

SHARING PERSPECTIVES ON CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

December 10-15, 2002

FINAL REPORT
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FINAL REPORT

**SHARING PERSPECTIVES ON CURRICULUM
DEVELOPMENT IN AFGHANISTAN**

December 10-15, 2002
Kabul, Afghanistan

A Workshop Hosted by the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan, the
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Prepared by:
MaryFaith Mount-Cors
Eileen St. George
Katy Anís

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Creative Associates International, Inc.
5301 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20015
USA

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Executive Summary

The transitional government and the Afghan people, together with the donor community and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), are now taking active steps to rebuild the education system in Afghanistan. The Sharing Perspectives on Curriculum Development in Afghanistan workshop addressed issues of curriculum development as an integral part of building a new Afghanistan. The workshop yielded important results, including recommendations for the Ministry of Education (MOE) on the proposed new curriculum framework. Some key points of agreement established during the workshop include:

- Support the goal of education, as stated by Minister of Education Qanooni, to bring up a generation of Afghans who will be good Muslims, patriotic and unified across ethnic and religious lines, progressive and respectful of human rights and cooperative members of the world community.
- Build on national and international experiences in curriculum development and meet regional and international standards, while maintaining a compatibility with the values and needs of Afghan society. Crucial local concerns are economic resources, as well as the context and conditions specific to Afghanistan.
- Support anti-terrorism and anti-drug policy goals, which can be achieved, in part, by returning to the traditional respect and value for education inherent in Afghan culture.
- Base the curriculum on a spiral or integrated system in which students revisit concepts at several different grade levels.
- Identify specific learning objectives for each subject in addition to having a general education curriculum.
- Teach national unity throughout the curriculum.
- Share the framework with the provinces for further review with educational professionals, teachers, school leadership personnel, students, parents and community members.
- Edit thoroughly the Dari version of the framework with attention to word choice and style, and translate the framework into Pashto.

Significant momentum is in place to produce this new curriculum, but the rush to fast-track curriculum implementation can adversely affect the quality of the curriculum.

Those taking next steps in this process must strongly consider:

- A realistic timeline to, first and foremost, develop the capacity of implementers to understand the depth and breadth of the core concepts of the new curriculum framework. In the process of curriculum development, time must be allowed for planning, development, formative evaluation and revision.
- The provision of capacity training and financial, human and material resources.
- The creation or enhancement of systems and infrastructures that incorporate necessary quality control measures.
- The influence curriculum developers have on the classroom through the instructional materials they develop.
- The development of standards and competencies to improve the quality of the curriculum by identifying milestones that align the study plan, syllabi, instructional materials and assessments, increasing the validity of measures in

- learner outcomes and achievement as learners advance through the curriculum.
- Given that curriculum development and teacher training are coordinated by two separate ministries, close collaboration is required to produce teachers that understand, embrace and practice the new curriculum in the classroom.

The challenges are many, but the opportunity of today is equally as great. Textbooks exist and are currently in use around the country; therefore, there is time to give this process of new curriculum development the needed patience and diligence. Afghanistan has educators who bring exceptional experience and dedication to this task, both those currently in the country and those that continue to return from exile, emboldened by an abiding hope, as well as passionate about rebuilding the education system. Among parents and communities, support is burgeoning for the schooling of their children. The thirst for education is strong and the resolve to build a new curriculum for a new Afghanistan is firm.

Final Report
“Sharing Perspectives on Curriculum Development in Afghanistan”
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I. Background

Over the past 23 years, Afghanistan has sustained a series of devastating events. Invasion and occupation, civil war, and repressive regimes severely limited access to education for all, with girls and women categorically denied the opportunity for education under the five-year Taliban rule. Although there has never been a complete or accurate national census and estimates of key development indicators vary widely, according to the best estimates in 1997, school enrollment was estimated at 34 percent in urban areas, and only 6 percent in rural areas. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports the literacy rate in Afghanistan as the sixth lowest in the world, with only 4.7 percent of females over the age of 15 able to read. While political repression and fighting have deprived more than a generation of Afghans of even a basic education, the Afghan people have embraced a rebirth of education since the fall of the Taliban regime, especially among women and girls. Students returned to schools in record numbers in 2002 even in the face of the destruction of over 70 percent of the nation’s school buildings.

Afghanistan’s education system should be rehabilitated and modernized through careful, culturally sensitive, long-term efforts while the transitional government continues to find shorter-term solutions for the lack of school buildings, trained and qualified teachers, and instructional materials. During the past months, great strides have been made to reinvigorate the Afghan education system and begin work on a new curriculum framework. As part of this effort, a commission made up of 30 MOE staff, Kabul University professors and representatives of UNICEF and UNESCO traveled to Tehran, Iran to participate in a three-week investigation of curriculum in the Iranian school system. After this informative study tour, the MOE was interested in continuing the process of curriculum development and dialogue through a workshop focused on curriculum development. This workshop, Sharing Perspectives on Curriculum Development in Afghanistan, was conceived of as a forum for soliciting feedback and stimulating dialogue on the development of a new curriculum. During the workshop, the MOE presented the draft curriculum framework and the team of facilitators structured questions in order to systematically review different components of the curriculum framework. The forum gave participants an opportunity to actively share their ideas and to engage in debate and dialogue around issues of curriculum for a new Afghanistan.

