

Chapter 13

Protecting the gains—education

13.1 Uncertainty, a difficult security environment, reduced funds for development assistance but a continuing and desperate need for such aid means that donors need to review their programs and to plan ahead carefully. Reports and evidence before the committee emphasised the need to consolidate and safeguard the gains made to date. Advice from sources such as the recent review of the ARTF highlighted the importance of concentrating on sectors that have a proven track record of success.

13.2 In the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Afghanistan and the Government of Australia, 'Development Framework Agreement', Australia pledged to:

...deliver assistance in sectors where Australia has particular expertise, comparative advantage and can have the most impact, with particular focus on education, agriculture, mining and public financial management to improve social and economic development for the people of Afghanistan, end violence against women, and ensure the equality of men and women, boys and girls.¹

13.3 A number of witnesses referred to education as a specific area where, in their view, Australia could direct its attention most productively. In this chapter, the committee looks at the work that Australia is doing and intends to do in this area.

Education

13.4 Professor Maley acknowledged that capacity building with the kind of funds that international donors have is not going to transform Afghanistan, but it could begin to change the skill set of people who are there on the ground. He noted:

Here the old Chinese saying that 'a single spark can start a prairie fire' does have a certain amount of resonance. What is encouraging in Afghanistan is the incredible talent of some of the younger people. The population statistically gets younger every day—70 per cent of the people are under the age of 25. The best of the young people in Afghanistan are as bright as you will find in any country in the world, and they are a generation that has been exposed to the forces of globalisation in the way that no previous Afghan generation ever has.²

13.5 Other witnesses similarly highlighted the central importance of education as a means of achieving sustainable development. Mr Poulter supported the notion that

1 Memorandum of Understanding, 'Development Framework Agreement', between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Government of Australia, 2012–2017, p. 4, <http://www.aisaid.gov.au/countries/southasia/afghanistan/Documents/aus-afghanistan-development-framework-agreement-2012-17.pdf> (accessed 18 January 2013).

2 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 11.

education was a key building block for a healthy society.³ Mr Leahy agreed with the view that 'the transition from aid-dependency to self-sufficiency involves people coming through schools, training and these sorts of things'.⁴ He stressed that this was a long term project—in effect a generational process.⁵

13.6 Mr Rahatullah Naeem, Managing Director for the Afghan Development Association, informed the committee that for long-term sustainability and development, primary education was very important to raise the literacy rate.⁶ Given the importance of education, he suggested that Australia prioritise its funding for primary education in the southern region of Afghanistan where literacy rates were very low.⁷ While most witnesses recognised the importance of primary education, some also stressed the need to ensure that there were pathways to higher education.

13.7 Dr Bizhan noted that, in comparison to other donors to Afghanistan, Australia had a comparative advantage and expertise in a few areas including education which could 'yield high return in terms of poverty reduction, economic stability, and investment creation...' He gave the example of Australian scholarships for young professionals who could 'make lasting contributions in Afghanistan in the area of policy formulation and change management'.⁸

13.8 The committee has described Afghanistan's poor record on education starkly demonstrated by the lack of opportunities for girls and women to access education. Indeed, for some witnesses, education for girls should be a priority.

Girls

13.9 The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission noted that girls have very limited educational opportunities in most parts of the country, particularly in rural and insecure areas and encounter many cultural and traditional constraints in exercising their right to education. Indeed, according to the Commission, girls constitute about two-thirds of all children who do not go to school and there are no female students in secondary schools in around 200 districts. The report also noted that in recent years, in different parts of the country, including in Kabul, there had been suspicious attacks on girls' schools.⁹

13.10 Mr Poulter stated that promoting gender equality in education was particularly important because cultural norms often do not allow women or girls to travel far making it difficult for them to access education. He explained that secondary schools

3 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 37.

4 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 37.

5 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 37.

6 *Submission 5*, p. 1.

7 *Submission 5*, p. 1.

8 *Submission 13*, p. 2.

9 Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *Fifth Report: Situation of Economic and Social Rights in Afghanistan*, November/December 2011, p. 90.

tend to be in urban centres and most of the people live far away from those. Such populations can only be reached through a community school but that requires infrastructure and the development of teachers so they have the skills and level of education necessary to teach others.¹⁰ Mr Krishnan explained that the problem with education was not that parents were unwilling to send their girls to school but because of the fear of violence against their daughters. He stated:

They do not have schools nearby, which means that the girls have to walk two or three kilometres every day. There are no female teachers in the schools, particularly in higher schools. The parents will not have the young laymen teaching their girls... There are no toilets for girls in schools, there are no drinking water facilities and there is no privacy for those girls in schools. Parents are afraid to send them—not because they do not want their daughters to learn—but because the environment does not provide them that scope to send them without fear.¹¹

13.11 The number of female teachers is also very low and they face many and various security problems in unsafe parts of the country—250 districts do not have a female teacher. Disadvantage which starts with primary education for girls carries through subsequent levels and is then reflected in the workforce. Thus women are also underrepresented in the administration—in 2010–11, women constituted about 20 per cent of government employees and around half of all ministries and governmental institutions had less than 10 per cent of women as part of their personnel.¹²

13.12 Oxfam also drew attention to interrupted education, a common experience especially for girls in Afghanistan. It suggested that the Australian Government improve access to education and training for illiterate rural women by prioritising funding for accelerated learning programs that address interrupted schooling and community based education initiatives run by local organisations. In addition, it was of the view that funding should also go toward 'establishing rural and remote vocational training centres for training in basic health, midwifery, paramedics, social work, small business enterprise and agricultural production'.¹³ Finally Oxfam informed the committee:

Often we have found that female students who have above average grades in year 12 are denied access to places at universities, in particular in large cities, because they do not have sufficient accommodation or sanitation facilities. Finally, these women and girls are getting through primary education, through secondary education and then are unable to access places at tertiary institutions to fill much-needed roles as teachers or nurses

10 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, pp. 39–40.

11 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 60.

12 Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, *Fifth Report: Situation of Economic and Social Rights in Afghanistan*, November/December 2011, pp. 90–92.

13 *Committee Hansard*, 22 March 2013, p. 9.

or doctors purely because there is not enough accommodation to house them or they do not have separate sanitation facilities for women.¹⁴

13.13 Oxfam saw value in funding that would go toward improving access to higher education for rural women with the building of facilities for women at existing tertiary institutions such as accommodation and sanitation facilities, and establishing rural and remote technological institutes in nursing, teaching and information technology.

Education—a priority for Australia

13.14 Education is one sector where development assistance has made substantial improvements in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the delivery of education services has been a major focus of Australia's aid program in Afghanistan.¹⁵ For example, