donors define textbooks as expendable while others define them as non-expendable. These details can delay activities if they are not parsed out internally between technical and political counterparts, ideally consulting other donors for consensus building.

- 2) How can we effectively monitor education interventions, and what third party monitoring could support the sector?

Feedback summary: A third-party monitor, funded through a multi-donor pooled fund, could act as a potential interim solution for monitoring education interventions in the absence of EMIS (third-party monitors have been used in CBE). EMIS tools should still be used so that monitoring can be integrated into a government-owned system. In terms of a monitoring framework, partners suggest a high-level framework with a common approach to learning outcomes and well-being measurement. These indicators must be disaggregated by gender and age at minimum. Given that there have been twenty years of investment in education, the high-level framework should be developed based on lessons learnt from gaps in feedback loops within project cycles.

- 3) What assurances and due diligence measures do bilateral donors need from implementing partners/grantees to ensure partners are not supporting any discriminatory actions?

Feedback summary: It is important to start from the current reality rather than from an ideal, as the current system did not benefit all learners equally. Donors/partners should be guided by red lines or principles that prevent discrimination and do no harm but ultimately should be guided by the beneficiaries. For example, gender equity in teaching may not be possible in some areas due to safety concerns from women, which should indicate that additional work must be done to improve the environment to enable women to work. Feedback and accountability mechanisms are thus essential to all programming. The platform Awaaz is recommended to be expanded to capture feedback from community members.

- 4) What assurances and due diligence measures do bilateral donors need from implementing partners/grantees to ensure that programming is benefitting those most in need?

Feedback summary: All interventions need to have sound, rigorous needs assessments and be coordinated with other actors to avoid duplication. Partners should use a standard vulnerability assessment to determine prioritisation of aid. As a best practice, OCHA requires all Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) applicants to receive an endorsement from their respective sector Cluster leads. This helps to ensure that there is no duplication and that the proposed approach aligns with the Cluster strategy and costing. Costing should also be adapted to ensure that hard-to-reach areas are adequately budgeted for and partners are not penalised for comparatively higher budgets to reach these populations.

- 1) How will we avoid creating a permanent parallel system?

Feedback summary: Education stakeholders should take a whole-of-system approach to design sector support which does not undermine existing systems but rather provides interim stop-gap measures for immediate needs using non-government structures. Parallel systems are necessary as all development is off-budget under the present circumstances; however, it should be intentionally designed to work with existing systems.

- 2) How will we avoid perpetuating aid dependence?

Feedback summary: The education system is already largely built with external aid so is aid dependent; the key issue is not supporting interventions which undermine the existing system. Supporting local structures may provide short-term sustainability; however, longer-term sustainability has not been achieved in twenty years of investment so is unlikely to be solved during this transitional period. Clear roles and responsibilities for implementing partners, donors, and duty-bearers are critical to identify and ringfence so that traditional government duty-bearer responsibilities are not off-loaded to external donors/implementers.

- 3) How will we avoid removing accountability from local authorities to deliver basic services?

Feedback summary: Without legitimising de facto authorities, it will be important to stress the importance of their role in delivering basic services. Donors and implementing partners should not take on the role of government, which will require clear policies and regular communication for when to step in/up and when to step back. This may include explaining to de facto authority leadership the scope of funding/aid (off-budget), the intended results, and the length of the investment period for planning purposes, while recognising that the previous MoE was not able to finance the education sector without development funding. At the local level, accountability may be managed more easily through local supervision mechanisms such as community and school shuras. Training of school shura members and school management should be allowed to occur with due diligence measures in place (i.e., vetting).

Donor investments:

- 1) For how long should the Transitional Framework guide investment/programming? What future institutional process or plan should the Transitional Framework be expected to link to?

Feedback summary: The AESTF should be valid for two years. Donors are in different stages of planning, and a longer timeframe may allow for more critical and global thinking about financial support, risks, and sustainability. A review of the AESTF should be built in annually to determine progress and assess relevance and/or changes in political environment. Given the extensive work already completed towards the NESP 2030, the AESTF should also act as a transitional document towards the NESP process, assuming a change in political context. As the NESP 2030 was a government-owned document, there should be some socialisation of the AESTF with de facto authorities to avoid interference/hindrance of activities, noting that it is not a government-owned document and has been developed as a transitional framework within a complex legal environment.