II. Workshop Objectives, Participants and Organizers

A. Objectives

The primary objective of the Sharing Perspectives on Curriculum Development workshop was to promote dialogue on the proposed new curriculum framework for the Afghan

education system. An intended result of this dialogue was to develop recommendations and thus build consensus on the new curriculum framework. A second objective of the workshop was to identify and discuss educational approaches, potential strategies and mechanisms that could be applied in curriculum development and implementation, which was to result in a guide to future steps to be taken by the MOE's Department of Compilation and Translation and other stakeholders.

B. Participants

Twenty-nine organizations in total participated in the workshop. One hundred twenty-three participants, among them 22 women, included staff from the MOE, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), the Ministry of Information and Culture, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Kabul University, various Kabul schools, USAID, UNICEF, UNESCO, World Food Programme, the UN Programme Secretariat, and various NGOs, including: the Agha Khan Development Network, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Children in Crisis, Creative Associates International, Inc., Educational Concepts International, the International Rescue Committee, Norwegian Afghanistan Committee, Save the Children, Solidarité Afghanistan Belgium, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, University of Nebraska/ARRENA, and various other institutions and news agencies. Annex A contains a complete list of all conference participants and their organizational affiliations. Annex B displays the workshop invitation.

C. Organizers

Creative Associates International Inc. (CAII), through its USAID-funded Basic Education Policy Support (BEPS) activity, teamed with USAID and the MOE to conduct this five-day curriculum development workshop for Afghanistan. CAII provided the venue, logistical, organizational and conceptual support, two of the conference facilitators, Dr. Eileen St. George and Dr. Seddiq Weera, and prepared the final report. The conceptual design of the conference was developed in concert with USAID, the MOE, the UN Program Secretariat, UNICEF and UNESCO. In addition to this final report, CAII prepared a midterm briefing report summarizing the proceedings from the first three days of the workshop for the use of Minister of Education Qanooni and his staff as they traveled to a regional UNESCO meeting in Paris, France.

III. Workshop Topics for Discussion and Conference Schedule

A. Key Topics for Discussion

- Educational approaches presented in the new curriculum framework.
- Chapters 1-10 of the new curriculum framework.
- Potential strategies and mechanisms that can be applied in the future of curriculum development and implementation.
- Recommendations for next steps in the curriculum development and implementation process.

B. Conference Schedule

See Annex C.

C. Methodology

The first day of the conference was devoted to plenary sessions in which speakers and participants presented an overview of the situational analysis in Afghanistan, curriculum reform in a broader context and a summary of the proposed new curriculum framework (See Annexes D, E and F for PowerPoint presentations on Evaluating Curriculum, Syllabi and Assessment, and Summary of Feedback respectively). On the second, third and fourth days of the conference, participants met in small working groups to discuss the curriculum framework, guided by a series of questions, then reported key points to the plenary assembly. The conference organizers worked to compose small groups with a balanced mix of participants. Women were placed throughout the groups, as were representatives of NGOs, MOE, MOHE and teachers. The fifth and final day brought participants together to summarize recommendations, continue considering next steps and listen to closing comments. Guidelines for group work distributed to participants appear in Annex G and a complete set of review questions used in small groups is contained in Annex H.

IV. Key Speakers and Opening Discussion: Current Context of Education in Afghanistan

After a reading from the Holy Qu'ran, local newscaster and teacher Ms. Najiba Sharif welcomed the participants and introduced each speaker:

- Deputy Minister of Education Zabiullah Asmati reported on achievements in education in the past six months. Mr. Asmati praised Minister of Education Mohamad Yunus Qanooni for securing international assistance that enabled the MOE to publish and distribute textbooks.
- Minister Qanooni followed with remarks about improving education, emphasizing that education and educational institutions were severely damaged or destroyed during 23 years of war in Afghanistan. New curriculum programs will be introduced not only in Kabul, but in all the provinces of the country. With the help of donors and international institutions, educational facilities will be provided for 3 million children, and books, chairs, tables and other necessities will be available to schools across the country.
- In his remarks, Minister of Information and Culture Makhduom Raheen emphasized Islamic teachings about compassion towards humans as well as animals. Minister Raheen suggested, as part of the rehabilitation of education in Afghanistan, eliminating the tradition of violence and guns from the Afghan culture. Minister Raheen also stressed the role of art, music and sports in children's development.
- USAID Mission Director Craig Buck expressed support for the new Afghan education policy efforts and reaffirmed the support of the U.S. government.
- Mr. Waheed Hassan, of the UN Programme Secretariat and UNICEF, reinforced the continuing support of UNICEF for the Afghan education sector and offered a series of questions to consider in developing a new curriculum for Afghanistan.
- UNESCO Country Director Ed Burke praised USAID for continuing the process of curriculum development and expressed the continuing support of UNESCO for the rehabilitation of education in Afghanistan.

- Mr. Abdul Nabi Wahidi, Director of the Department of Compilation and Translation at the MOE, presented a detailed historical background of education in Afghanistan, highlighting the role of religious institutions in education. Mr. Wahidi listed the following new features of the proposed curriculum framework:
 - Student-centered versus teacher-centered teaching.
 - A balance of religious and secular subjects.
 - Inclusion of foreign languages and vocational training in primary education.
 - Establishment of four cycles consisting of three years each (grades 1-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12).
 - Division into a two-track system for grades 10-12, one in social studies and the other in natural sciences.
 - A change from traditional examination and grading to evaluation based on competencies and learning outcomes.
 - Establishment of guidance and counseling committees in schools.
 - Development of content that reflects education policy.
- Comments from the audience emphasized the need for financial support, time and other resources in order to implement this curriculum. The crucial role of both teacher training and school construction was also stressed by participants. The audience offered the following concerns and suggestions:
 - The curriculum should be based on Islamic principles.
 - Diplomas should not merely be a means for escape from the country. Job opportunities should be made available for students upon graduation.
 - National unity should be taught to students.
 - Primary education should be compulsory and free.
 - The needs of the country should be considered in training students.
 - Students should be placed in courses of study depending on their interests.
 - The curriculum should be built as a spiral system.
 - Guidance and counseling play an important role in responding to the needs of students and enhancing their learning potential.
 - The teacher profile should not be that of a military officer, but rather a kind, considerate person who offers opportunities for asking questions in the classroom.

