Afghanistan Case Study

Situation Analysis on the Effects of and Responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia
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Afghanistan Case Study

Situation Analysis on the Effects of and Responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia

June 2021
The pandemic caused a major children’s rights crisis: all service sectors being profoundly impacted, with the most disadvantaged being disproportionately affected.

COVID-19 – possibly the largest pandemic the world has ever seen - led to an economic crisis probably more radical and global than ever before; as well as disruption of learning on an unprecedented scale. The pandemic caused a major children’s rights crisis: all service sectors being profoundly impacted, with the most disadvantaged being disproportionately affected.

In response, with support from the Global Partnership for Education, UNICEF and UNESCO joined forces with Mott MacDonald, Cambridge Education to carry out a situation analysis, primarily to generate analyses to inform strategic responses to the crisis going forward. While the extension and duration of the pandemic required to invest more time to produce the final analyses and reports, fortunately information had already been discussed through webinars and national conversations with Ministries of Education and other partners across large parts of the Asia Pacific region.

Furthermore, the reports continue to be of utmost relevance given subsequent waves of COVID-19 sweeping across the world in 2021 and very likely in 2022 as well. The task of learning from the crisis and how to mitigate its effects in education is on-going. More than one academic year has now been lost for many children. To ensure continuity of learning whilst schools are closed, the delivery of education is radically changing today through distance education: digital, blended or hybrid learning have become part of the new learning reality which all Governments, teachers and learners will have to adjust to.

While major efforts are needed to mitigate the learning loss of those children who return to school in the post-COVID-19 recovery phase, we must also remember that many children were not learning before the crisis and several million were not even in schools. The reports therefore also explore opportunities to build back better and to re-imagine education; to shift from fact-based didactic methodologies to competency-based approaches, which are more flexible, better respond to the holistic needs and aspirations of all children, and provide opportunities for life-long learning as per the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 agenda.

While the suite of reports provided within the Regional Situation Analysis are particularly relevant to the Asia Pacific region, contexts of course vary considerably across our huge region. At the same time, the reports may also provide insights that are relevant to other regions around the world. Hopefully the findings, including the country case studies, and regional budget needs analysis will help governments resume and accelerate progress towards SDG 4. The way education is conceptualized and delivered is changing fast, and the transformation journey will be steep and full of challenges. Governments, donors, all partners and the private sector will need to work together, not only to get the strategies and levels of investment right, but to build more resilient, effective and inclusive systems, able to deliver on the promise of education as a fundamental human right for all children, whether schools are open or closed.

Shigeru Aoyagi
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We would like to thank all interview participants who assisted with the development of the case study: CBE and ALP teachers, Shura members, M&E officers, Academic Supervisors and Managers of General Education within the Kandahar Provincial Education Directorate.

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We would like to acknowledge the technical and logistical leadership of the country teams of UNICEF and UNESCO to organize interviews and source information, as well as for their detailed reviews and comments to help with the finalization of the report.

We would also like to thank Cambridge Education, notably Emma Mba, Project Director, Sue Williamson, Team Leader, Ira Sangar, Project Manager and Laura McInerney, Senior Education Advisor and main author of this report.

Finally we also wish to express special appreciation to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) for their financial contribution to the production of this report.
List of acronyms

A&V Audio and video
AAOD Accessibility Organizations for Afghan Disabled
ADB Asian Development Bank
ALP Accelerated learning programmes
ALSE Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Social Effects
CBC Community-based classes
CBE Community-based education
CBS Community-based schools
CDC Center for Disease Control and Prevention
COAR Coordination of Afghan Relief
COVID-19 Coronavirus disease
CSO Civil society organizations
ECHO European Commission’s Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ECW Education Cannot Wait
EIE Education in Emergencies
EI EWG Education in Emergencies Working Group
EMIS Education Management Information System
FER First Emergency Response
FCDO UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GDP Gross domestic product
GER Gross enrolment ratio
GPE Global Partnership for Education
HRW Human Rights Watch
IDP Internally displaced person
IRC International Rescue Committee
M&E Monitoring and evaluation
MICS Multiple indicator cluster surveys
MoE Ministry of Education
MoPH Ministry of Public Health
MYRP Multi-Year Resilience Programme
NESP National Education Sector Plan
NGO Non-governmental organization
OCHA United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PED Provincial Education Department
SDG Sustainable Development Goals
SMS Short message service
SMS School Management Shuras
SOPs Standard operating procedures
TVET Technical and vocational education and training
UIS UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID United States Agency for International Development
WADAN Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan
WASH Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP World Food Programme
WHO World Health Organization
WVI World Vision International
Executive summary

Background

UNICEF and UNESCO conducted a rapid assessment of the effects of COVID-19 on education across the Asian continent and the responses of individual countries to this pandemic. Cambridge Education, part of Mott Macdonald, was commissioned by UNICEF and UNESCO to conduct this situation analysis.

This report presents a case study on the impact of COVID-19 on education in Afghanistan, covering a review period of nearly two years: from June 2019 until March 2021. At the time of writing, there had been 45,490 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 1,725 deaths in the country. According to data from the WHO, the first peak was in late May to mid-June 2020. Confirmed cases and deaths started to increase again from early November 2020. The Government closed schools in March 2020, affecting close to 10 million children, and reopened again from September 2020. It is not known yet what proportion of children returned to schools when they reopened.

Afghanistan has experienced protracted crises for 35 years and is also prone to natural disasters, which hamper poverty reduction and development. The lack of direct government control in many areas poses challenges in the provision of services, implementation of projects, data collection and monitoring. At the time of writing over 18 million people are classed as being in need of support, of which 5.1 million are children.

Despite good progress in increasing access to education over the past 20 years, it is estimated that, pre-COVID-19, over 3.7 million children were out of school, of which 60 per cent were girls. Reasons for children being out of school include household poverty, gender, parental level of education and disability, among other factors. Girls are less likely to attend schools than boys, particularly at secondary level. The assessment found that girls’ ability to attend and participate in schooling is limited by factors such as attitudes towards girls’ education, child marriage, violence and harassment, insecurity, distance to school, as well as a lack of female teachers.

There are also challenges with education quality. The World Bank found that 93 per cent of children at late primary age are not proficient in reading. Learning poverty in Afghanistan is 35.2 percentage points worse than the average for the South Asia region. There is also a significant gender gap. Using the Learning-adjusted Years of Schooling metric, boys receive 5.3 years whereas girls received 3.8.

Effects of COVID-19

In the past twenty years, the Government, with the support of development partners and civil society organizations, established over 13,000 schools, with the majority having new infrastructure and buildings. However, the availability of adequate infrastructure continues to present a huge challenge to learning. Only 51 per cent of schools have buildings. The coverage of water and sanitation facilities across the country is also low due to decades of conflict and under-development. Across the country, 33 per cent of public schools (6,000) serving approximately 2.3 million students have no water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities. The lack of WASH facilities in schools and limited stock of hygiene supplies, such as soap, buckets with taps and chlorine, presents a huge challenge for the Government to keep teachers and children safe in school.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing health, well-being and protection issues for children in Afghanistan. In addition to insecurity through conflict, a proportion of children experience malnutrition, gender-based violence and poverty. In April 2020, according to the World Food Programme, 1,841,228 children were missing out on school meals, of which 33 per cent were girls. World Food Programme (WFP) also reported that 275,864 children were no longer receiving WFP-provided meals due to the school closures. To mitigate this, WFP provided a monthly take-home ration pack for primary school children instead of their mid-morning snack. WFP also provided cash transfers to secondary school girls accompanied by social behaviour change communications around the importance of education. The Government started providing free bread to approximately 2.5 million people in Kabul at the end of April 2020 and extended this programme to other cities until the end of June 2020.

Women are likely to be disproportionately affected by the virus. World Vision International estimates that the proportion of girls married before they are 19 will increase above the current 57 per cent as families try to cope with the effects of the virus, such as lower or loss of household income. Girls also face an increased risk of violence in the home and an Oxfam study showed that 97 per cent of women said violence had increased since the start of the pandemic.
In its Asian Development Outlook 2020 September update, the Asian Development Bank projects that the Afghanistan economy will contract by five per cent in 2020 due to the pandemic. The World Bank estimates a 5.5 per cent contraction for 2020 and forecasts growth of 2.5 per cent in 2021. Border closures, lockdowns, declining household consumption, decreased investment and lower remittance inflows due to the effects of the virus have all had a negative effect. This will put more pressure on the education budget. In 2017, the Government spent 4.1 per cent of GDP on education and investment in education has gradually been increasing since 2010. However, after a decade of growth, GDP has remained stagnant at around $20 billion since 2002 and has been falling slightly since 2017. International development partners contribute a significant amount of funding to support education both on and off-budget. On-budget support has been received from the Global Partnership for Education and the World Bank. Other external aid is off-budget and is provided by both bilateral and multilateral donors, yet funding gaps remain.

Challenges

The education sector faces clear challenges in mitigating the impact of COVID-19. Firstly, the Government has a challenge in adequately and equitably providing learning opportunities to all learners due to a lack of resources within households, an inability to deliver learning resources to children at home and in reaching parts of the country not under its control. Secondly, the lack of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities across schools hampers their ability to follow the Ministry of Public Health guidelines for virus prevention. Lastly, children are unable to benefit from non-educational support they receive within schools, such as snacks, mineral supplements and psychosocial support.

Response

In response to COVID-19, with financial support from Global Partnership for Education, the Ministry of Education (MoE) developed an Alternative Education Plan. The plan had three learning options to try to accommodate children’s situations at home: self-learning, distance learning, and small learning groups. A distance learning website was set up and TV and radio lessons were developed and broadcast. However, these options were available to those with the technology at home and, even then, there was no guarantee that the children would participate as intended. Alongside its Alternative Education Plan, the Ministry of Education developed a Manual of Monitoring and Supervision of the Alternative Learning Programmes. However, it is unclear whether or not the actions described in the monitoring manual were implemented as no reports on national monitoring of the whole plan by the MoE were obtained as part of this situation analysis.

Data that was available came through the Education in Emergencies Working Group (EiEWG). The EiEWG prepares a monthly dashboard of partners’ activities and, since May 2020, has included COVID-19-related indicators. By September 2020, 23 EiEWG partners were reporting on their ongoing Education in Emergencies (EiE) activities covering 30 provinces. Progress on the three channels is shown in the table below; the use of small-group learning was discontinued in June 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>ACHIEVEMENT (SEPTEMBER 2020)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EiEWG partners with ongoing EiE activities</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provinces with EiEWG Partners implementing EiE Programmes</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children reached with access to distance learning through radio/TV</td>
<td>798,182 (Girls: 343,149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children provided with learning materials at home (self-learning materials)</td>
<td>118,695 (Girls: 62,812)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children reached through small learning groups</td>
<td>81,624 (Girls: 46,795)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through the EiEWG, the Ministry of Education and development partners developed plans and guidelines to facilitate the reopening of schools. The Government developed protocols for reopening schools and allowed schools to reopen if they were able to meet them. They included mask-wearing, provision of handwashing facilities, sanitisation of premises as well as social distancing. Some of these were later relaxed so as not to hinder schools with inadequate resources or infrastructure.

Applications were also made to donors for funds to support implementation. UNICEF obtained a grant from the Global Partnership for Education of $11 million to support the response to COVID-19 in public schools. UNICEF selected eight implementing partners to support (i) the reopening of 1,250 schools in 10 hard-to-reach emergency-affected provinces with high numbers of out-of-school children (OOSC); (ii) the provision of COVID-19 safe, child-friendly
and grade- and gender-sensitive learning environments targeting 625,000 girls and boys; and, (iii) the provision of remedial classes for girls and boys who had fallen far below grade level so that they are later readmitted at the right level. Funds were also mobilized to support community-based education (CBE), notably through the support of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW). CBE was the focus of the thematic deep dive for Afghanistan (see Chapter 3).