- 2) PHASING: What pooled funding mechanisms are currently available in the sector and how do current funding and reprogramming priorities speak to each other and to needs?

Feedback summary: Pooled funding mechanisms currently include: ECW MYRP, GPE, EQRA, ARTF, AHF, GEC, HRP. Initially, the Inter-agency Call to Action was put forward by UNICEF, UNESCO, Save the Children, and WFP to elevate immediate needs to sustain the education sector; however, this was not meant to be a

platform for investment. Existing mechanisms such as the HRP and bilateral funding to agencies are available to support the objectives enumerated in the Call to Action. In terms of the current investments, there is a large degree of overlap in terms of donor participation in ECW and GPE steering committees, which increases synergies; however, there seems to be few standardized process for coordination or complementarity aside from avoiding geographic duplication.

- 3) How do donors and receiving agencies look at reprogramming? What guides reprogramming of existing funded projects?

Feedback summary: There are several key issues which need to be addressed in reprogramming. Cessation of capacity building activities towards de facto authorities, as it is no longer allowed, may result in reduced efficiency and additional bottlenecks, especially as the new de facto leadership has little experience with administering government. It is critical for donors and implementers to define each step in the process of working with public schools so that risks are named and addressed (i.e., engage with de facto authorities to receive access to public schools, teacher training, school management training, etc.). In addition, NTAs are no longer funded, which means the MoE will lose a significant number of technical staff and with them, capacity to develop, implement, and monitor activities. For implementing partners, it will be useful if donors can simplify requirements and remain flexible along shared principles as policies and practices inevitably will fluctuate. Multi-year funding for CBEs is essential, as public schools have even less capacity to absorb CBE students in the current context, so funding should be shifted to redesign programmes towards emerging needs (i.e., multi-grade CBE).

- 4) How can education interventions be designed to allow donors to fund within risk appetite/restrictions?

Feedback summary: For education programming under a unified framework to progress, this requires donors to agree on what is politically and legally possible. For example, if partners cannot sign MoUs with the de facto authorities, but authorities will not allow them to work without signing an MoU, there needs to be a sector-wide discussion on the way forward. Collective decision-making and problem-solving will protect humanitarian space and safeguard donors and implementers with less risk appetite. Programmes will need to be designed through independent needs assessments, but should coordinate with de facto authorities as a key stakeholder.

- 5) Does the CBE model need to change if public schools/MoE infrastructure no longer receives financial/on-budget support?

Feedback summary: CBE as a modality relies on public school transition as a method of ensuring learning continuity and sustainability. As public schools no longer receive on-budget support, they are unlikely to be able to absorb additional students (this was already a challenge prior to Taliban takeover). The approach, therefore, should be to ensure continuity of current cohorts and provide opportunities for new cohorts in communities where partners have already generated buy-in and appetite for education, as this is one of the main successes of the last twenty years of investment. Humanitarian activities which only support CBE for one year must be extended or have clear transition plans to other sources of funding, as they are no longer fit for purpose. The current School Improvement Plan activity should also be scaled up to enable public schools to absorb additional students in areas where there is a functional school within three kilometres. As was the practice previously, CBE providers will need to work closely with school management and inform de facto authorities of the intention to transition CBE students to hub schools.

ANNEX B: SUMMARY OF EDUCATION BOTTLENECK ANALYSIS

An initial step in the AESTF preparation process was to develop or take stock of the state of the education system at this time and external factors which may affect it. The summary of the education bottleneck analysis below focuses on the key issues and challenges facing the education system and seeks to identify the main underlying bottlenecks.

PROVISIONAL

Level		Key education sector bottlenecks
Demand side	Socio-cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gendered social norms and practices • Parents and caregivers' level of education • Poor perceptions of the value of education, especially in undeserved remote areas • Early marriages • Child labour • Language, ethnicity-based education • Violence, harassment and bullying
	Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing poverty • Opportunity costs and child labour • Lack of employment opportunities following education completion
Supply	Essential commodities and inputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The physical environment, quality and quantity of infrastructure • Distance to school • Shortage of schools, particularly girls' schools in rural areas • Additional access constraints for children experiencing disabilities • Lack of WASH/MHM and other infrastructure conducive for participation of girls and children with disabilities • Lack of gender friendly/transformational school environments • Lack of early childhood education and pre-primary education services in formal schools • Lack of provision for nomadic ways of life • Underfunded and donor-driven CBE programming • Underexplored alternative delivery modes (e.g., home-based, distance learning options)
	Adequate services, materials and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content of learning curriculum • Shortage of textbooks and teaching and learning materials (including reading materials) • Lack of assessment system, including continuous formative assessment at classroom level • Limited accountability towards learning outcomes at school and local level (limited role of SMS and weak supervision system) • Shortage of teachers, especially qualified and female teachers • Outdated teaching practices that are standardised and not geared towards the capabilities of the individual child
Enabling environment	Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralized education system and service delivery, with sub-national levels having limited stake in planning and budgeting, hence weak response to both development and humanitarian needs • Limited capacities at central and provincial levels • Weak interdepartmental coordination and information sharing from national to sub-national levels • Allegations of corruption and nepotism in the education sector leading to low levels of public trust
	Security and political situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertain political climate further exacerbates an already weak education system

	Budget and expenditure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low education public budget share, public sector financial constraints• High dependency and decreased levels of external aid for education (sanctioned and frozen funds)
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PROVISIONAL

ANNEX C: 'PERSPECTIVES FROM COMMUNITIES' SUMMARY FINDINGS

Save the Children, Education Cluster Co-Lead Agency, conducted a multi-sector needs assessment in December 2021. As part of this assessment, scoping questions related to individual and community perspectives on education were posed. The results are synthesised in this annex and select data points are embedded in the main body of the AESTF to underpin recommendations.

Methodology

Save the Children conducted a power analysis to determine the sample size for the needs assessment that would provide a greater strength of analysis and chance of detecting the effect of the variables of interest. Based on the power analysis calculation with 95% confident interval, 5% margin of error, 14.2% population proportion, the minimum sample for the assessment is 189 respondents per province. Considering the possibility of receiving partial responses, where the participants stop or drop-out from the participation in the middle of the survey, Save the Children decided to set a minimum target sample of 200 adult respondents at the household level. The gender breakdown was targeted at 50% men, 50% women.

To be eligible to participate in the survey, participants had to meet the following criteria:

- Part 1 (Household survey): (a) Adult respondents (aged 18 and above) living in a household with any children (0-17 years) as the household member; (b) the household head or any adult representative or caregivers who are able to respond on the question about household socio-economic condition and children who live in the household; (c) the respondent agreed to take part in the survey through consent processes;
- Part 2 (Child survey): (a) the child respondent had to be aged 11 to 17 years old, living in the household surveyed in part 1; (b) the child respondent received the consent from the legal guardian through consent processes; (c) the child respondent agreed to take part in the survey through an assent process.

Save the Children enumerators surveyed 1,209 households and conducted interviews with 1,206 children (623 girls, 583 boys) across six provinces: Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Kabul, Nangarhar, and Sar-e-Pul. Enumerators collected data using KOBO Toolbox, an open source tool for data collection and analysis. Household respondents were reached face-to-face, through text message, or through phone calls. Female enumerators collected data from female respondents and male enumerators collected data from male respondents to maintain cultural sensitivity. The survey was administered in Dari or Pashto (depending on the language of the participant) from 18 November through 2 December.

Note: The multi-sectoral needs assessment was not conducted for the purpose of informing the AESTF; however, questions were inserted prior to enumerator training to collect data that would enrich the AESTF draft. De facto authorities were informed of data collection activities, but not of AESTF scoping specifically.

Respondent Demographics

Province	Gender	Age	Location	Status	Highest Level of Education	Disability Prevalence
Balkh	Women: 50.5% Men: 49.5%	<25: 4% 26-40: 48% 41-65: 45.5% 65+: 2.5%	Urban: 56% Rural: 44%	Undocumented Returnee: 3.5% IDP: 31.5% Host community: 65%	Illiterate: 121 Primary: 38 Secondary: 11 Above secondary: 22	None: 118 Disability reported: 46

					Religious learning: 8	Chronic illness ⁸⁰ reported: 36
Faryab	Women: 120 Men: 80	<25: 2 26-40: 98 41-65: 99 65+: 1	Urban: 139 Rural: 61	Documented Returnee: 19 Undocumented Returnee: 3 IDP: 42 Host community: 136	Illiterate: 172 Primary: 17 Secondary: 4 Above secondary: 4	None: 129 Disability reported: 36 Chronic illness reported: 35
Jawzjan	Women: 104 Men: 96	<25: 9 26-40: 69 41-65: 109 65+: 13	Urban: 61 Rural: 139	Documented Returnee: 26 Undocumented Returnee: 2 IDP: 36 Host community: 130 Kuchi (nomadic): 5 Other: 1	Illiterate: 161 Primary: 15 Secondary: 8 Above secondary: 11 Religious learning: 4 Other: 1	None: 144 Disability reported: 19 Chronic illness reported: 29 Other: 7
Kabul	Women: 102 Men: 100	<25: 6 26-40: 87 41-65: 104 65+: 5	Urban: 2 Rural: 200	Documented Returnee: 6 Undocumented returnee: 10 IDP: 28 Host community: 155 Other: 3	Illiterate: 128 Primary: 23 Secondary: 14 Above secondary: 26 Religious learning: 11	None: 136 Disability reported: 12 Chronic illness reported: 48 Other: 6
Nangarhar	Women: 102 Men: 103	<25: 4 26-40: 69 41-65: 130 65+: 2	Urban: 7 Rural: 198	Documented Returnee: 11 Undocumented Returnee: 28 IDP: 63 Host community: 103	Illiterate: 155 Primary: 22 Secondary: 17 Above secondary: 9 Religious learning: 2	None: 169 Disability reported: 22 Chronic illness reported: 13 Other: 1
Sar-e-Pul	Women: 101 Men: 101	<25: 4 26-40: 80 41-65: 113	Urban: 9 Rural: 193	Documented Returnee: 2	Illiterate: 140 Primary: 24 Secondary: 13	None: 174

⁸⁰ Several respondents across all provinces recorded 'other' under this category but indicated mental illness or addiction, which the authors have re-classified as chronic illness.

		65+: 5		Undocumented Returnee: 1 IDP: 9 Host community: 188 Kuchi (nomadic): 2	Above secondary: 23 Religious learning: 2	Disability reported: 10 Chronic illness reported: 16 Other: 2
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Related to disability prevalence, Save the Children used the Washington Group Short-Set (WG-SS). The WG-SS provides information on difficulties a person may have in undertaking basic activities. The WG-SS looks at six functional domains: Seeing, Hearing, Mobility, Remembering or Concentrating, Self-care and Communication. A disability is present if a respondent answered “a lot of difficulties” or “cannot do at all” in at least one of the six domains.

For the household surveys, the following data was gathered (related to education):

Sector	Indicators	Household Survey Tool	Child Survey Tool
Education	Child enrolling/attending school	√	√
	Child stop or drop-out school	√	√
	Distance of the school	√	
	Reasons for not attending school by gender of the child	√	√
	Priority activities perceived to increase access to education	√	
	Skills needed for children to make education more relevant	√	
	Availability of community-based school	√	
	Child's perception of safety in school		√

*Excerpted from Save the Children MSNA Draft Report, 2021.

Findings

Across the six provinces surveyed, a high proportion of girls for both 5 to 9-year-old and 10 to 18-year-old age groups did not attend school compared to boys. Girls were also more likely to face child protection risks by being out of school. More than half of caregivers responded that there was no available community-based class for girls or boys in their communities.

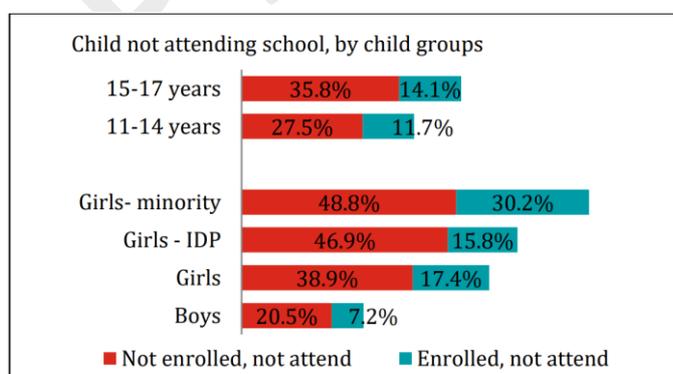


Figure 1. Proportion of children reporting not attending school, by group

In response to why children were not attending school, caregivers most frequently cited that both boys and girls did not attend school because of security risks, followed by prohibitive costs to purchase school bags, uniforms and notebooks. According to caregivers, the most prevalent reasons for girls not attending school in comparison to boys were **security concerns** (50.4% girls vs. 43.3% boys), **no teacher** (37.7% vs. 12%), **cultural barriers/family restriction** (31% vs. 13.8%), **fear of violence at school** (16.0% vs. 13.0%), **harassment/bullying** (12.7% vs. 9.3%), and **lack of proper latrines** (11.7% vs. 7.9%). For boys, the most prevalent reasons compared to girls were the need to **work or help at home** (31.1% vs. 20.3%), the **perception of expensive school cost** (43.8% vs. 40.3%), **not considering the importance of education** (24.3% vs. 18.9%) and **being too hungry to go to school** (21.6% vs. 19.6%).

Interestingly, answers slightly differed when Save the Children interviewed children about their reasons for not attending school. The top reasons for children in general were security concerns, no bags/uniform/notebook, family restriction, school closure, no learning materials, expensive school cost, no learning space nearby, and need to work/help at home. Girls, in particular, reported that they faced disproportionate barriers compared to boys related to **security** (31.6% vs. 14.8%), **family restriction/cultural barriers** (30.1% vs. 9.8%), and **girls' school closures** (29.7% vs. 7.4%). Boys faced disproportionate barriers to girls related to the need to **help family members at home or work** (29.5% vs. 17.1%).

1 in 5 children reported not feeling safe in school. Children reported not feeling safe because of **fear of violence, damage to the school building, bullying/harassment, lack of acceptance of girls in schools, and abuse from teachers.**

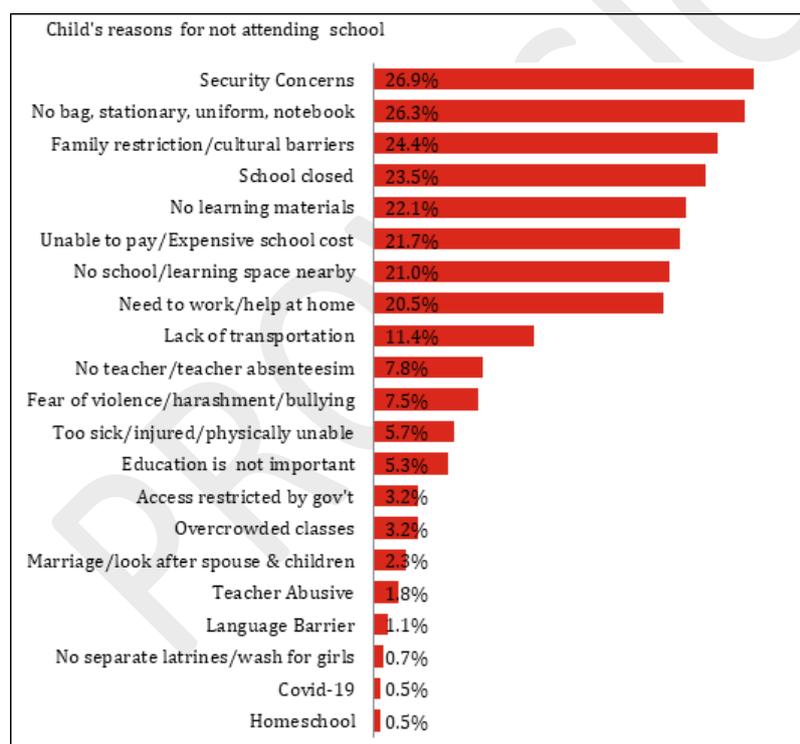


Figure 3. Proportion of children reporting not attending school, by reason

Cross-cutting issues related to child well-being

Only 1 in 3 child respondents (34.5%) reported having regular meals for three times per day, while 65.5% eat only twice or fewer per day. Nearly 3 in 4 child respondents (73.9%) expressed overall negative feelings (worried,

sad, scared, and angry) now compared to July 2021. Caregivers observed that their children experienced behavioural changes since July including sleeping changes (54.2%), changes in appetite (48.4%), unusual crying/screaming (46.2%), and changes in emotional regulation (39.4%). More aggressive behaviour (18.4%) and violence against others (13.7%) was reported as well.