V. Recommendations on Proposed New Curriculum Framework

This chapter contains a summary of participant feedback and recommendations from the five days of the workshop. Comments from participants during the plenary session on evaluating the curriculum focused on:

- Making objectives clear in the curriculum from the primary level up to higher levels and evaluating the curriculum after each semester to ensure better results.
- Meeting the needs of students, fitting the present conditions in Afghanistan and \ applying and implementing strategies within a specific period of time.
- Considering on whom the curriculum should focus—the student rather than the teacher.

A. Participant Feedback

General Perception of the New Curriculum Framework:

- Overall views were positive, while noting some recommendations for revision.
- The curriculum should go through thorough editing in Dari and be translated into Pashto.
- The curriculum should be shared with provinces and offer provinces a chance for providing feedback.
- The curriculum should be reviewed further with educational professionals, including those in schools as well as parents and communities.
- The curriculum should build on national and international experiences in curriculum development.
- Economic resources, context and conditions of Afghanistan need to be considered.
- The curriculum should be compatible with the values and needs of the Afghan society as well as with regional and international standards.
- Identify specific learning objectives for each subject in addition to having a general education curriculum.
- National unity should be taught and reinforced throughout the curriculum.
- The curriculum should be based on a spiral and integrated system.
- The policy goals of anti-terrorism and anti-drug, while important, are perhaps overemphasized in the policy statement.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Chapter 2: Education Policy (In addition, editorial feedback on selected chapters is contained in Annex I.)

- Priorities should include: providing suitable educational facilities, training teachers, separating education from politics, maintaining a balance in education, observing the rights of children in the education system and placing sufficient emphasis on Islamic studies.
- It is important to teach children to respect others and their beliefs and to promote moral and social responsibility.
- Curriculum development is dynamic; goals and processes change as society changes.
- Political changes should not affect development of an education system.
- Students should be at the center of the teaching and learning process and should be motivated to learn.
- Two identified needs include building the capacity of teachers and improving instructional materials.
- Teacher training centers should be transferred from the purview of the MOHE to the MOE.
- The curriculum should strongly promote lifelong learning to lead the students toward self-sufficiency.
- NGOs should work under the guidance and the umbrella of the MOE.
- Further discussion is needed on mother tongue languages as language of instruction, especially for early primary grades.

- A curriculum for the disabled, including the physically handicapped and the deaf/hard of hearing, needs to be designed and offered under the purview of a vocational or technical department.
- Swift implementation of a new curriculum is suggested, but with a vigilant eye toward preserving and ensuring quality.

Chapter 3: General Objectives and Chapter 4: Education System and Cycle Objectives

- Suggested categories for organizing curriculum goals: scientific and learning goals, dynamic and artistic goals and psychological goals.
- The teaching of foreign languages should be reconsidered with student class load in mind as well as contemporary language acquisition strategies and research.
- High school may be too early to divide students into tracks.
- Education on good citizenship should be added.
- A cycle should build on the cycle that precedes it; a focus on incremental development of skills is important.
- Curriculum should be relevant and applicable to students' daily lives.
- The goals section should also include vocational and technical studies.
- If needed, primary schools can be coeducational, while middle schools and high schools should be single sex.

Chapter 5: Literacy Programmes

- The goal should be the complete eradication of illiteracy.
- Develop an accreditation system to integrate literacy program students into the formal schooling system.
- Promote literacy through media campaigns using television, radios, newspaper and clergy to attract public support.
- Literacy courses can be held in Sunni and Shi'ite mosques, home schools, mobile libraries, etc. and supported through an ongoing task force.
- Literacy programs can be integrated with life skills, agriculture and livestock programs, vocational programs, maternal and child health care programs, programs in family life, customs and practices of the society.
- Teaching materials should be developed on the basis of the learner's age, capacity and occupation.
- Draft literacy program text with contents from the general education system so linkages between systems can be established.
- Literacy programs should be developed for the handicapped.
- Librarians need to be trained.

Chapter 6: Study Plan

- A teacher should have an organized and achievable lesson plan for the students.
- New policy issues, such as human rights, anti-terrorism and anti-drug awareness, promotion of peace and national unity, and health education must be integrated into the curriculum. Some suggestions included incorporating these items into social studies, Islamic studies, foreign languages or ethics. The method of integrating and tracking the effectiveness of these subjects in the curriculum must

be considering in more depth. It is imperative that these subjects are not lost or neglected in the implementation of the curriculum, due to inadequate planning or insufficient preparation of teachers to achieve these goals.