**Community-based education**

Over the last 20 years, the Government of Afghanistan has supported the establishment of community-based education (CBE) in hard-to-reach areas of the country and also in those areas affected by conflict. At the start of 2020, over half a million children were learning through CBE in more than 15,000 classes nationwide. Community-based education has two mechanisms:

1. Community-Based Classes (CBC) for Grades 1-3 and;
2. Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALP) for Grades 4-6.

CBE has generated significant positive outcomes as its existence has appeared to have influenced community stakeholder attitudes towards education and girls’ education in particular. A recent evaluation of CBE found that overall programme targets in relation to access were surpassed: over 26 per cent more CBCs were established than planned, and 55 per cent more students than anticipated were enrolled in CBS, with a roughly even gender ratio in CBSs and a higher percentage of girls than boys in ALPs. There is strong evidence that CBE, in addition to increasing children's enrolment, improves learning, and reduces gender disparity in Afghanistan.

Community-based education is funded off-budget by international donors and generally granted on an annual basis. However, in 2018, ECW approved funding of $36 million for a Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP). Implementation is through CBE across a range of international and national non-government organizations (NGOs). Organizations support various numbers of centres and support learning in accordance with the national curriculum.
Supporting continuity of learning for children in CBE settings when schools closed had its own unique challenges. For example, many of the children in CBE classes have illiterate parents which impacts their ability to support their children to learn at home. The children are often living in remote villages which do not have access to as much news and media as other locations.

The Education in Emergencies Working Group was able to coordinate the response to COVID-19 at a technical level. Two task forces were set up to develop the MoE’s response plan to look at students’ learning pathways and teacher engagement. Additional funds were made available from ECW and were used to support COVID-19 awareness campaigns, mental health and psychosocial support, WASH, distance learning and the capacity building of teachers. After a rapid assessment to establish the types of support that teachers would need, assistance was given in the development of teaching materials which were passed on to families by the CBE teachers. Teachers were also given support to help disseminate health messages relating to COVID-19 and to dispel myths. Ongoing support was provided to teachers through WhatsApp groups.

In terms of engaging children and their parents, interviewees stated that girls’ CBE classes had higher uptake than those for boys: this was attributed to the fact that more CBE teachers and community mobilizers were female. Others thought it might be related to girls helping each other with learning during this time, while boys played sports. Children with disabilities were not provided with any adapted materials to study. Respondents did report that children with disabilities who attended CBE were visited in their homes in the same way as other children. If they had parents and carers who were able to teach them, then they were able to learn as much as other children. In general, implementing partners found that parents had exceeded their expectations in terms of supporting their children to learn. In the past, parents had seen the education of the children as being the responsibility of teachers, but after having had home-learning visits, they started to also see their role in the learning process.

In mid-September 2020, public schools were told that they would be able to open from the beginning of October so long as they met standard operating procedures (SOPs). Some CBE-implementing partners were able to put in place safe school guidelines so that the centres could open. They then trained teachers and shuras on how to open safely. In classes that were able to reopen, teachers had to teach children in small groups so that they could try to physically distance, which required them to teach more hours for the same remuneration.

It is difficult to say how well the response worked at scale due to the paucity of data. Aside from data provided by the EiEWG, which is incomplete, no other data was available. It is therefore unclear how many children returned to the CBE centres once they reopened, who those children were, which children did not return and why. The extent to which children had engaged with learning materials and why while away from school is also not known, nor is how their learning, interpersonal skills and well-being were affected.

From the information available, it appears that through CBE some of the world’s most marginalized children were able to continue learning. Given CBE was developed as a solution to ongoing crises and challenges, its ability to provide continuity of learning when faced with uncertainty and adversity should not be too surprising.

Recent evaluations of CBE programmes point to their success in delivery of education and acceptance by the Ministry of Education and communities. But there are obstacles to scaling up and long-term sustainability and communities, relating to funding and system capacity, particularly in relation to monitoring and data management. It is recommended that partners identify ways to reduce the cost of CBE without compromising its positive outcomes.

Lessons learned

From the interviews and documents reviewed, a number of priorities for building back better emerged. Firstly, access to WASH across educational settings needs to be improved. Secondly, the self-learning materials that were created can be further used and evaluated in terms of efficacy and cost-effectiveness. Thirdly, testing of children and provision of remedial education, possibly through multi-grade classes that teach at the level of the child, could be considered. Finally, in order to ensure that maximum benefit is obtained, discussions on expanding CBE to other grades should be prioritized.
Recommendations

The report provides six recommendations addressed at the Government and supporting development partners to increase education resilience to future shocks:

1. Expand CBE to more remote areas and investigate how it can be expanded to support children in grades four to six who are unable to transit to hub schools.

2. Develop better ways to capture data for a clear, real-time understanding of what is happening at scale.

3. Consider ways to continue providing distance education for when crises happen, but also investigate other ways to better support children attending public schools in times of closure that do not have access to radio, television or the internet to avoid increasing inequity.

4. Ensure teachers are trained on health and safety measures as well as provided with training to support learning, particularly for those most excluded.

5. Mobilize communities to support and sustain learning through CBE.

6. Reduce dependence on donor-funded, NGO-implemented CBE.

Conclusion

CBE evolved as a response to protracted crises and a range of issues prohibiting meaningful access to education for millions of children across Afghanistan. As shown in this situation analysis, CBE was able to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to provide learning opportunities to some of the most marginalized children across the country. There is great potential for CBE to go further in terms of geographical reach and in increasing the number of grades it serves, yet more investment is required. The past 20 years have shown its potential to operate in challenging circumstances and the past year further demonstrated its resilience and adaptability. With further support and planning, it could become a model for resource-poor countries to follow to dramatically reduce the number of out-of-school children, increase the number of girls staying in school and achieve improved learning outcomes.
The table below provides a snapshot of the pandemic, education sector response and background information for Afghanistan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION</th>
<th>INDICATOR/QUESTION</th>
<th>INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epidemiology</strong></td>
<td>Date of first confirmed case</td>
<td>24 February 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date of first confirmed death</td>
<td>23 March 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COVID-19 cases and deaths over time</td>
<td>40,200 cases and 1,492 deaths as of 19 October 2020⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Details about the pandemic and Government responses and supports</td>
<td>Following the initial case, numbers rose in March 2020 due to the return of Afghans from Iran, which had a high caseload. The Government responded early with school closures and lockdown measures. A Ministry of Public Health survey in August 2020 estimated that one-third of the population had contracted COVID-19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School closure</strong></td>
<td>Were schools closed, partially or fully?</td>
<td>Schools were fully closed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date of school closures</td>
<td>15 March 2020. The announcement was made on 14 March 2020.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date of school reopening</td>
<td>All private schools and grades 11-12 of public schools reopened on 22 August 2020. Remaining grades of public schools on 3 October 2020.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have schools reopened fully or partially?</td>
<td>Schools fully reopened in October 2020, but then schools in cold climates closed in November for the winter break and reopened on 21 March 2021.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What phase is the country currently? Phase 1, 2 or 3 and is this nationally or regionally?</td>
<td>Schools are open and fully in phase 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key vulnerable groups</strong></td>
<td>Key vulnerable groups affected by the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector</td>
<td>Internally displaced people (IDP), children with disabilities and those at risk of child labour, as well as those who cannot access remote learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education system structure</strong></td>
<td>Brief description of the structure of the education system – federal or centralized</td>
<td>Education sector service delivery responsibility is divided largely between the following: Ministry of Education (pre-school, general education grade 1-12, literacy, and Islamic education); Ministry of Higher Education (grade 13 and higher); Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, (kindergarten, non-formal TVET); TVET-Authority (formal TVET)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The education system is centralized, led by the national Ministry of Education. Provincial and District Education Departments are responsible for implementation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education data</strong></td>
<td>Number of learners⁷</td>
<td>ECE 6.6 Million (Girls 2.6 Million) 3.1 Million (Girls 1.1 Million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of teachers⁵</td>
<td>Primary 134,000 (48,000 females) 92,000 (33,000 females)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of education institutions⁵</td>
<td>Secondary 8,000 10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-COVID-19 progress towards SDG4 indicators</td>
<td>Out-of-school rate</td>
<td>There are 4.2 million children out of school.⁹⁰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum reading proficiency rate</td>
<td>93 per cent of children at the end of primary do not reach proficient reading standard.⁹¹</td>
</tr>
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01
Introduction
1.1. Background

The global nature of the COVID-19 pandemic makes it unique in modern times, affecting the whole world with the twin shocks of a health emergency and an economic recession. This will lead to long-term costs on human capital accumulation, development prospects and welfare. The pandemic, though global, has disproportionally affected the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society.

Some of the most vulnerable children felt the impact of COVID-19-related restrictions from the moment nationwide lockdowns were put in place to control the spread of the disease. Markets, workshops, farms and factories closed, leaving children and families stranded. For many, the fear and uncertainty continues. Some minority groups find themselves stigmatized and accused of causing or spreading the pandemic. Deep-rooted inequalities in societies are being exposed.2

Asia, with its huge population and many overcrowded cities, is potentially very vulnerable to COVID-19, which spreads through close contact with infected people. The contexts within which the people of South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia are coping with the virus are vastly different, with a disparity in living conditions and varying degrees of access to and quality of essential services such as health and education. Across the continent, there is vast inequality between the rich and poor and, therefore, different levels of resilience to the shocks that this disease has brought, putting the poor at long-term risk that reaches far beyond contracting the virus. This region regularly suffers from shocks which lead to localized learning interruptions. For example, during the pandemic, Bangladesh and India were in the path of a cyclone and recent floods across the continent which have threatened communities and resulted in a double shock.

This Situation Analysis has been undertaken as part of the broader analysis initiated by UNICEF and UNESCO to provide a snapshot of the response of the education sector to the effects of COVID-19 across Asia. It considers the direct effects of school closures and reopenings and identifies the initial impact that this may have had on learners, their families, and the overall education system. In so doing, it aims to develop insights based on the variety of responses to the pandemic with a view to assessing their efficacy in Asia. It seeks an understanding of the contextual factors that may have supported or hindered learning, with particular attention on the most disadvantaged groups, who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. For this, the analysis has the following objectives:

- To assess and estimate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector and its stakeholders in Asia;
- To examine the financial and policy implications of progress towards achieving SDG4-Education 2030; and
- To identify examples of promising responses and strategies in education and associated social sectors, which can be shared with other countries.

This Situation Analysis identifies examples of effective country approaches which could be replicated or adapted for use in other countries. Following the development of the case studies (including this Afghanistan situation analysis), the overall study will include an overview of the situation in each of the three Asian sub-regions, as well as an overview of the region.
1.2. Methodology

This case study is part of a broader study into the impact of COVID-19 across Asia. The case studies have been supported by the UNICEF and UNESCO country offices which have provided relevant information and assisted the researchers in contacting relevant officials to collect country-specific documents, grey literature and data.

In addition to a literature review, each case study also involved interviews with key stakeholders (listed in Annex). This provided an opportunity to hear more about the challenges faced and the strategies developed by people at the frontline of the response, and provided a space for discussion and debate on lessons learned and what still needs to be done.

A cross-cutting focus on the most vulnerable members of society, particularly highlighting girls and learners with disabilities, has been used across the assessment. The aim of this is to identify interventions which have been able to successfully reach the most marginalized communities and how their different needs were addressed to increase accessibility and participation for all.