Caregiver suggestions for improving access to education in their communities

The highest priority cited by caregivers to increase access to education for girls and boys in their communities was to increase the availability of pens and learning books (80.7% for boys' access; 85.5% for girls' access), followed by safe learning environments (51.2% boys; 50.9% girls), and the availability of learning materials (22.8% for boys; 36.8% girls). For girls, caregivers listed the priorities as having a female teacher (61.1%) and safe learning environments (52.1%).

Quotes from Children

As part of the qualitative section of the study, interviewers recorded quotes from children in response to the following questions:

- 1) What changes do you notice in your family when you discuss current events with them?
- 2) What worries you the most at the moment?
- 3) What do you think is the best way to include you and/or ALL children in the community (girls, boys, children with disabilities) in school?
- 4) What support would you like Save the Children or other humanitarian organization to offer help to you and/or other children overcoming or coping with the current issues/challenges?
- 5) If you could ask world leaders for 3 things to help Afghan families and children, what would you like to say to them?

A conceptual content analysis approach was used in the qualitative analysis of children's responses to capture the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts. The children's open-ended responses were examined and coded, irrespective of any perception on saturation point. Codes were used to determine the existence of key themes that children spoke about. The AESTF used the findings to extract key quotes for use within the text to emphasise or nuance the suggested strategies and approaches.

ANNEX D: DETAILED CBE MODALITIES

CBE uses the same curriculum and academic calendar as of the public schools, although exceptions can be made for EiE. CBE can extend from Grade 1 to 12, though current implementation focuses largely on Grade 1-3. The ALP curriculum, which is designed for children who are over-age, or too old to enrol at their grade level in public school, covers 2 grades in a 12-month period and is intended to provide 6 grades before matriculation into a public 'hub' school. ALP has been a particularly useful strategy for adolescent girls living in Taliban-controlled areas who previously never had access to a girls' school.

CBE classes are established in existing community facilities, such as a community hall or a room in someone's home. CBE uses the same curriculum and academic calendar as of the public schools, although exceptions can be made for EiE, and CBE can extend from Grade 1 to 12. Each CBE class is comprised of up to 35 students, has one teacher per class, and teaches one grade (there are no mixed grade classes), though in some cases, shifts can be used to teach multiple grades. The CBE class previously operated under the supervision of the MoE, and CBE students obtain registration (*Asaas*) numbers from government 'hub' schools to be able to enrol.

The most recent version of the MoE CBE Policy and Guidelines (2018) includes the criteria for the establishment of CBE to include:

- i. "A gender-appropriate public school that features hygiene facilities with running water and female teachers for girls does not exist;
- ii. Children live at a walking distance of more than 3 kilometres from a public school, or live within 3 kilometres and face severe and documented inhibitors to attendance, such as consistent insecurity, geographic barriers, harassment, and/or other protection issues verified by MoE;

Ten or more students (OOSC entering for the first time and/or children of ages corresponding to MoE standards for the age appropriate to grade-level entry) have missed the opportunity for formal education, or with ALP, are above enrolment age for matriculation into the hub school" (MoE, 2018, p. 9).

ANNEX E: AFGHANISTAN EDUCATION IMPLEMENTING PARTNER SOP

PROVISIONAL

Education Implementing Partner¹ Standard Operating Procedures (rev. 1 November 2021)

Purpose and Scope: The purpose of the Education Implementing Partner Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), developed by the Education in Emergencies Working Group (EiE WG) and the Education Sector Development Partner Group (DPG), is to outline and coordinate principled action in the education sector. These SOPs were developed to operationalize the [OCHA Joint Operating Principles](#) (JOPs) endorsed by the Humanitarian Country Team in August 2021. In addition to the JOPs, for education implementing partners with the mandate or remit to engage with Taliban*,² these SOPs are intended to guide engagement in bilateral and joint negotiations on education activities with authorities and armed groups at local, national and international levels in light of the changes to the Taliban* leadership in Afghanistan. **However, engagement should never be considered political legitimization, recognition of—or support to—a party of conflict and should not take place on behalf of others.**

PRINCIPLES:

Core Humanitarian Principles: Humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and operational independence are the core fundamental principles for humanitarian action. These principles are derived from International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Law and other normative documents, and are part of codes of conduct and mission statements guiding humanitarian organizations. See [OCHA JOPs](#) for definitions of core humanitarian principles.

In practice, Education Implementing Partners agree to the principles of ‘do no harm,’ dignity, transparency and accountability, cultural sensitivity, and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). See OCHA JOPs for definitions of principles, in addition to the core humanitarian principles. **Importantly, Education Implementing Partners agree to uphold the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#),** as Afghanistan is a signatory and is therefore accountable to ensure that all children, regardless of gender, religion, language, ethnicity, or ability, are able to access and enjoy their rights, including the right to education.

ACTIONS:

¹ Applicable to education partners that directly implement and/or manage consortia or sub-partner implementation in Afghanistan. Not applicable to bilateral donors or pool fund managers.

² *United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Action (OCHA) uses the term ‘de facto authorities’ to reflect neutrality. Where ‘Taliban’ is reflected in this document, humanitarian partners and the United Nations will use ‘de facto authorities.’

In addition to the actions detailed in the OCHA JOPs, specifically with regard to education sector activities, including education in emergencies (EiE), Education Implementing Partners are advised to comply with the following:

Coordination

- Education Implementing Partners will regularly attend coordination meetings to ensure consistent messaging, information sharing, and alignment with EiE and sectoral strategies.
- Education Implementing Partners will participate in information sharing with other relevant cross-sectoral working groups, including but not limited to the Humanitarian Access Group (HAG), the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group, the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Working Group, etc.
- In a timely fashion, Education Implementing Partners will share incident reports on grave violations against children (related to attacks on schools) with the EiE WG and directly report incidents through the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM).
- Education Implementing Partners will contribute monthly submissions to the 5Ws for the EiE WG (where relevant) and/or to the information management system of the DPG.
- Education Implementing Partners continuously monitor and report back to the EiE WG and DPG on the operating environment for girls' education and women's participation in education programming and to collaborate on problem-solving where barriers are identified.
- Education Implementing Partners, where they have the mandate or remit to engage, share non-sensitive information from technical or programmatic meetings with Taliban* with the national EiE WG co-leads and/or DPG co-leads or through the sub-national working group focal points (EiE WG).

Accountability and Fidelity

- Education Implementing Partners abide by the OCHA JOPs in their entirety and recognise that breaching these principles compromises the humanitarian space for other organisations.
 - o With particular emphasis, in line with OCHA JOPs:
 - Education Implementing Partners ensure the meaningful and regular participation of women in education programming including but not limited to employing women as key project staff, recruiting female teachers, and engaging with women stakeholders (i.e., mothers, female caregivers, girls, and female members of the community).
 - Education Implementing Partners conduct all needs assessments independently – without influence from parties to the conflict and to impartially report findings to stakeholders to determine targeting strategies.
 - Education Implementing Partners do not make any concessions with Taliban* that do not align with the OCHA JOPs and these SOPs to ensure that other

partners are not asked or expected to operate in the same fashion (in breach of humanitarian principles).

- Education Implementing Partners are intentional about the design of EiE and education (development) programmes. Education activities must be designed, implemented, and monitored to do no harm, to be accountable to beneficiaries, and to ensure for continuity of learning in targeted communities (i.e., no interventions for less than 1 year or without clear transition planning and links to other EiE or development programming).

In response, the Coordination Body Leadership (EiE WG co-leads and DPG co-leads) are expected to:

- Remain accountable to the OCHA JOPs either in direct action (where relevant) or in direction to education implementing partners.
- Guide Education Implementing Partners in their operationalization of the OCHA JOPs and Education Implementing Partner SOP.
- Share information from all relevant coordination meetings amongst co-leads and disseminate relevant information to members at regular and ad hoc meetings, noting that no sensitive or political information should be shared.
- Strongly link all EiE and development programming.
- Design EiE interventions to be responsive to the gaps in the public education system.
- For development and nexus interventions, design and adapt programming to absorb EiE pipeline and complement existing CBE investments.
- Where co-leads have the mandate or remit to engage with Taliban*, conduct technical discussions with Taliban* at Kabul and provincial levels to ensure all Education Implementing Partners can safely adhere to the SOPs – noting that any engagement is carried out as the individual agency and not carried out on behalf of other EiE WG or DPG members.

Education Implementing Partners that breach these SOPs will not be endorsed for current and future funding opportunities. Fidelity to these SOPs will contribute to transparency in implementation and alignment to humanitarian principles. These attributes are expected to guide Education Implementing Partners through the increasingly complex operating environment in Afghanistan and will be revised based on evolving conditions and information in agreement with the EiE WG and DPG, respectively.