- Physical education, fine arts and music should be given more attention.
- Build in the use of children's literature to teach reading.
- Computers should be part of the curriculum.
- Further discussion is needed on the number of hours appropriate for the study of Arabic, the number of hours of Islamic studies across the grade levels, the number of hours and classes in a school day, the number of hours of science and physics, and the grade levels that include the teaching of drawing and calligraphy.
- In the lower secondary cycle (middle school), agriculture and home economics should be included.
- In upper secondary cycle (high school), general psychology should be taught.
- School schedules must take into account the need for breaks or recesses.
- Kindergarten curriculum and programs need to be incorporated into the MOE.

Chapter 7: Syllabi

- Consider logical scope, sequence and steps for skills development.
- Develop teacher capacity in content and methods to teach according to the syllabi.
- Develop teacher understanding for appropriate student age and level capacities.
- Acquire syllabus samples from other countries in the region.
- Review resource materials critically before they are adopted.
- Establish an art department at the MOE to help with illustrations for materials.
- Objectives should guide the syllabi development and reflect societal needs.
- Syllabi should highlight the use of relevant practical exercises, especially for vocational courses.

Chapter 8: Learning and Teaching Strategies

- The curriculum should facilitate the development of students' creative and analytical thinking skills.
- The classroom should be learner centered, with the teacher serving as a facilitator, helper and guide, enabling students to participate and be motivated.
- Professional, experienced and sympathetic teachers are needed to implement the new education strategy; special attention should be paid to training teachers.
- Teachers should not use corporal punishment.
- It is important to consider setting up schools near the residence of students, especially girls. Household schools or home-schooling programs could be developed for elementary education because often girls and women avoid attending official schools.
- Flexible requirements need to be developed in terms of qualifications for female teachers, especially in rural schools.
- Added strategies, resources and capacity-building efforts may be needed in the rural areas given the current context and situation.

- Parent and community participation in the learning and teaching process is necessary to improve education for girls, student attendance and school performance.
- Students and teachers need access to libraries and resources with practical education materials, and need to be encouraged to use these materials. Box libraries/mobile libraries with books and magazines would increase access to information and encourage reading outside the textbook and independent reading.
- Establish departments for training professional teachers in the areas of vocational and technical education.
- Kindergarten teachers need to receive specialized training.
- Learning contests should be used to create healthy competition among students.

Chapter 9: Assessment and Evaluation of Learning Outcomes

- Use learner outcomes (standards and competencies) to guide the syllabi, instructional materials and the teaching and learning process. These outcomes map the destination and help determine strategies to reach learning goals.
- Assessments should be a learning experience and be used regularly in the classroom to ensure attainment of desired learning.
- The teacher should be trained in different ways of measuring learner outcomes using classroom assessment and examination tools.

Chapter 10: Counseling and Guidance

- While the program is being developed, schools can identify appropriate teachers to assist students in coping with school and home life.
- Schools can establish committees to help support guidance and counseling.

B. Content Area Recommendations

For the breakout discussions on Chapters 7 and 9-10, small groups met according to content area. MOE participants met according to their department affiliation, with NGO representatives and other participants choosing from among those departments, namely Art, Biology/Chemistry, Dari Language, Mathematics, Pashto Language, Physics, Preschool and Literacy, Religious Studies, Social Studies, and Vocational Training. As much of the substantive feedback from these content area groups mirrors what is reported in the feedback on curriculum chapters found above, the editorial comments from each of these groups has been summarized for reference in Annex J.

VI. Recommendations on Planning for Next Steps and Potential Obstacles to Curriculum Framework Goals

For the small group session on planning next steps, participants chose from among the following topics:

- Further Discussion on the Curriculum Framework
- Further Development of Syllabi Objectives
- Development of Instructional Materials
- Establishing Linkages Between the New Curriculum and Teacher Training
- School and Community Engagement in the New Curriculum Reform Process

- Girls' Education
- Preschool and Kindergarten Training

These topical groups presented important policy to action items for consideration, which were also reinforced at other points in the workshop. General recommendations included:

- Requesting through donor assistance: financial support, material and technological resources, technical advisors and sample materials.
- Encouraging experts and skilled people, living abroad in exile, to return and contribute to this process.
- Providing further, in-depth training to build the capacity of curriculum developers, provincial educational officers, teachers, school administrators and others.
- Sharing Dari, Pashto and English versions of the draft framework with provincial education offices and schools, as well as with different sectors of society, e.g., politicians, Islamic scholars, education experts from outside the MOE, members of finance, agriculture, industry and health communities.

Further Discussion on the Curriculum Framework

- The new curriculum is in accordance with the Afghanistan situation/context, but it needs to be edited again to make better sense.
- The curriculum should be discussed in the provinces through workshops such as this one.
- Practical steps are necessary to successfully implement the curriculum.
- The provision of teacher manuals over the short term and incorporating their use over the long term is essential.
- If the MOE provides the materials for this plan, then the process will be accomplished more quickly.

Further Development of Syllabi Objectives

- Specific goals for every subject should be developed, according to the new policy of education.
- Skilled specialists should be trained to develop teaching manuals.
- The governmental press facilities should be upgraded and modernized, e.g., ability to print in color, etc.
- Financial resources for implementing the curriculum should be secured.
- In addition to teaching books, guidebooks for teachers and supplementary materials such as audio-visual materials should be prepared and provided to teachers.
- It should be recognized that the MOE, the MOHE, the Science Academy, experts, professional educators, students, parents and NGOs all play an important role in implementing the new educational curriculum.