1.3. Structure of the case study

The case studies are divided into four sections. After this introduction and the country fact sheet, above, Chapter 2 discusses the effects of COVID-19 on the education system against four dimensions (see Figure 1 below); challenges are identified and the responses are set out against the three phases of school reopening (see Figure 2 below). Chapter 3 provides a deep dive into a particular theme, which, for Afghanistan, looks at community-based education. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the lessons learned, providing specific recommendations for Afghanistan, as well as for other countries on building back better and increasing the resilience of the education system to future shocks.
Effects of and response to COVID-19 on the education sector in Afghanistan
The arrival of COVID-19 in March 2020 was one more challenge with which the country had to grapple.

Afghanistan is a landlocked and mountainous country situated in Central and South Asia. It shares borders with China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It has a continental climate with harsh winters in parts of the country.

Current estimates put the population at almost 39 million with a median age of 18.4, but there has not been a full census since 1979. Approximately 25 per cent of the population lives in urban areas, the rest in rural areas. The population is ethnically and linguistically diverse with ethnic groups including Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, Turkmen, Baloch and others.

The physical and political geography of Afghanistan poses significant challenges for its development. The country is prone to natural disasters, such as droughts, flooding, landslides, avalanches and earthquakes. In addition to natural disasters, the country has experienced protracted conflict for almost 35 years, hampering poverty reduction and development and contributing to Afghanistan being ranked 175 out of 186 countries in the global Human Development Index. A significant proportion of Afghanistan is not under direct government control.

Migration and forced displacement are also significant issues. In 2020, there was close to 680,000 returnees (672,000 from Iran and 6,400 from Pakistan) as well as almost 800,000 undocumented returnees entering the country comprising of 783,400 from Iran and 6,100 from Pakistan. There have also been 286,000 conflict-induced displacements in 2020. In terms of new internally displaced persons, 2019 data shows that there were 461,000 people internally displaced through conflict and 117,000 through natural disasters.

Since 2001, the country has received bilateral and multilateral military and humanitarian assistance. At the time of writing, 18.4 million people are classed as being in need, of which 5.1 million are children. Over a quarter of the population (11.1 million) experience food crises. Yet, there are solutions in response to these crises and which present optimism. One example is Community-Based Education (CBE), which will be discussed as a thematic deep dive in Chapter 3.

2.1. Effects of COVID-19 against four dimensions

At the time of writing, there had been 45,490 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 1,725 deaths. According to data from the WHO, the first peak was in late May to mid-June 2020. Confirmed cases and deaths started to increase again from early November 2020.
In Afghanistan, the academic year which a school follows depends on whether it is located in a hot climate province or a cold climate province. The cold climate academic year runs from 6 March to 21 November, the hot climate provinces from 6 September to 5 June. According to the Education Management Information System (EMIS) 2018 dataset, the enrolment for the ten hot climate provinces was 2,107,815 and for cold climate provinces was 7,135,087. When the Government closed schools on 23 March 2020, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that approximately 10.5 million students (a number higher than that captured in the EMIS data) were affected. Children in cold climate provinces were unable to start school as planned, and children in hot climate provinces were unable to complete the last three months of their school year.

Access to and participation in learning

Afghanistan has taken significant steps to advance the right to education for children. The 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan, together with the Education Law of 2008, establishes the legal framework for working in the Education Sector. The Afghan Constitution upholds free education until completion of a Bachelor’s degree level as a right. The Constitution of Afghanistan makes education compulsory up to grade nine. 2020-21 marked the final year of the third National Education Sector Plan (NESP III). The intra-Afghan peace agreement will likely increase the number of children enrolled in schools over that period. Over the past 20 years, Afghanistan has increased access to education. There are now 9.6 million children in school, or which about 3.7 million are girls, up from 0.9 million in 2001. However, there are still 4.2 million out-of-school children representing 42 per cent of the school-age
population, and it is estimated that 60 per cent of those are girls. The Multi-Cluster Indicator Survey in 2014 estimated that just one per cent of children aged three to five attended pre-schools.

Table 2, drawn from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data for 2018, provides details on the total school-age population and gross enrolment ratio by education level. As shown, boys significantly outnumber girls at each level with the gap increasing by level. The multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS) survey estimated that primary attendance is 64 per cent, with 54 per cent of those children completing primary school and 38 per cent for lower secondary.

### Table 2 | School-Age Population and Gross Enrolment Ratio by Education Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>GER PER CENT (T)</th>
<th>GER PER CENT (F)</th>
<th>GER PER CENT (M)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
<td>1,087,480</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>6,352,124</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>5,653,049</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>3,826,080</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasons for children being out of school was examined in a recent assessment and an overview of the barriers are shown in Table 3. These included household poverty, gender, parental level of education and disability, among other factors. Girls are less likely to attend schools than boys, particularly at secondary level. The assessment found that girls’ ability to attend and participate in schooling was limited by factors such as attitudes towards girls’ education, child marriage, violence and harassment, insecurity, distance to school as well as a lack of female teachers. Significantly higher levels of out-of-school girls are found in parts of the country not under direct control of the government. Nearly one-quarter of respondents interviewed by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 2018 indicated that they thought that conflict and insecurity were the biggest barriers to education. According to stakeholder interviews, the Ministry of Education has no specific programme for children with disabilities.

### Table 3 | Overview of Key Barriers to Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Identified Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demand-side, socio-cultural</strong></td>
<td>Social expectations, gender and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents’ level of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language, ethnicity-based education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Violence, harassment, and bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demand-side, economic</strong></td>
<td>General poverty, low household income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of guardianship for vulnerable children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunity costs and child labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ancillary costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of employment opportunities following education completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supply-side</strong></td>
<td>Lack of provision for nomadic ways of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of effective displacement-related solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of early childhood education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogy and quality and quantity of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content of learning curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality and quantity of infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stigma against over-age children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political, governance, capacity and financial barriers</strong></td>
<td>Additional access constraints for disabled children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MoE-related</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lack of verified data on education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public sector financial constraints and mismanagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Broader issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Security</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a shortage of competent teachers, with only 38 per cent of teachers in Afghanistan meeting the minimum grade 14 requirement, only 34 per cent being female, and with very few teachers located in rural areas. Over 30 per cent of schools run multi-shift systems with reduced teaching hours, which compromises quality, thereby providing a disincentive for families to send their children to school.
The World Bank also found that 93 per cent of children at late primary age are not proficient in reading. Learning poverty in Afghanistan is 35.2 percentage points lower than the average for the South Asia region. There is also a significant gender gap. Using the Learning-adjusted Years of Schooling metric, boys receive 5.3 years whereas girls receive 3.8.

As shown above, Afghanistan already had immense difficulties in providing access to education for all children. Community-based education, described below, was one solution to some of the barriers outlined above. The COVID-19 pandemic has put more pressure on an already-stretched education system.

Safe operations

In the past 20 years, the Government, with the support of development partners and civil society organizations, has established over 13,000 schools with the majority having new infrastructure and buildings. However, the availability of adequate infrastructure continues to present a huge challenge to learning. Only 51 per cent of schools have buildings. The National Education Strategic Plan III recognizes that infrastructure development and school construction did not expand as rapidly as expected. Furthermore, some schools have been attacked, putting more pressure on Government budgets to conduct repairs or reconstruct. In 2017, 68 schools were attacked and in 2018 the number tripled to 192. It is thought that one factor in this increase was the use of schools as voter registration and polling centres for the 2018 parliamentary elections.

The coverage of water and sanitation facilities across the country is also low due to decades of conflict and under-development. Table 4 provides 2019 data from the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene. As the table shows, many schools do not have adequate access to WASH and much data is unavailable. No disaggregated data was available for urban and rural locations.

Poor WASH conditions contribute to disease outbreaks, and it is reported that 13 per cent of deaths among children under five are linked to diarrhoea diseases. Such diseases also weaken children’s immunity, which increases the risk of mortality when exposed to other diseases such as COVID-19. Across the country, 33 per cent of public schools (6,000) serving approximately 2.3 million students have no WASH facilities. In schools where they are available, they are often not gender-segregated. They are also largely absent from the CBE centres serving 500,000 children. As in other countries, women and people with disabilities have limited access to WASH facilities.

The Education in Emergencies Working Group (EiEWG) mapped schools without water and sanitation facilities to provide a targeted WASH response. Furthermore, it identified 756 schools in border provinces (Hirat, Nimroz, Kandahar and Nangarhar) serving 862,000 children that have no access to clean water.

The lack of WASH facilities in schools, and the limited stock of hygiene supplies such as soap, buckets with taps and chlorine presents a huge challenge for the Government to keep teachers and children safe in school.

Health, well-being and protection

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing health, well-being and protection issues for children in Afghanistan. In addition to insecurity through conflict, a significant proportion of children experience malnutrition, gender-based violence and poverty.

Malnutrition is a serious and widespread issue across the country. Oxfam estimates that the number of people on the brink of famine in Afghanistan has risen to 3.5 million in May from 2.5 million in September 2019. Forty-one per cent of children under five are stunted, one-third of adolescent girls have anaemia, and 9.5 per cent of children suffer from wasting. Poor diet not only affects their ability to grow and to develop healthy immune systems, but also to learn effectively. As a response to this, many children receive nutritional snacks or mineral supplements at school but, as schools closed, provision of these was affected.

In April 2020, according to the World Food Programme,
1,841,228 children were missing out on school meals, of which 33 per cent were girls.\(^{51}\) WFP also reported that 275,864 children were no longer receiving WFP-provided meals due to the school closures.\(^{52}\) To mitigate this, WFP provided a monthly take-home ration pack for primary school children instead of their mid-morning snack. WFP also provided cash transfers to secondary school girls, accompanied by social behaviour change communications around the importance of education. The Government started providing free bread to approximately 2.5 million people in Kabul at the end of April, which was extended to other cities until the end of June 2020.\(^{53}\)

With the support of an Afghani 20.8 billion World Bank grant, the authorities are rolling out a relief package, amounting to 1.6 per cent of GDP, to Afghan households with incomes of $2 per day or lower (twice the national poverty line). Approximately 90 per cent of all households fall below that threshold, the programme is near-universal. Households in rural areas will receive the equivalent of $50 in essential food staples and hygiene products, while those in urban areas will receive a combination of cash and in-kind assistance equivalent to $100, in two tranches.\(^{54}\)

Women are likely to be disproportionately affected by the impact of the virus. World Vision International estimates that the proportion of girls married before they are 19 will increase above the current 57 per cent as families try to cope with the effects of the virus, such as a reduced or loss of household income. Girls also face an increased risk of violence in the home and an Oxfam study showed that 97 per cent of women said violence had increased since the start of the pandemic.\(^{55}\) Girls also experience reduced access to schooling.\(^{56}\) There is also a gender discrepancy in testing for COVID-19. It is thought that far fewer women than men are having tests. In Afghanistan, women make up only 30 per cent of the cases, compared to the global average of 51 per cent.\(^{57}\) Many people face challenges accessing health services in Afghanistan, but this data demonstrates that this lack of access is exacerbated for women.

Human Rights Watch estimates that a quarter of children are engaged in labour across the country\(^ {58}\) and as families experience economic hardship, more children are expected to earn money.\(^ {59}\) A World Vision children's consultation found that 88.8 per cent of the surveyed children contribute towards their family’s income.\(^ {60}\) Children engaged in labour activities may experience higher levels of abuse, and projects that worked to support such children, such as those focusing on technical and vocational education and training, are also affected by restrictions in movement.

### Finances

Investment in education as a proportion of GDP has gradually been increasing since 2010\(^ {61}\) and in 2017 the Government spent 4.1 per cent of GDP on education.\(^ {62}\) Yet, in real terms, it has not increased much; after a decade of increasing GDP to 2012, it then remained stagnant at around $20 billion until 2017, when it began falling slightly. This, therefore, equates to a small budget for education provision, so the Ministry of Education is heavily dependent on international donors for education programmes and part of its operating budget. Donors also heavily invest in off-budget expenditure such as CBE.

In its Asian Development Outlook 2020 September update,\(^ {63}\) the Asian Development Bank projected that the Afghanistan economy would contract by five per cent in 2020 due to the pandemic. The World Bank\(^ {64}\) estimated a 5.5 per cent contraction for 2020 and forecast growth of 2.5 per cent in 2021. Border closures, lockdowns, declining household consumption, decreased investment and lower remittance inflows due to the effects of the virus have all had a negative effect. According to the World Bank,\(^ {65}\) poverty is believed to have worsened in both 2019 and 2020, surpassing the 54.5 per cent recorded in the 2016-2017 household survey.\(^ {56}\) Micro-simulations from the World Bank\(^ {67}\) suggest that the economic contraction in 2020 could cause the poverty rate to reach 72 per cent. It estimates that those displaced by conflict, and returned refugees, are more severely affected.\(^ {68}\)

The profile and need to support Education in Emergencies (EiE) has increased substantially over the past five to ten years. International development partners contribute a significant amount of funding to support education both on and off-budget. On-budget support has been received from the Global Partnership for Education and the World Bank. Other external aid is off-budget and provided by both bilateral and multilateral donors, yet there are still funding gaps. Much funding is granted for humanitarian needs on an annual basis. While these funds greatly support the sector, delays in mobilization of funds which affect planning, implementation of activities and learning. Partly in response to these challenges, Education Cannot Wait (ECW) is funding a Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP). This is described in Chapter 3.
2.2. Main challenges faced by the education sector

The brief overview above presented some of the most salient effects of COVID-19. From the reports available, three main challenges emerge:

**Inability to provide learning opportunities equitably**

The Government’s ability to adequately and equitably provide access to learning opportunities is a major challenge. As shown above, many children are in families with illiterate parents and many more live in households that do not have the means to connect to television, radio or the internet. Due to limited resources, the Government is also unable to print and distribute learning materials to all learners. The Government was also unable to provide home learning packages to parts of the country that are not under its control.

**Lack of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools**

The lack of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities across the majority of schools and educational settings presents a challenge for enabling children and teachers to attend schools safely and be able to follow guidelines from the Ministry of Public Health to prevent the transmission of the virus. This challenge is difficult to fix in a short space of time, although the Government and development partners have been able to provide some hygiene kits as described below.

**Difficulty in providing non-educational support to children, thereby increasing other challenges**

Schools provide children with non-educational support, including snacks and mineral supplements, psychosocial support, and being in school lowers the incidence of violence and early marriage. With children being out of school and at home, they may not be able to access the secondary support provided by schools. This may result in fewer children being able to return to school after the pandemic and, for those that do, their learning ability may be further compromised through nutritional deficiency or trauma.

2.3. Education sector response to COVID-19 and support to continuity of learning

Phase 1: Prior to Reopening

In late March 2020, the UNICEF office in Afghanistan received a GPE grant of $70,000 to support the Ministry of Education with the development of a comprehensive COVID-19 response plan for the immediate, medium- and long-term impact of the pandemic on the education system. The Alternative Education Plan had three learning options to try to accommodate the situations of children at home. The three channels were:

- ‘Self-learning’ through radio, literate parents and mobile applications aimed at lower and upper secondary, as well as to build capacity of teachers and principals;
- ‘Distance learning’ using television, literate parents, mullahs of mosques, upper secondary pupils and mobile applications, interactive voice response (IVR)/phones, mobile applications and the internet aimed at primary Grades 1 to 3 pupils, lower and upper secondary students, students of Islamic education and literacy learners; and,
- ‘Small learning groups’ for children in settings without internet, TV and radio and where parents were unable to support learning.

The Alternative Education Plan sets out that the Ministry of Education, along with the other government entities, NGOs, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCs) and parents would perform the following actions:

- Printing and distribution of self-learning guidelines.
- Producing audio and visual learning materials for broadcasting through the media:
  - Purchasing audio and video (A&V) learning materials available in the market from the private companies.
  - Producing A&V learning materials.
- Broadcasting teaching videos and awareness programmes through TVs and radios.
- Supervision and assessment of students’ learning progress.
- Strengthening preventive health measures from the outbreak of COVID-19 in MoE offices and education centres.
The plan also explicitly mentioned out-of-school children and that they, too, would be able to benefit from the distance lessons. From the reports reviewed and interviews conducted, it is not possible to say whether this happened in practice and, if so, to what extent. According to newspaper reports, the MoE launched its distance learning website on 7 May 2020 and uploaded audio and video lessons.\(^71\) However, these distance learning solutions were only available to those with internet connection.

On the whole, children’s access to and participation in learning during school closures as a result of COVID-19 was largely influenced by where they lived and whether their families had access to resources, likely related to their socio-economic status. The TV and radio lessons for distance learning were made according to grade and teachers assessed their quality prior to broadcast.\(^72\) The MoE shared a schedule of lessons that pupils could watch if they had access. Table 5, from the Ministry of Education’s alternative education plan, shows that children in urban areas would have a higher chance of being supported in their learning by literate parents than their peers in rural areas. In general, households in urban areas also have much better access to multi-media devices than those in rural areas, with the exception of radio. This means that many children did not have any access to learning materials, particularly those in rural areas. Getting children who have not been learning for many months back into school is likely to be a challenge. Remedial support will also be needed.

### TABLE 5 | RESOURCES AND CAPACITY TO SUPPORT EDUCATION DELIVERY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES</th>
<th>URBAN AREAS</th>
<th>RURAL AREAS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literate persons</td>
<td>58 per cent</td>
<td>28 per cent</td>
<td>43 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosques</td>
<td>100 per cent</td>
<td>100 per cent</td>
<td>100 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>78 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of radios</td>
<td>42 per cent</td>
<td>62 per cent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of televisions</td>
<td>91 per cent</td>
<td>57 per cent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of phones</td>
<td>90 per cent</td>
<td>30 per cent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of the internet</td>
<td>31 per cent</td>
<td>9 per cent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Alongside its Alternative Education Plan, the Ministry of Education developed a Manual of Monitoring and Supervision of the Alternative Learning Programmes.\(^73\) The manual aims to set out objectives, methods, means, performance and reporting of monitoring teams at the country level. It is split into three parts comprising of ideas for: 1) monitoring programme broadcasting and monitoring students’ access to broadcasts; 2) monitoring programmes of self-capacity building of teachers and managers; and, 3) evaluating the results of the self-learning programmes. The manual advises that data can be collected through an app, or short message service (SMS) for those with accessibility. It also recommends visual and practical evaluation for students and teachers.

The final part of the manual states that the relevant teams at local levels, under the General Directorate of Academic Supervision, are ready to monitor the alternative learning and capacity building programme. However the Directorate requires support to develop monitoring applications, to provide tablets with internet and GPS facilities, or to cover transport costs for the local supervision teams.

Some data was available through the Education in Emergencies Working Group. The EiEWG prepares a monthly dashboard of partners’ activities and, since May 2020, has included COVID-19-related indicators. The following table summarizes their achievements between May and September in terms of providing access to and participation in learning. The data only captures organizations that have reported to EiEWG and there may be others that also provided support without reporting. Therefore, from the materials and reports reviewed, it has not been possible to ascertain fully the degree to which the alternative education plan was implemented and how many learners benefitted.
As Table 6 shows, the numbers of children provided with learning opportunities increased significantly during the time that the schools were closed. However, given it is estimated that close to 10 million children were affected, those captured in the reporting only represent a very small proportion of all learners across the country.

A joint Human Rights Watch, UNICEF and UN Women alert reported that a World Vision Afghanistan assessment conducted in Herat, Badghis and Ghor found that 53 per cent of households did not practice home-schooling for their children, and 30.8 per cent of caregivers said they were not able to provide any type of support in terms of home-schooling and education to their children. A further 76 per cent of the respondents reported that they needed learning and school materials.

In June 2020, the small group learning approach was banned by the MoE. This decree would have most affected children without access to home-based and self-learning materials, particularly those in the hard-to-reach and remote areas. Yet, as shown in EiEWG data, the numbers reached through small group learning did continue to increase each month. This could be due to late reporting by some organizations.

During the time schools were closed, EiEWG partners supported the Government with prevention and control messages, trained teachers in safe schools’ protocols, and provided safe and clean drinking water and hygiene kits. Teachers were also trained to raise awareness of COVID-19. Table 7 shows the achievements between May and September 2020. As before, this only includes organizations that have reported on their activities to EiEWG. Based on reports reviewed as part of this assessment, it is unknown how many others were reached. It is reasonable that many more could have been reached through activities undertaken by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH).

### TABLE 6 | PROGRESS AGAINST EDUCATION-RELATED COVID-19 INDICATORS BETWEEN MAY AND SEPTEMBER 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES</th>
<th>ACHIEVEMENT (MAY 2020)</th>
<th>ACHIEVEMENT (SEPTEMBER 2020) (G- GIRLS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EiEWG partners with ongoing EiE activities</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provinces with EiEWG partners implementing EiE programmes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children reached with access to distance learning through radio/ TVs</td>
<td>381,124</td>
<td>798,182 (G: 343,149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children provided with learning materials at home (self-learning materials)</td>
<td>12,218</td>
<td>118,695 (G: 62,812)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children reached through small learning groups</td>
<td>10,314</td>
<td>81,624 (G: 46,795)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 7 | PROGRESS AGAINST HEALTH-RELATED COVID-19 INDICATORS BETWEEN MAY AND SEPTEMBER 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>ACHIEVEMENT (MAY 2020)</th>
<th>ACHIEVEMENT (SEPTEMBER 2020) (G- GIRLS, W- WOMEN)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of children reached with prevention and control messages through radio</td>
<td>52,118</td>
<td>312,134 (G: 136,067)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children reached with prevention and control messages through print materials</td>
<td>6,917</td>
<td>94,232 (G: 51,264)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of teachers trained on safe schools’ protocols</td>
<td>1,038</td>
<td>1,235 (W: 1,003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools provided with safe and adequate drinking water (safe and clean drinking water)</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students provided with safe and adequate drinking water (safe and clean drinking water)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>27,044 (G: 16,145)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools provided with adequate hygiene kits (like soap, handwashing liquid, etc.)</td>
<td>1,922</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students provided with adequate hygiene kits (like soap, handwashing liquid, etc.)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>54,550 (G: 31,013)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is difficult to analyse the response in terms of coverage as, aside from the data from the EiEWG shown above, it has not been possible to locate information on achievements, such as the types of materials produced for distance learning, the number of children reached while the schools were closed through different channels, the number of communities met, number of hygiene kits distributed or number of WASH facilities established. It may be that this data exists within Government, but was not readily accessible for the purpose of this situation analysis.

Phase 2 - Part of the reopening process

The Ministry of Education and development partners, through the EiEWG, developed plans and guidelines to facilitate the reopening of schools. Applications were also made to donors for funds to support implementation. This section sets out some of these activities.

The Ministry of Education’s Alternative Education Plan contained three scenarios as part of its recovery response plan. The three scenarios were based on the emergency situation ending in 1) June, 2) September, and 3) December of 2020. The plan identified five main activities:

1. **Rehabilitating and maintaining schools**: making schools ready for students and teachers by assessing and disinfecting schools in accordance with the health protocols of the MoPH.

2. **Assessment of students’ learning achievements during the quarantine period**: the students’ learning progress during the quarantine period will be assessed and analysed so as to identify the impact of the pandemic on learning.

3. **Fulfilling incomplete sessions**: based on the students’ levels of learning, and using the available resources and facilities, strategies such as increasing daily teaching hours, extending the school year duration and or adopting other educational approaches in classes will be implemented. Daily teaching hours will be increased in schools with one shift. The school year duration will be extended in schools with three shifts. In addition, heating materials will be provided for cold season schools.

4. **Final exam and promotion to upper grades**: to ease and support decision making on students’ suitability for progression through grades, a specific focus will be on taking final exams, analysing the results and setting exceptional norms.

5. **Increasing demand for education**: The following measures required to meet the increasing demand for education services will be implemented in communities to encourage children to go back to school and pursue their learning:
   - Social mobilization;
   - Provision of stationary;
   - Small maintenance activities and painting of school buildings;
   - Construction of girls’ and mixed school buildings;
   - Recruiting female teachers in rural schools.

As noted above, it has not been possible to identify the extent to which the activities above were implemented. Reports on this will be useful to facilitate learning in the future.

UNICEF Afghanistan produced four back-to-school TV and radio spots, including COVID-19 mitigation in schools for students and parents. It was intended that the spots would be broadcast throughout the country by 182 national and local TV and radio channels.

The Government developed protocols for reopening schools and allowed schools to reopen only if they were able to meet them. They included mask-wearing, provision of handwashing facilities, sanitisation of premises as well as social distancing. Given the situation of many of the schools, there were concerns that many schools, including CBE, would not be able to meet them.
This would disproportionately affect children from poorer areas. The EiEWG therefore advocated that CBE schools would be able to open too if they could meet some minimum standards, e.g., incorporating more handwashing and reducing class sizes. Later, the Ministry of Education decided that some of the measures, for example, the provision of masks, sanitisation and temperature checks, were not required or conditional for the reopening of CBE classes.

UNICEF obtained a grant from the Global Partnership for Education of $11 million to support the response to COVID-19 in public schools. According to the GPE website, the grant was given to support:

- Distributing WASH and hygiene supplies to schools. Training local community members and teachers to maintain WASH/hygiene equipment, and training school staff and students to adhere to social distancing guidelines and in the use of water and hygiene supplies.
- Recruiting and deploying ‘volunteer’ teachers, especially female. Providing teachers training to develop their capacities for learning assessments and remediation.
- Developing and implementing guidelines for student assessments and exams, monitoring and supporting teachers in analysing results and using them to prepare interventions enabling students to successfully complete their academic year.
- Distributing student learning kits, teacher pedagogical support kits, and classroom learning supplies.
- Supporting accelerated and remedial ‘make-up’ classes for students who have fallen below their grade level, with special attention to IDPs and students at risk of being stigmatized or abused.
- Public schools- especially those in COVID-19 high-risk provinces- are tracked, assessed and ready for reopening with the resources, information and materials they need to welcome children, and keep them and their teachers physically safe.

By October 2020, UNICEF had selected eight implementing partners to support (i) the reopening of 1,250 schools in 10 hard-to-reach emergency-affected provinces with high numbers of out-of-school children (OOSC); (ii) the provision of COVID-19 safe, child-friendly and grade- and gender-sensitive learning environment targeting 625,000 girls and boys; and (iii) the provision of remedial classes for girls and boys who had fallen far below grade level so that they are later readmitted at the right grade level. The grant runs until June 2021. UNICEF has provided psychosocial support through structured and semi-structured activities, including door-to-door visits and helplines for the provision of psychosocial support.

Funds were also mobilized to support community-based education, as described below.

Phase 3 - With schools reopened

Schools reopened for grades 10 and 11 in September 2020 and for all other grades from October 2020. Although schools have reopened, the Ministry of Education continues to face multiple challenges in providing quality education across the country. Schools still close due to conflict and attacks on education institutes continue. The Government is prioritising ensuring minimum WASH standards for students and teachers, which was necessary and will also assist in the case of outbreaks of other diseases. Gender-disaggregated latrines can also assist in increasing girls’ access to schools, so would offer an opportunity to build back better.

According to the minutes of the EiEWG meeting for October 2020, the Ministry of Education had not developed any guidelines for condensing the curriculum/subjects so that children can catch up on key areas of learning.

The EiEWG was prepared to provide support to schools in cold climates so that they could continue to study during the harsh winter months. However, these plans have not moved forward. In late 2020, the MoE closed schools in cold climates for the winter months. This means that the learning of approximately 7.5 million children will be affected. The EiEWG has expressed concerns that if children in cold climates are unable to continue studying throughout winter, it will be difficult for them to catch up on learning and complete their grades. Given the lack of data on the total number of children who were able to access distance learning materials while schools were closed between March and September 2020, the scale of this challenge is unknown. For some children, it is possible that between December 2019 and March 2021 they will have had just three months of classroom-based learning. Enabling these children to catch up on lost learning and resettle back into school is likely to be a huge challenge. Given that sustained absence from school often leads to children dropping out, it may be that many of these children never have the chance to continue their education. Out-of-school children surveys will be required to understand how many children dropped out of education (both schools and CBE) due to COVID-19. Yet, as noted above, collecting accurate data is a challenge.
UNICEF worked separately with the MoE to develop a detailed school reopening plan for the academic year 2020 and 2021, including curriculum adjustments. It also plans to provide catch-up and remedial classes to students based on assessment, with the aim to place students at the right grade level. UNICEF is also supporting the MoE to develop a student assessment guide.

Under the framework of the Global Education Coalition, UNESCO has developed eight toolkits (available at COVID-19 Response Toolkit) for governments and partner countries to support the response to COVID-19. The UNESCO office in Kabul is currently working with the MoE on contextualizing those toolkits. Eight chapters below developed by UNESCO and coalition partners provide COVID-19 education response frameworks, country practices and examples, concrete steps for interventions, and tactical action checklists to support governments. These approaches can be used regardless of the response stage - the kit is modular and each of its chapters can be used in a stand-alone manner:

1. Remote Learning Strategy
2. Re-enrolment
3. Remediation
4. Hybrid Learning
5. Organising for the response
6. Health, safety and resurgence protocols
7. Remote learning platforms
8. Recommitment and reform

In line with the safe operation of schools, the MoE has placed a greater focus on the improvement of WASH within schools. This was evident when the MoE requested the ECW to allow COVID-19 Response Plan funds allocated to distance learning to be reprogrammed to WASH. EiEWG will support the MoE to enhance WASH services by providing water storage containers and water chlorination facilities to schools in hard-to-reach areas.

The MoE also endorsed a guideline note developed by UNICEF which includes monitoring checklists and safety measures. According to the EiEWG dashboard, its partners have trained 1,235 teachers on safe school protocols. In addition, EiEWG will also train school management shuras on the importance of education, especially for girls. This will increase their awareness and skills in relation to gender, disability inclusion and negative socio-cultural practices.

A portion of the ECW funding for the COVID-19 Response Plan will support psychosocial and mental health activities, including delivery of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) messages, a child helpline and also mobile psychosocial support teams in project areas. It is intended that these will reach approximately 33,000 children.

At this stage, and based on the information available, it is difficult to provide details on the numbers of children that returned to school, those who may have dropped out and reasons for doing so, or whether girls or children with disabilities have been more severely affected by the closure, as feared. It is also not yet possible to see which children’s learning has been most affected. Assessments are due to take place and it would be useful to see the results to enable further planning or adaptation.
03

Thematic deep dive: Community-based education
The priority of the MoE and its partners is to improve education quality and relevance, ensuring that learning focuses on results and competencies, as outlined in the National Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 (NESP-III). Over the past 20 years, the Government of Afghanistan has supported the establishment of community-based education (CBE) in hard-to-reach areas of the country and also in those areas affected by conflict. At the start of 2020, over half a million children were learning through CBE in more than 15,000 classes nationwide. Community-Based Classes (CBC) has two mechanisms: Community-Based Schools (CBS) and Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALP). The Ministry of Education’s guidelines specifies that CBE can be established in any one of the three following conditions:

- A gender-appropriate school does not exist.
- There are no public schools within a three-kilometre radius or access to the public school is constrained by geographical features, e.g., rivers.
- There are more than 10 children that have missed the opportunity for formal schooling.

Community-based schools are classes that are set up in community buildings or homes. The children study the primary school curriculum in classes of approximately 25-30 children. The community-based school is overseen by a so-called ‘hub school’, and there is an intention that children transfer to the hub school at the end of year three. The ALP provides opportunities for children aged between 10-15 to complete their primary school curriculum in three years instead of six.

CBE has generated significant positive outcomes; its existence appears to have influenced community stakeholder attitudes towards education, and girls’ education in particular. A recent evaluation of CBEs found that overall programme targets in relation to access were surpassed, as over 26 per cent more CBSs were established than planned, and 55 per cent more students than anticipated were enrolled in CBSs, with a roughly even gender ratio in CBSs and a higher percentage of girls in ALPs than boys. This is a major result in a context where school enrolment in Afghanistan has been found to drop considerably – by 13.2 per cent for boys and 19 per cent for girls – for each additional mile a child has to walk to school. The social impact of having the opportunity to go to school in one’s own or nearby community, and the close contact of families with School Management Shuras (SMS), elders, influential decision-makers and teachers has led to high unmet demand for access to education, especially for girls. Another strong driver is that CBE is viewed as a culturally-appropriate avenue for girls’ education – they ensure the presence of female teachers in communities where parents are reticent to let their girls be taught by a male teacher.

There is strong evidence that CBE, in addition to increasing children’s enrolment, improves learning, and reduces gender disparity in Afghanistan. Previous assessments, such as a 2012 randomized evaluation, found that the introduction of village-based schools increased test scores by 0.51 standard deviations. Gender disparity in school enrolment was virtually eliminated and gender differences in test scores were significantly reduced by the intervention, highlighting the role of CBE in improving girls’ access and learning. A 2016 study found smaller but similarly positive effects on enrolment and learning, especially for girls.

Over the past 20 years, the Government of Afghanistan has supported the establishment of community-based education (CBE) in hard-to-reach areas of the country and also in those areas affected by conflict.
Community-based education is funded off-budget by international donors,91 including the European Commission’s Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Japan, UNICEF and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Funding is generally granted on an annual basis.

In 2018, ECW approved funding of $36m for a Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP). The MYRP targets the most vulnerable displaced populations, with a particular focus on girls, IDP and returnee refugee communities. The MYRP aims to bridge the divide between humanitarian and development programmes by offering funding for three years. According to programme documents, it aims to catalyse recovery, help implement Afghanistan’s Community-Based Education Policy and promote continuity of education. Interventions will improve access to education through community-based and innovative approaches; create an inclusive teaching and learning environment for emergency-affected girls and boys; improve continuity of education by facilitating opportunities for students to transition from lower to higher grades; improve the quality of learning; and create safer and more protective learning environments.92

CBE is implemented by a range of international and national non-government organizations. Organizations support centres and support learning in accordance with the national curriculum.

Globally, donors and other development partners are looking at good practices to replicate, adapt and fund within education in emergencies. UNICEF selected CBE for the Afghanistan thematic deep dive due to its unique role in supporting approximately half a million of the country’s most disadvantaged and marginalized children. This chapter explores the challenges and responses from donors, implementing partners, government and teachers in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic within CBE settings. It draws on plans, reports, interviews and a series of focus group discussions. Lessons learned and recommendations are presented in the following chapter.
3.1. The challenge

Community-based classes and accelerated learning programmes target some of the most marginalized children in Afghanistan, many of whom would be out of school were it not for CBE. In 2020, over 500,000 children were attending CBE. As mentioned above, the Ministry of Education with the support of development partners produced radio, TV and online lessons, but the majority of CBE learners had no access to that material. Officials and development partners were concerned that if CBE children were unable to access learning, they would fall behind and drop out of school. Gains that had been made to improve access to education through CBE over the past two decades could quickly unravel.

Supporting continuity of learning for children in CBE settings had its own unique challenges. Many of the children in CBE schools have illiterate parents, which impacts their ability to support their children to learn at home. The children are often living in remote villages which do not have as much access to news and the media as other locations. Official information about COVID-19 was accompanied by myths: many villagers were fearful about its potential impact. In addition, classes are taught by volunteer teachers in remote areas or provinces affected by conflict. Adequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are largely absent which means that many learners and teachers were unable to wash their hands as directed by the Ministry of Public Health and World Health Organization.

The challenge was enabling children attending CBE to continue learning. How could additional funding be mobilized to support children in CBE? How could implementing partners collaborate to ensure that learning would continue? How could teachers in CBE settings be empowered, trained and supported to try to minimize loss of learning? The next section explores how CBE partners responded.

3.2. The response

To date there are few documents detailing the response to COVID-19 in CBE settings. Therefore, this section draws largely from interviews that were held with stakeholders. Stakeholder interviewees included staff from UNICEF, ECW and implementing partners, provincial education department officials, school management shura members and teachers. They were conducted via Microsoft Teams with translation provided where necessary. Interviewees were selected by UNICEF.

This response section is split into two parts. The first one looks at the response while CBE centres were closed, and the second looks at how they were supported to reopen.

Coordination

Overall, the response to COVID-19 was well-coordinated through the Education in Emergencies Working Group. However, some respondents mentioned that there were some challenges with coordination at the top management level within the Ministry of Education regarding support to the development and implementation of the MoE’s COVID-19 response plan, as well as the school reopening guidelines. But at a technical level, the EiEWG responded well to the pandemic. Save the Children and UNICEF are co-leads of the working group, and the EiEWG was able to form two task forces in response to the Ministry of Education’s response plan. The first task force looked at students’ learning pathways and the second looked at teacher engagement. The EiEWG members collaborated to decide on a plan (details of which are provided below) to enable children to keep learning during this time.

Funding requests and plans

In addition to the Multi-Year Resilience Programme funding described above, within a month of the school closures, ECW provided additional support of $1.25 million through First Emergency Response (FER) funds to support existing cohorts of children in the CBE system. To ensure quicker disbursement of funds, ECW disbursed the funds to UNICEF as the existing grantee. The funds would then be passed on to implementing partners based upon their proposals. The ECW funds support COVID-19 awareness campaigns, mental health and psychosocial support, WASH, distance learning and capacity building of teachers. The support is targeted at some of the most marginalized children in the country. The additional support will reach 32,600 children (almost 20,000 girls) of which 22,500 are thought to be IDPs.
Development of materials

At the outset, there was a rapid assessment using phone calls to establish the kind of support and materials required by teachers in order to assist their students with learning while the schools were closed. CBE implementing partners worked together with the Ministry of Education and teacher trainers to prepare child-friendly, self-study materials in Dari and Pashtu. They covered language, Islamic studies and mathematics. The materials were based on content that the children had learned the previous term. It had been decided that it would be difficult to introduce new content at this time, and so a decision was made to focus instead on revising and extending what had already been learned in the classroom.

Materials were developed in chapters for grades 1 to 5. Each chapter was designed to last for one week. The materials were prepared centrally and then distributed to teachers.

Teaching

Teachers were responsible for visiting children in their homes and introducing the self-study materials. After one week, they collected the materials and gave children the following week’s chapter. Some teachers reported that they visited children twice a week to support their learning. Government officials mentioned that some CBE teachers also continued to teach their children in small groups throughout the period when schools were meant to be closed. Some community members had questioned why children were allowed to play outside together but not study together and so did not obey the instructions from the Provincial Education Department (PED).

The teachers had mixed feelings about the teaching. They found that in households where parents were illiterate, it was much more difficult for children to learn. They also noted that some of the lessons required practical work, roleplay and group work and some children were unable to do those activities. Some teachers also lamented that visiting the children was time-consuming.

Messages around health, WASH

In addition to providing learning materials to the children, the teachers also helped to disseminate messages to support efforts to reduce virus transmission and information about how to seek help from clinics if required. Teachers are often trusted members of communities and therefore were able to share information to their communities and dispel some myths. Teachers interviewed said that they participated in some training about COVID-19 on how to protect themselves and the children. They also received some brochures and hygiene kits which they distributed to their community. The teachers also reported giving psychosocial support to learners and parents.

Ongoing support to teachers

Master trainers set up WhatsApp groups to provide ongoing support to teachers and also used mobile phones to call them. Government officials noted that the WhatsApp groups were used to share information about the pandemic and what they were doing in response. Teachers used the WhatsApp group to provide feedback on which parts of the materials children found easy or difficult to engage with. Some implementing partners, for instance, Save the Children, were able to provide teachers with top-ups for their mobile SIM cards which enabled them to better communicate with master trainers. Support may have varied across provinces and implementing partners as teachers interviewed said that they had been given some initial training but no ongoing support through WhatsApp or other means.

Engaging children (particularly those more marginalized)

CBE does enable some of the poorest and most marginalized children to access education. School Management Shura (councils) members are responsible for identifying children and asking their parents to enrol them; they are also supported by religious leaders and local elders. Government interviewees mentioned that some illiterate parents would not send their daughters to public school but would send them to study through CBE, as it is home-based. They also shared examples of parents seeing positive changes in their children, after which they were happier for them to study outside of the village.

During COVID-19, interviewees mentioned that girls’ CBE classes were more active than those for boys. Stakeholders reported that many CBE teachers and community mobilizers were female and that they were requested to specifically keep an eye on girls at this time. In Herat, for example, 97 per cent of teachers are women and 83 per cent of children in accelerated learning classes are girls.84 It was stated that where there were female teachers, they were better able to support the learners as some families did not want male teachers to teach the girls at home. Government officials said that they had heard of many instances when the classes were not running where girls had supported each other with their learning, but often boys had used the time to play cricket and other sports. It is not known how widespread this was.

Children with disabilities were not provided with any adapted materials from which to study. Stakeholders said
that there was no time or resources to develop materials in braille, for example. Respondents did report that children with disabilities who attend CBE were visited in their homes in the same way as other children. If they had parents and carers who were able to teach them, then they were able to learn as much as other children.

Parental and community involvement
The implementing partners had anticipated parents being cautious about the home learning, but reports suggest that they became more engaged with their children’s learning as they had more frequent interactions with the teachers. It is reported that the increased engagement made them more committed to supporting their children to learn. Teachers said that, in the past, parents had seen the education of the children as being the teacher’s responsibility. But after having had home learning visits, they started to also see their role in the learning process. In addition, the Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan (WADAN), a local NGO, found through weekly reports it collected from community mobilizers that religious leaders were also very supportive of home-based learning.

Reopening
In mid-September, public schools were told that they would be able to open from the beginning of October 2020 as long as they met standard operating procedures (SOPs). The SOPs included the taking of temperatures in each lesson and all children to handwash/sanitize between classes. Given that the CBE classes would be unable to meet the government’s standard operating procedures, the Education in Emergencies Working Group had to advocate to allow the CBE classes to reopen. The EiEWG prioritized handwashing station across CBE centres and distributed hygiene kits.

Some CBE implementing partners were able to put in place safe school guidelines so that the centres could open. They then trained teachers and shuras on how to open safely. At some centres they were able to install handwashing stalls, messaging around social distancing was reinforced and communities were advised to wear masks or scarfs to minimize transmission. It was also decided to close CBE classes for 14 days if a child or teacher tested positive for COVID-19. At the time of conducting the interview, Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR) had been unable to reopen its classes as they
did not have a budget to purchase resources to make the centres COVID-19-safe and were negotiating with their donor for additional funds. Other centres supported by International Rescue Committee (IRC) with funding through Education Cannot Wait in Helmand had also been unable to operate as they were awaiting funding.

In classes that were able to reopen, teachers had to teach the children in small groups so that they could try to physically distance, which required them to teach more hours for the same remuneration. The teachers said they were happy to do this as many of the children in the village were relatives or the children of friends. The teachers interviewed taught grade 1 and said that children needed more support to learn than in previous years, but that the smaller class sizes enabled them to assist as needed. They were prioritising the teaching of maths and language in the classroom. UNICEF interviewees said that other non-foundational subjects would still be taught as self-learning.

Given that CBE classes are funded off-budget by international donors, they are closely regulated and monitored. The government officials also noted that teachers had masks or scarves and that teachers were working with small groups. They checked that the centres had handwashing facilities and soap. The government officials mentioned that some health messages at the village level were not followed as well as expected and attributed this to there being relatively few or no COVID-19 cases in those areas.

Once the schools opened in October 2020, parents allowed their children to return to the CBE centres and seemed to be excited to let them go to study again. It was reported that CBE has really increased the value of education among parents. Government officials and teachers reported that the majority of children returned to the CBE classes once they reopened and put this down to the strong support within the community for those classes. Teachers reported that some parents refused to send their children back due to a fear of COVID-19.

Respondents mentioned that CBE is an effective way to reach out-of-school children, even in times of crises, but they are not a long-term solution. Children attending grades 1-3 are expected to transition to the hub school at grade 4, yet there often isn’t room to accommodate all of the children or they live in locations which are far away or are unsafe to walk to. Other schools do not have a female teacher which affects girls’ attendance. The government interviewees thought that extending CBE to later grades would better support the retention of children in schools.

Lost learning

Interviewees were unsure how much learning had been lost during the time the schools had been closed or not fully operational. Government officials said that some learning assessments had shown that children had lower results than expected. Implementing partners stated that they planned to test children in November 2020 and develop plans for remedial learning. As mentioned above, children attending schools in cold climates are likely to experience higher levels of learning loss due to the very short time in which they were able to learn face-to-face if the CBE schools also closed. At the time of writing, it is unclear the extent to which any testing or remedial programmes have been implemented. It is also unclear whether or not CBE classes are also expected to close over the winter period until March 2021.

Monitoring and evaluation

During the time the schools were closed, interviewees said that teachers had been able to monitor some learning when checking learners’ work in their homes. In turn, master trainers and NGOs used phone calls to monitor teachers. The Provincial Education Department (PED) team also visited CBE centres once they had reopened.

Yet, it is difficult to say how well the response worked at scale due to the paucity of data. Aside from the data provided above from the EiEWG, which also is incomplete, no other data was available. It is therefore unclear how many children returned to the CBE centres once they reopened, who those children were, and which children did not return. The extent to which children had engaged with learning materials while away from schools is also not known, and neither is how their learning, interpersonal skills and well-being were affected. Much more information is needed on this in order to better learn lessons, but without over-burdening partners with bureaucratic processes.
3.3. Analysing the response

The EIEWG’s coordinated response to COVID-19 in CBE settings demonstrated how some of the world’s most marginalized children could continue learning. Because CBE is rooted in the community with a robust support network and uses teachers from that community, it was able to adapt to restrictions put in place to control the virus. On the whole, the implementing partners also had access to funding which they were able to use to adapt materials and distribute to the community level.

As CBE was developed as a solution to ongoing crises and challenges, its ability to provide continuity of learning when faced with uncertainty and adversity should not be too surprising. The interviews showed that the delivery methods put in place were able to offer children an opportunity to keep learning and to also engage their parents more in the process, in turn making them more supportive of education. The use of paper-based modules was appropriate for those children, as many live in areas which do not have access to radio, television or the internet. CBE has demonstrated its potential to reach and keep some of the most marginalized children learning and to better engage parents. Studies elsewhere have shown that providing parents with information on the benefits of education increases their support and children’s learning. It would be good to see whether or not the greater involvement of parents in learning instigated by the pandemic is sustained and has any positive impact on student retention and learning in the longer term.

Although the interviews clearly showed the benefits of CBE, it wasn’t possible to obtain any data to see how many children benefited. Details on children’s gender and location were also unavailable. Data on the numbers of children restarting CBE classes was also inaccessible at this time. It is unclear if all children returned and, if not, which children dropped out. Furthermore, no information was found on the total number of teachers trained, the number of materials distributed, nor their content. In order to assess the effectiveness of this support, specific information is also needed on the types of lessons and activities that worked well or less well, and the extent to which the children were able to learn. In order to have a clearer picture, it would also be useful to assess how children’s interpersonal skills and well-being fared. Feedback from parents and children on what worked well and less well would also be useful for future planning.

While there are only limited funds available, and much of it is rightly spent on implementation activities, for learning and better planning, it would be helpful to obtain data as cost-effectively as possible.

Given that the CBE centres are dependent on external funding, delays in funds reaching implementing partners can have huge impacts on learning. Although funds were mobilized rapidly from ECW, due to changes in MoE priorities, for example, they did not reach intended recipients as quickly as intended. Due to the lateness of some funds, implementing partners were unable to conduct activities as planned or purchase handwashing materials so that they could reopen centres and children could return as safely as possible. Implementers need to have the flexibility to be able to react to shocks, such as a pandemic, within their budget allocations to reduce the impact on learners.

Sustainability

Recent evaluations of CBE programmes point to their successes in the delivery of education and acceptance by the Ministry of Education. But there are obstacles to scaling up and long-term sustainability. As one evaluation stated, “The policy foundation is in place for implementing scale up and there is significant individual technical capacity within the MOE. However, system capacity – especially for monitoring and data management – still need to be developed. There are also significant funding and ownership concerns for sustainability that present barriers to handover of CBE programming.” At present, it seems unrealistic for the Government to be able to fund CBE, especially if it continues to grow and support more marginalized children.

A 2019 evaluation found that while classes can be set up by NGOs, they are often not sustained once the NGO leaves. The study found that of the 226 villages to which control of CBE classes was handed in 2011, only 48 of the communities continued to have a school within 2.5km by 2014.

At present, according to figures from UNICEF shown in Table 8, the yearly cost per child in CBE classes is $119 for CBS, including overheads and $142 for ALC. This is a much higher allocation per pupil than in public schools and so at present would be unsustainable for the Government to fund. For CBE to be expanded or adopted by government systems, its implementers need to identify ways to reduce the cost in implementation without affecting enrolment, learning or community support. This is a challenge which all partners supporting the programmes need to consider and discuss with teachers, shuras, communities, local governments and the Ministry of Education.
After identifying ways to reduce the cost of CBE, partners can consider how to share costs. One idea to explore is including funding of CBE as part of other social protection packages responding to the impact of COVID-19. This could be in the form of a universal child grant, which could be given to parents and contribute towards the cost of CBE. It may also be worth considering if any of the recurrent costs can be borne by the community, as has happened with community-based education in other settings.

### TABLE 8 | UNIT COSTS PER YEAR FOR CBE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECONOMY INDICATOR</th>
<th>CBE UNICEF PROJECT ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excluding overheads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of learning materials per student</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher salaries, average cost per student per year</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher training, average costs per student per year</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Shura, average cost per student year</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS unit costs per student, per year (graduate)</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALC unit costs per student, per year (graduate)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 8 shows, CBE is also reliant on learning materials and teacher development provided by NGOs, which can be expensive. More affordable alternatives that still offer good returns on investment in terms of community engagement, children’s attendance and learning could be explored and tested. The Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Social Effects of Community-Based Education in Afghanistan (ALSE) study found that NGOs can work effectively through village community councils to sustain their CBE programmes at 53.7 per cent of the cost of NGO management with similar outcomes in participation and learning.98 Integrating plans to transfer ownership and implementation to community organizations at the outset of future programmes could provide a more affordable model for the Government.

It is clear that CBE is heavily reliant on donor funding, and interviewees didn’t suggest any ways to continue without external financial support. Given the dependence on external funding for CBE, perhaps longer funding windows can be agreed upon as one-year programmes seem quite short. The ECW-funded MYRP is one solution to this and enables better planning. Other donors are also able to contribute funding to the programme, thereby increasing efficiency. The MYRP has a commitment to support the sustainability of the CBE programmes, which means working alongside MoE on its institutionalization along with the Ministry of Finance and the President’s Office.

There are ongoing discussions with the MoE on two key areas which will support continuity of learning for children in CBE settings. One discussion centres on better supporting the transition of children to hub schools and working towards reducing or removing some of the supply-side barriers which currently hinder the transition, such as lack of space, resources or transport. Another discussion is ongoing about the possibility to extend CBE to higher grades so that children, particularly girls, can continue learning within their villages. If this is possible, it would support the retention of those children in schools and enable them to build upon their foundational skills.
Lessons learned & recommendations
4.1. Lessons learned

This situation analysis has demonstrated how some of the world’s most marginalized children could continue their learning during the COVID-19 pandemic due to effective stakeholder coordination, planning, mobilization of resources and community support. Community-based education was set up in response to crises and lack of access to formal education; from its outset it was designed to be resilient to the climatic and political shocks often experienced in Afghanistan. The effective coordination of the Education in Emergencies Working Group in responding to the pandemic meant that response plans and support could quickly be put in place.

Although conclusive data is unavailable, it is likely that children in CBE settings may well have had more opportunities to continue their learning than the majority of children who access public schools but had little or no home access to the distance education lessons that were broadcast via the internet, TV and radio. Furthermore, even if children do have access to those mediums, it doesn’t mean that they are able to access them at the right time for learning. The ability of the CBE system to rapidly develop and distribute self-learning materials and support teachers to share messages with communities about the pandemic was commendable. This was not cost-free, though, and it would be too expensive for the Ministry of Education to adopt the same approach for learners across all public schools.

4.2. Plans to build back better

From the interviews and documents reviewed, a number of priorities for building back better emerged.

The first of these relates to improving access to WASH across CBE settings, as well as public schools. The challenges related to access to latrines, especially those that are gender segregated, were known before COVID-19, but due to the pandemic and the importance placed on handwashing, access is being prioritized. Not only will WASH facilities enable more children to reduce their risk to COVID-19, but an increase in handwashing with soap is known to reduce vulnerability to a host of other viruses and bacteria which can cause other illnesses. In addition, if gender-segregated facilities are provided, particularly at hub schools, then this may contribute to an increase in girls’ enrolment and attendance. Furthermore, children attending schools and getting exposed to positive infection control behaviours may act as change agents in their families and communities to help promote hygiene practices.

A range of self-learning materials was created and can continue to be used. There had been a plan to trial self-learning materials for CBE; the pandemic accelerated its implementation. If an assessment of these materials is conducted to understand which best supported learning, then they can be re-used in the event of other closures or to target children who are unable to access CBE for extended periods of time. In a similar vein, the efficacy of the audio-visual materials that were developed for the internet, TV and radio can also be tested. If proven effective then these materials will be a resource that could be used to accompany existing learning materials or to increase some access among children who are out of school.
There are plans to test children to see what remedial education is required. The MoE and development partners need to ensure that any children that have fallen behind are supported to catch up. Development partners have access to funding for this. It may be worth considering multi-grade classes that split children according to their learning levels. Evidence has shown this to be effective in improving learning, particularly reading, in other contexts.

The response within CBE settings has demonstrated its resilience and flexibility. In order to ensure that maximum benefit is obtained, discussions on expanding CBE to other grades are to be prioritized. There will also be more discussion on how best to support children to graduate from CBS into hub schools and how those attending ALC can best reintegrate into secondary education where possible.

4.3. Recommendations for increasing resilience to future shocks

Community-based education is already a solution to shocks, and its ability to adapt, and to some extent withstand, COVID-19 is a testament to its resilience. Given the high numbers of out-of-school children, as well as the continuing fragile situation in Afghanistan, CBE offers both short- and medium-term solutions to providing access to learning. Given the variety of shocks in Afghanistan as described above, the recommendations here are mainly related to increasing resilience to future pandemics, although some may also be applicable in other circumstances.

Expand CBE to more remote areas and investigate how it can be expanded to support children in grades 4-6 who are unable to transit to hub schools.

CBE has proven effective in enrolling and educating children in CBS and ALC. Partners should urgently look at how the model can be expanded to other parts of the country where there are many learners out of school. As it is expanded, opportunities for cost-saving and also cost-sharing with communities or government should be integrated from the outset to increase institutionalisation and opportunity for sustainability. Lessons can be drawn from studies which have shown the merits of training community members from the outset and reducing the need for so much external resourcing from NGOs.

In addition to expanding to other parts of the country, its expansion to other grades where children have difficulty transitioning to hub schools is also recommended. By working with community volunteers to support upper-primary grades, children may be able to learn close to their home and stay in education for longer. While it is intended that children will have access to public schools in the medium- to long term, extending CBE to grades 4-6 is likely to fulfill the demand in the short- to medium term.

NESP III sees the number of children in CBE falling over the next ten years as more children enter public schools. If CBE is expanded to other districts or grades during this time, the number is likely to grow from its current position, but may then reduce.

Given that learning levels through CBE are comparable and sometimes better than public schools, if a more cost-effective and sustainable model could be implemented widely, then this could mark a move towards CBE more broadly across the whole sector.

Develop better ways to capture data for a clear, real-time understanding of what is happening at scale.

In order to better support evidence-based planning and adaptation, there is a need to have timely, complete and accurate data at scale. The lack of data across educational settings makes it difficult for the government to know where to target support and resources. The response to COVID-19 seems comprehensive and extensive, yet data is needed to show just how many pupils, families, teachers and communities were reached, the proportion of materials that reached learners, and their ability to engage with the self-learning materials to learn. Ideally, data would be collected electronically, perhaps via an app such as Kobo Collect, at each centre and then aggregated by district and province with checks by government staff to improve quality and address any immediate findings. Any pupil data collected should be disaggregated by gender, age and disability status.

In addition to immediate feedback on the implementation of activities, there is a need to collect data on children's learning levels, mental health and social and emotional well-being to feed into longer-term planning activities. Information about the degree of learning loss is required so that, at the classroom level, teachers are able to support their learners and, at the macro level, policymakers can consider whether adjustments are needed to the curriculum and examinations in the medium term. Teachers are best placed to collect information on pupils and to act
on it, but may also need support to do that. Aggregated data on what is required can also inform government and development partners on what resources or training packages to develop to support teachers.

The implementation of activities across CBE settings has potentially reached hundreds of thousands of children. The online EiEWG dashboard provides some good information on a monthly basis, yet it does not cover all settings and not all partners are completing it on time. Incentives to submit timely data could be explored. If many partners find monthly reporting too onerous, then partners could consider quarterly reports. The dashboard could be expanded so that data on compliance with safe operations, attendance and drop-out rates may also be included; however, collecting more data needs to be offset against any loss of accuracy or timeliness that may be incurred through the increased burden in data collection.

The Ministry of Education has an EMIS website, yet at present it does not seem to capture data from the CBE system. In the mid-to-longer-term, all children in CBE settings need to be captured in the EMIS so that their journey through the education system is tracked at the individual level. There is routine data that is required on CBE related to attendance and learning levels that could be collected or reviewed by the provincial education departments. Reporting of CBE and ALP needs to be standardized across all settings, and partners should work with the Ministry of Education to do that. If attendance data could be submitted weekly, then children that are at risk of dropping out may be identified.

Aside from CBE, monitoring data on the Ministry of Education’s response plan across all schools would be useful for longer-term planning. This will enable lesson learning in case other shutdowns occur during this, or further, pandemics.

Consider ways to continue providing distance education for when crises happen, but also investigate other ways to better support children attending public schools in times of closure, especially for those who do not have access to radio, television or the internet, to avoid increasing inequities.

As part of global initiatives to connect all schools and learners to the internet, partners should explore opportunities for partnerships with mobile network operators to supply internet solutions to, at a minimum, hub schools as a first step, and some devices to share for CBE/ALP classes in order to develop digital skills. Even if those devices would function in an offline modality, it is possible to envisage that they be loaded with teaching and learning materials from the online repositories such as Raspberry Pi, which could be downloaded on devices from hub schools, or from the nearest internet access point. Then lessons could be carried out using some of those materials (like videos of lessons), and they could form a repository of grade-wise resources to be accessed in times of school closures. Providing access to resources on devices is just one step. Children need to be able to access the devices and be supported to read/watch and understand the resources. Ideally, this should also be monitored by the teacher.

Finally, given remoteness and limitations, in the short term, the most appropriate alternative modality for continuity of learning still remains printed self-learning materials. Given the cost of printing and distributing, simple contextual, local solutions to make print-outs more durable would be important.

Ensure teachers are trained on health and safety measures as well as provided with training to support learning, particularly for those most excluded.

Enabling teachers to support their learners during times of crisis is paramount. CBE teachers showed resilience and flexibility. With support and guidance, they were able to support parents and communities by sharing information about the pandemic and dispelling myths. They were also able to educate families on good practices such as handwashing, mask-wearing and social distancing. CBE teachers did this with no additional funding, but because they were members of those communities and so were deeply invested in ensuring it was as safe a place as possible. If future waves of COVID-19 occur, then teachers have demonstrated that they are able to support the national government in educating communities on health and safety, working above and beyond their roles as CBE teachers.

In case of future shocks or closures, it is recommended that teachers are supported to better include children who have been unable to learn well at home due to a disability or to their family circumstances. They may also need support in how best to work with school management shuras to reach children who drop out or are at risk of dropping out.

It is also recommended that further support be given to the teachers themselves and their well-being. This can be in the form of peer-to-peer support mechanisms to share best practices, challenges and successes. Teacher-mentors may also be identified to support less experienced teachers.
**Mobilize communities to support and sustain learning through CBE**

An unintended outcome of home-learning was the perceived increase of parental support for education and community-based education. While data would be welcome to assess how prevalent this support was, it is recommended that teachers, NGOs and the Government build upon this goodwill. Information on the benefits of education can be shared more widely with parents to increase their demand for it and lend their support to the expansion of CBE within their communities so that their children can continue to learn close to home. They can also advocate to ensure that their children have places in hub schools or secondary schools to continue their learning. CBE settings can also be used as entry points for parenting sessions, which could also support early childhood development in the absence of much formal support. If willing, teachers or other community members could provide interactive sessions to parents on topics such as nutrition, childcare, health and well-being. Evidence from other settings have shown positive results in terms of parental interactions with their children's education and the provision of a wider range of food groups to children.99

**Reduce dependence on donor-funded, NGO-implemented CBE**

In order for CBE to be sustainable and institutionalized, it needs to become more affordable and to work in communities without the ongoing support of NGOs. Which is not to say NGOs should not set up CBE, but they should work with village shuras and others to sustain the classes over the longer term. Where government - and village-level community institutions are trained at the outset, they can act as an effective structure for delivering CBS and ALPs. It is, therefore, necessary for NGOs to focus from the outset on building the system and structure to maintain the classes in addition to training the teacher and mobilizing resources.

Furthermore, it is recommended that partners develop investment cases for the programme scale-up, to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of the model and positive return on investment. Further research is needed to show CBE's effectiveness at scale. Based on the evidence of this initiative being a positive ‘value for money’ solution, partners can drive a fund-raising campaign for programme expansion, and look for innovative funding mechanisms. One idea is to explore how it could be partially funded by household contributions from families receiving a universal child grant as part of current social protection packages. The assumption here is that families receiving the grant per child would spend it on education and health, once basic survival needs are met.

**4.4. Conclusion**

This report describes how the education sector in Afghanistan has responded to COVID-19 with a deep dive into community-based education. Its objectives were to:

- Assess and estimate the various impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic on the education sector and stakeholders in Asia; and
- Identify examples of promising responses and strategies in education and associated social sectors, which can be shared with other countries.

As the report has shown, at present, it is not possible to assess with any degree of certainty the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholders in Afghanistan due to the paucity of comprehensive data on access and learning. From the interviews conducted and data available through the Education in Emergencies Working Group, it appears that some children were reached through the TV and digital lessons and through community-based education, yet an accurate number is unavailable. As there has not yet been an assessment of learning, it is also unclear how much learning was lost.

From the information available, it seems that teachers in the CBE context were well supported and seemed able to assist learners to continue learning from their homes, and later in small groups. Some parents also became more engaged in their children’s learning during the process. It is hoped that this will be sustained into the future. In terms of implications towards achieving SDG4: Education 2030, CBE has shown that it has real potential to make huge contributions towards that goal. CBE evolved as a response to protracted crises and a range of issues prohibiting meaningful access to education for millions of children across Afghanistan.

As shown in this situation analysis, CBE was able to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to provide learning opportunities to some of the most marginalized children across the country. It is likely that higher proportions of children attending CBE continued learning during the times the schools were closed than their counterparts in public schools due to the coordinated and targeted response that was implemented. The response was grounded in the realities of the children's and teachers' lives and was supported by the communities.
There is great potential for CBE to go further in terms of geographical reach and in increasing the number of grades it serves, yet more investment is required. To attract more investment, better data is needed on reach, retention, learning and sustainability. Furthermore, ways to reduce the cost of CBE need to be explored without reducing its quality or outcomes. Community-based education clearly has potential to bring contextual, locally-appropriate learning to children close to their homes.

The past 20 years have shown its potential to operate in challenging circumstances, and the events of 2020 further demonstrated its resilience and adaptability. With further support and planning, over the next decade, it could become a model for many countries to follow to dramatically reduce the number of out-of-school children, increase the number of girls staying in school and achieve improved learning outcomes.
Annex: Interview questions

CBE teachers interview questions

Introductions
Could you explain how you supported your students and families through CBE before COVID-19?
Prior to school closures, were any preparations made for continuing CBE? If so, what?
How did you initially respond to the pandemic?

During school closures
- What support did you receive? (e.g., materials, training, well-being support)
- How effective was the support you received? (strengths/weaknesses)
- How did you support continuity of learning for the following groups:
  - Learners
  - Parents
  - Children with disabilities
  - Girls
  - Those in remote areas
  - Other marginalized children
- What knowledge and skills enabled/constrained the response?
- How did gender and social norms affect the response?
- What good practices/success stories have you seen?

School reopening
- How have you been able to open your centre safely?
- How have you got girls and boys back to school?
- Have delivery modalities changed? If so, how?
- How have your pupils been on their return to school?
- Have you assessed the children’s learning? If so, how?
- Are you providing any remedial education?
- How are you able to reach the most marginalized children? Are any special programmes in place?
- How are you supporting well-being and child protection?

What are the main lessons learned? Are there things you would have done differently?
Going forward, how resilient do you think CBE is to future shocks?
How do you view the challenge of sustainability of CBE and what recommendations do you have for the successful continuation of the programme in the long term?

ECW interview questions

Introductions
Could you explain how ECW has supported CBE prior to COVID-19?
Prior to school closures, were any preparations made?
What?
How did you initially respond to the pandemic?

During school closures
- How did ECW support continuity of learning?
  - Learners
  - Teachers
  - Parents
  - Government of Afghanistan
  - Children with disabilities
  - Girls
  - Those in remote areas
  - Other marginalized children
- What knowledge and skills enabled/constrained the response?
- How did gender and social norms affect the response?
- How were decisions made on what to do and who was involved in them?
- What good practices/success stories have you seen?
School reopening

- To what extent have centres been able to operate safely? How has safety been addressed?
- Have delivery modalities changed? How?
- Has the curriculum changed? Any remedial education? How will assessment take place?
- How are you able to reach the most marginalized? Are any special programmes in place?
- How are you supporting well-being and child protection?

What are the main lessons learned? Are there things you would have done differently?

Going forward, how resilient do you think CBE is to future shocks?

What plans for scaling up do you have, given that CBE has probably proven to be more effective in continuing learning than other government schools?

How do you view the challenge of sustainability of your programmes and what recommendations would they have for the successful continuation of the programme in the long term?

Questions for CBE Implementing partners

General questions

Could you give a brief overview of your CBE programme?

How did you initially respond to the pandemic?

How has the response changed as centres have reopened?

What good practices/success stories have you seen?

What are the main lessons learned? Are there things you would have done differently?

To what extent have IPs shared experiences and coordinated responses?

Going forward, how resilient do you think CBE is to future shocks?

Targeted questions (to ask if they are not covered in responses to questions above)

How has COVID-19 affected access to and participation in learning in CBE centres?

To what extent have centres been able to operate safely? How has safety been addressed?

How have parents and communities participated in educational provision and support to well-being?

How have community and religious leaders been involved in supporting learning and/or well-being of children?

How have CBE teachers been supported at this time? (materials, delivery modalities, finances)

Have delivery modalities changed during this pandemic? How?

How have you addressed health and well-being for teachers and learners?

Has additional financial support been available for IPs and/or vulnerable families?

How is the programme reaching the most marginalized children through CBE? Are there certain groups that still don’t have access or have fallen off behind during COVID-19, such as children with disabilities or adolescent girls?

What plans for scaling up do you have, given that CBE has probably proven to be more effective in continuing learning than other government schools?

How do you view the challenge of sustainability of your programmes? What recommendations would you have for the successful continuation of the programme over the long term?

Have you engaged with the government/MoE in meaningful ways to ensure ownership and sustainability?

Government interview questions

Introductions

Could you explain how you supported CBE prior to COVID-19?

Prior to school closures, were any preparations made for continuing CBE? If so, what?

How did you initially respond to the pandemic?

During school closures

- How did you support continuity of learning for the following groups:
  - Learners
  - Teachers
  - Parents
  - Children with disabilities
  - Girls
  - Those in remote areas
  - Other marginalized children
- What knowledge and skills enabled/constrained the response?
- How did gender and social norms affect the response?
- How were decisions made on what to do and who was involved in them?
- What good practices/success stories have you seen?
School reopening

- To what extent have centres been able to operate safely? How has safety been addressed?
- Have delivery modalities changed? How?
- Has the curriculum changed? Any remedial education?
  - How will assessment take place?
- How are you able to reach the most marginalized? Are any special programmes in place?
- How are you supporting well-being and child protection?

What are the main lessons learned? Are there things you would have done differently?

Going forward, how resilient do you think CBE is to future shocks?

What plans for scaling up CBE do you have?

How do you view the challenge of sustainability of CBE and what recommendations do you have for the successful continuation of the programme over the long term?

UNICEF interview questions

Introductions

Could you explain how UNICEF has supported CBE prior to COVID-19?

Prior to school closures, were any preparations made?

What?

How did you initially respond to the pandemic?

During school closures

- How did UNICEF support continuity of learning?
  - Learners
  - Teachers
  - Parents
  - Government of Afghanistan
  - Children with disabilities
  - Girls
  - Those in remote areas
  - Other marginalized children

- What knowledge and skills enabled/constrained the response?
- How did gender and social norms affect the response?
- How were decisions made on what to do and who was involved in them?
- What good practices/success stories have you seen?

School reopening

- To what extent have centres been able to operate safely? How has safety been addressed?
- Have delivery modalities changed? How?
- Has the curriculum changed? Any remedial education?
  - How will assessment take place?
- How are you able to reach the most marginalized? Are any special programmes in place?
- How are you supporting well-being and child protection?

What are the main lessons learned? Are there things you would have done differently?

Going forward, how resilient do you think CBE is to future shocks?

What plans for scaling up CBE do you have given that CBE has probably proven to be more effective in continuing learning than other government schools?

How do you view the challenge of sustainability of your programmes and what recommendations would they have for the successful continuation of the programme in the long term?
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This report reviews the impacts of and responses to COVID-19 on education in Afghanistan, provides reflections on lessons learned so far in Afghanistan’s COVID-19 response, and analyzes capacity gaps for recovery. It explores successful elements of the Government response, issues and challenges faced, and strategies adopted to continue students’ learning during school closure. It also looks to the future, in building back better and increasing the resilience of the education system to future shocks.

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