Development of Instructional Materials

- One of the most important and useful means for preparing teaching materials is a good library, where teachers can find different kinds of needed books and brochures. Libraries should be developed.
- The MOE, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should ask foreign countries to assist in preparing syllabi and textbooks with the Compilation and Translation Department.
- Teaching equipment and supplementary materials such as classrooms, tables, chairs, laboratories and printing materials are necessary for teaching.
- Natural and locally available materials should be used for simple experiments and lessons.
- A department of audio-visual materials to prepare the needed equipment and materials should be established.

Establishing Linkages between the New Curriculum and Teacher Training

- Teacher training should be transferred from the purview of the MOHE to the MOE.
- The Scientific Research Center for Pedagogy, the Department of Compilation and Translation, the Department of Science and the Center for Publication should work together.
- Obtaining financial and technical support of international organizations should be done through USAID, UNICEF and UNESCO and the MOE should receive convincing proposals for projects.
- Due to the lack of experts and professionally trained teachers, teacher training and skill building workshops should be held.
- Rebuilding educational infrastructure should be a priority.

School and Community Engagement in the New Curriculum Reform Process

- A session should be held each month with the school administration and parents in which suggestions and opinions can be raised.
- The benefits of the curriculum should be announced through the mass media for all.
- Informational sessions should be organized by school directors and educational boards throughout residential areas in mosques.
- Committees should be created in schools for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing school-community relationships.
- Similar to agricultural cooperatives, special cooperatives should be established to encourage parents to become involved in curriculum development as well as to distribute the food supplements at a low cost.
- Participants' comments during the plenary session revolved around the poor status and pay of teachers. A big problem is that no one wants to become a teacher because of the low status, lack of respect and extremely low compensation. Students see this situation and are certainly not motivated by a desire to become teachers. Mr. Wahidi confirmed the MOE's concern for the well-being of teachers and explained that the MOE is working on a project for

residential houses for teachers. The MOE itself needs resources to be able to plan and carry out this type of program.

Girls' Education

- The barriers towards girls' education are myriad. There are three levels of problems: Girls are not allowed to participate in education by parents. Girls are not retained in schools, i.e. they begin but do not complete education. Girls who complete education do not pursue careers and stay at home after marriage. The high level of illiteracy, the discriminatory attitude of parents and communities towards girls' education, the lack of female teachers and the uneven distribution of female teachers in rural and urban settings are the major factors. Other constraints on girls' education include early marriage and the small importance attached to girls' education since parents think that when daughters get married they will not provide economic backing to their families in the future. When low economic status forces families to make a choice between the education of girls and boys, most parents give preference to boys' education as they will be responsible for contributions to the income of the families. To promote girls' education, special measures and strategies should be developed to counteract these barriers.
- There is a need for a public education campaign to enhance participation of females in education, social affairs, medicine, as half of the population is female. Community awareness should be raised regarding the importance of education through public media and awareness-raising programs. The communities should be enlightened about the advantages of female education. Women should be encouraged to work outside the house in order to assist themselves economically and engage in social affairs.
- Sometimes women who are educated do not conform to the social values of the society. This infuses a feeling in less-educated people that if they educate their daughters, they will not respect Islamic values. One example: some women who are educated do not dress in a socially acceptable manner. Education is empowering for women and girls and they learn to make their own decision, but this can be a source of fear for those men and communities who believe in male superiority. Communities' perception of women's roles should be changed by promoting positive role models.
- One of the barriers to girls' education is the harassment caused by boys as the girls go to schools. Community support is needed to address this.
- The religious leaders in communities, especially mullahs, are well accepted and understood by the average person, especially in rural areas. The support of mullahs will be vital for the promotion of girls' education. Islamic teaching and the support of clergy can be instrumental in convincing communities, especially conservative ones, to send their girls to school.
- Female education at the primary level should be compulsory and the government should enforce it.
- Lack of schools in villages, especially female schools, is a major hurdle, as well as the lack of female teachers in remote areas of the country. More schools with a girl-friendly environment should be set up.

- Home-based girls' education classes should be established as they are more accessible for the girls. Families are more willing to send their daughters to local, home-based schools as girls do not have to travel long distances.
- The future curriculum should be gender sensitive. Perceptions of careers and jobs based on gender should not be reinforced in the school curricula, rather girls and women should be portrayed as capable and equal to men. For example, the books should not have such stories depicting girls helping mothers and boys going to school. For example, when professions are portrayed, the text will say "Ahmad is a doctor." "Razia is a nurse." "Fatana is washing the dishes." or "Kabeer is playing football." Labor is divided in a negative, sexually discriminatory way, which says a boy has more ability, power and rights to engage in more demanding and skilled activities than a girl. These types of messages should be removed. The future generation can develop better perceptions about women if women and girls are projected as capable and intellectually equal to men.
- Literacy among women and girls should be promoted using the following means:
 - Create mobile family affairs counseling groups that will invite the women to participate. These groups can themselves employ the local women.
 - Seek the help of mullahs in mobilizing support for girls' education
 - Make school obligatory for girls.
 - Prepare audio-visual materials like films on illiteracy.
 - Establish women's handicraft centers in all sub-districts.
- The content of learning materials for women should cover health, environmental information, concise women's rights materials and child-rearing lessons.
- As many girls do not pursue education beyond primary levels, the education that girls receive in lower levels should be relevant to women's lives and useful to them in their future lives.
- Coordination and cooperation should occur between the Ministries of Health, Transport, and Information and Culture to form joint strategies to promote girls' education. For example, clinics are the public places where women and men go, so advocacy for female education should be part of the messages transmitted by health personnel.
- Transportation should be provided to girls who have to commute to schools in order to complete their education. Messages for promotion of girls' education should be written in public areas. Mass media should be harnessed to produce programs through which advocacy for girls' education takes place.
- During the plenary session, one participant pointed out that, in Kabul and Herat, over 50 percent of students are girls. The only provinces noted where girls are not going to school are Ghore and Urozgan. Many teachers in Kabul are women. Discussing girls' education should not leave the impression that Afghanistan has not historically had education for girls, when the country had provided education for girls, even 40 years ago. Mr. Wahidi made the comment that in cities, access to education for girls is not generally a problem. In rural areas, because of a lack of transportation, schools, etc., girls' education is a problem. Another participant offered that during the Taliban regime, 300

schools for girls in remote areas were able to continue running by increasing the teaching time for religious subjects and thus gaining greater parental support.

Preschool Training and Kindergarten

- Sufficient funds should be allocated for kindergartens throughout the nation.
- Short- and long-term programs should be launched to enrich the quality of kindergarten. The process can be accelerated by employing academic professionals and new methods, and by providing educational facilities along with a new system of education.
- There should be professionals who are trained in instructional methods.
- Interesting illustrated books, along with supplementary materials, should be provided for the kindergartens as soon as possible.
- In preschool, children should learn how to hold a pen, how to sit in a chair and basic hygiene.

VII. Closing Comments

- Ms. Lisa Hartenberger of USAID thanked the MOE, CAII and the workshop participants for their energy and dedication. She reminded the audience of the resilience of the education system and the Afghan people in that although over 70 percent of schools were destroyed, 3 million children reported for school – the largest number in Afghanistan’s history. She encouraged all involved to continue making this curriculum development effort a truly democratic process.
- Ms. Karen Gillespie of UNICEF congratulated the MOE’s Department of Compilation and Translation for opening this discussion and bringing it to the group assembled at this workshop. She stressed that teacher training and curriculum development are very closely linked in the education process.
- Dr. Eileen St. George expressed her admiration for the diligence and commitment the participants had demonstrated for the improvement of the curriculum framework. She expressed that this workshop was a result of a collective effort and hoped that future efforts in educational development continue to build on this collaboration.
- Ms. Wranga spoke on behalf of the participants. Her remarks focused on the milestones Afghanistan would like to reach and the pathway to reach them. Ms. Wranga expressed that, if Afghans remain engaged in infighting, this curriculum will not be successful regardless of how much work is done. Ms. Wranga asked that the goal be to raise an Afghan who can defend the dignity, honor and territory of the country, and a generation that has the label of drugs and terrorism lifted from its forehead. Ms. Wranga closed with a suggestion that the MOE also use the talents and expertise of the brilliant Afghans working outside the Ministry that she met through small group discussions at this conference on an advisory committee for curriculum development.
- The final resolution from the participants was read by an NGO representative and contained the following recommendations:
 - The conference should have been entitled: National Workshop for Sharing Perspectives on Curriculum Development.

- The Ministry of Information and Culture should help us to inform the nation about the content of this curriculum.
 - Implementation of this new curriculum should begin immediately in the next school year. The Department of Compilation and Translation should produce new books, start using the textbooks in pilot schools, learn from the pilot experiences, improve the materials and then produce a final version.
 - The link between books and students is teachers; the MOE needs to conduct workshops for teachers to improve their skills. In addition, children have been affected by over two decades of war; we need to provide training for teachers so that they recognize differences in students using a student-centered approach.
 - It is essential to have supplementary teaching materials and audiovisuals. The MOE should seek help from UNICEF, UNESCO, University of Nebraska and other organizations to get these materials.
 - The MOE should seek support, technical and other, for implementation of this curriculum. The MOE needs to put together a budget, with help from donors, for books and libraries important in the implementation of this curriculum.
 - A sufficient number of preschool/kindergarten facilities needs to be established.
 - Children of nomads have been deprived of education for many years and they need access to education.
- Mr. Wahidi, Director of the Department of Compilation and Translation stated that the work style at the MOE is going to change; the group of ten that initiated the work will join the Curriculum Committee. This national curriculum group, led by Deputy Minister of Education Asmati, will take on more responsibilities. The efforts thus far have yielded achievements: schools have been established and an education policy was adopted. Now, syllabi are being drafted and then the books will be developed in accordance with those syllabi. The committee will work with the Department of Teacher Training, which needs to prepare a policy statement about qualifying teachers. The Department of Vocational Education needs to determine how to proceed with training that meets the needs of today and tomorrow. All departments need to think about application of the concept of student-centered learning. The Department of Literacy must map out a plan and figure out how many years it will take to eliminate illiteracy.
 - Mr. Wahidi reminded participants that the MOE currently has only a draft framework, not a complete curriculum. A few items have been added, i.e., counseling, vocational courses, foreign languages in primary school, and the division of the second cycle of secondary school into social studies and natural science tracks. When each department has a complete curriculum, then the framework can be called a curriculum. Only then can the policy be implemented. It will not be easy to implement this program, but if all work together, the goals can be achieved.
 - In his comments, Deputy Minister Asmati explained that in Paris the MOE and MOHE are currently forming a new UNESCO commission on education in Afghanistan. Mr. Asmati also stated that this curriculum framework is a national

- document representing a new education program for a new society. Only with a good education system and a sound society can the Constitution be implemented effectively.
- Mr. Asmati continued, saying that it is important to keep education separate from politics and that, at the same time, Afghanistan also needs healthy politics based on national unity. The future generation must acknowledge not only its Islamic identity, but also understand the depth and breadth of this belief so that politics are not again imposed from outside the country. The future generation also needs current technology. Islam is a religion of social justice and equality, not just about praying. The country needs good Muslims, who are focused on justice and equality. If Afghanistan has a world-class curriculum, but narrow-minded views, the country will not progress.
 - Mr. Asmati also touched on the importance of training teachers. The MOE must conduct training to strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's teachers.

VIII. Challenges and Opportunities for Curriculum Reform in Afghanistan

Developing and disseminating a new curriculum for Afghanistan and ensuring its implementation in classrooms is an attainable goal, yet one rife with challenges. Accompanying challenges are not insurmountable given proper planning, resources (human, financial and material), time and commitment, but will most certainly impede progress if disregarded. During this five-day workshop, many of the challenges addressed below were identified or alluded to, while others are foreseen based on experiences of other countries that have undergone similar reforms.

A. Challenges

Contemporary Educational Concepts, Theory and Practice

The curriculum framework, developed by the MOE's Department of Compilation and Translation, is a comprehensive document that addresses a healthy array of pertinent policy and implementation issues. Encompassed within the framework are several contemporary educational concepts, including student-centered learning, lifelong learning, life skills development, integrated learning, integrated and spiral curriculum, participatory processes, gender equity, etc. One of the primary challenges to overcome is the initial lack of understanding of the breadth and depth of these concepts and how to operationalize concepts through practical application of the curriculum. These concepts must not only be understood but internalized by those implementing the new curriculum if they are to fulfill their roles in the development and diffusion of the curriculum, which will result in the subsequent adoption of this curriculum by other educational practitioners.

Models of Intervention

Cascade models of diffusion have typically not produced desired sustainable impact in advancing the level of understanding for such concepts and more significantly promoting behavioral change in educational practices. Strategies that incorporate training, practical application, observation and monitoring of desired knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors over a span of time are more effective as they allow reinforcement and

realignment of the desired set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, a series of training programs with on-the-job follow-up would be far more desirable than one-time trainings for the various populations of implementers. This approach, offering a continuum of interventions, allows for a complete learning cycle of introduction, application, reflection, internalization, feedback and revision to enable ongoing development and progress.

Timeline for Curriculum Reform

Evaluations conducted on curriculum reform efforts in developing countries have repeatedly attributed poor quality of reform to the unrealistic timeframes set for reform implementation and achievement. Educational reform efforts, particularly curriculum development and textbook development initiatives, seldom, if ever, allot sufficient time for an appropriate process of development, formative evaluation and revision or for providing necessary inputs, such as capacity training, provision of materials, and creation of systems and infrastructure that incorporate necessary quality control measures. Unfortunately, reform efforts continue to prioritize *pace* over *quality*. The first round of syllabi and textbook development, in reality, become the capacity-building exercise for undertrained curriculum developers. This round then inspires a second cycle of materials development to actually apply all that has been learned to effectively represent policy concepts in the new curriculum materials and guides. Curriculum reform is an evolutionary process, not one that is finite and complete once the first round of new instructional materials are developed and present within the schools.

Curriculum Developers' Role in the Classroom

Curriculum developers in developing countries often do not realize the potential impact they could and should have on the classroom. Influences on and responsibilities for teacher behavior in the classroom are commonly attributed to those individuals and institutions responsible for teacher training. In the development context, research has informed us that textbooks are most often the driving force in the classroom, as teachers rely on them extensively and perhaps even exclusively. Research also tells us that a quality textbook can help compensate for an undertrained teacher. Curriculum developers creating these textbooks therefore influence the classroom for better or worse. In recognizing the potential impact they have on the classroom, curriculum developers can better serve the classroom through creating quality, responsive materials that stimulate the learning environment and teacher behavior.

Development of Standards/Competencies

There have been efforts in Afghanistan to develop standards or competencies to guide a curriculum. Pursuing standards development becomes increasingly important, given the desire of the MOE to respond to the high numbers of children currently out of school, overaged students, and those displaced and marginalized. Additionally, solutions developed to address these populations are often through nonformal education programs. The development of achievement standards to guide the teaching-learning process provides a nexus between the nonformal and formal education programs and results in an increasingly responsive and comprehensive national education program, satisfying the needs of a broader array of student populations.

These standards guide the evaluation of students and provide clear and valid grade equivalency measures on which to base the promotion process. In the absence of standards, finding points of intersection between the curriculum and learner achievement in the formal and nonformal systems would be challenging. Presently, Afghanistan is attempting to measure the capacity of returning students in order to place them within the Afghan school system. Measuring these students against a set of recognized standards would increase the validity and transparency of this process.

Developing standards to guide the new curriculum of Afghanistan will require training and on-the-job guidance as well as resource materials that provide examples of how to write standards, the gradual progression of sub-skills towards primary skill achievement, how standards become actualized through instructional materials and the manner in which the achievement of standards can be measured in the classroom. A useful exercise to initiate standards development would be a comparative study of national, regional and international standards enabling Afghan educators to assess their expectations for performance of students with the expectations within their region and other parts of the world, helping them gauge themselves in light of a broader context.

Syllabi Development

Syllabi guide the development of instructional materials and annual plans for teachers. As a guide linked to classroom activity, it is critical that syllabi be developed with care and attention to the new aspects of the curriculum framework. The syllabi should be based upon the standards set for each content area and grade level, including areas of integrated knowledge and skills, such as peace education, health and livelihood, equity issues, etc. The syllabi should also provide users with guidance on methods that adhere to the teaching-learning processes advocated in the new policy.

Common challenges observed in other countries with syllabi development include:

- A tendency to overload the syllabi.
- Inadequate time afforded to the development of sub-skills and knowledge that are necessary to learn and perform complex skills and tasks.
- Unevenly paced development and progression of sub-skills of knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- Inconsistency between or absence of linkages between the syllabi and desired learning standards.
- Inability to balance curriculum with a healthy combination of necessary subjects, topics, life-related skills, etc.
- The need for developing textbooks, from the syllabi, that guide learning and apply the core policy principles, such as relevance of content, learner centeredness, problem solving and discovery orientation, gender equity, etc.
- The complexity of integrating new subjects into the curriculum was specifically noted during the workshop. For example, Islamic studies and/or foreign languages were suggested to absorb many content areas, such as life skills, health education, equity, peace and unity, etc. A method for achieving this integration must be worked out.

Textbooks

A major challenge to the effective development of textbooks is the lack of understanding by textbook developers of the role textbooks can play in the classroom and the manner in which they need to assist the teacher in adopting the new curriculum reform. By following new textbooks, teachers believe that they are implementing the new curriculum. For teachers to be able to implement the new curriculum, the textbooks would then have to guide teachers not only through content, but through methods that put the new curriculum framework into practice.

Textbooks need to be based on the standards and follow a clear, comprehensive and well-paced set of learning objectives. Textbooks need to be appealing by stimulating learner interest, motivating students to learn by arousing their natural curiosity and desire to reason. Textbooks, promoting student-centered learning, aid teachers in engaging learners in higher-order thinking and offer options for classroom assessment activities that let teachers and learners know what has been learned and what remediation is required.

Assessment

Assessing learner achievement is one of the most challenging aspects of education. Most educators in developing countries think of national examinations when the term assessment is used. Considerable time and effort has been spent in numerous countries undergoing educational reform on developing teachers' ability to assess learners in the classroom and using assessment as a guide to teaching and remediation of learners. Coupled with enhancing teachers' understanding for assessment as a tool in measuring learner achievement, there is a need to enhance teacher understanding that learner performance is a measure of their achievement as a teacher.

When providing instruction, teachers should have a clear idea of the expected outcomes for learner achievement so that they can adequately and fairly assess learner accomplishments. Identifying learner outcomes is the destination point for which the teachers should aim to reach through classroom instructional activities. Assessment as well as instructional activities should be guided by the standards set through the syllabi and the instructional materials and reflect achievement of not only sub-skills but the higher-level complex skills. Assessment and remediation should be a continuous and integral part of the teaching and learning process.

Teacher Training Programs

Since curriculum development for primary and secondary education and teacher training for these cycles are the responsibility of different ministries within Afghanistan it will be critical to establish close communication so that teacher training programs reinforce the new curriculum framework and enable teachers to develop their capacity to actualize the new framework in the classroom. Teachers are required to understand the new methods, content and principles that the framework supports and how to effectively utilize instructional materials toward having a positive impact on learner achievement. Classroom performance is not to be about teacher behavior, but about learner

achievement. Teacher behavior is an input to a learner achievement ‘end’; teacher behavior is never an ‘end’ unto itself.

B. Opportunity of Today

Afghanistan has short-term solutions that can provide relief to the advancement of education as longer-term solutions are being developed and implemented. However, settling on short-term solutions and foregoing long-term planning would be to the detriment of the overall achievements of the educational reform. Within Afghanistan, textbooks, teachers and classrooms exist and, while in short supply and limited quality, there is enough to render the system functional at a very minimal level. Parents and communities are growing in their support of schooling for their children. International donors are available to lend the technical, financial and resource assistance.

Textbooks exist that can be used in the interim while new, appropriate, better-quality textbooks that represent the new curriculum content, methods and goals are developed. As these textbooks have not yet begun to be developed, there is still time to conduct several critical sets of activities, namely: engage the various levels of implementers in rigorous training on the new curriculum framework, its concepts and principles; acquire long-term technical assistance for the MOE for the curriculum development initiative; and develop standards upon which the syllabi and subsequent materials are to be based, prior to their development.

Afghanistan has the benefit of educators with valuable experience in implementing educational programs, as well as in providing instruction in classrooms. Participatory processes have begun and should continue to grow to promote collaboration between the private and public sectors, fostering a collective responsibility toward providing educational opportunities equally to the people of Afghanistan. While experienced educators do currently reside in the country, the MOE can provide further incentives to entice exiled Afghan educators back home. Teacher training institutions, with the help of donor agencies and regional support, can build on the experiences of teachers teaching with NGOs, in refugee communities or at home in public institutions; develop both pre-service and in-service programs based on the new curriculum framework; enhance outreach to teachers already in the schools through mass-media measures; and support these initiatives for in-service teachers by establishing teacher-to-teacher programs utilizing and diffusing existing knowledge and experience of teachers. Mass-media efforts could also assist with disseminating educational messages to parents advocating for education of all Afghan children and for responding to the significant changes in the new educational policy.

Careful planning on the part of the MOE and in collaboration with donors can bring about a comprehensive development strategy with sufficient resources to provide necessary inputs and systems. These inputs should come in multiple phases of the curriculum reform process and extend across a timeline allowing for internalization of policy concepts, and an understanding for how to operationalize them. The timeline must also allow for building system infrastructure from the MOE to the classroom to support development, implementation and dissemination of Afghanistan’s new education reform.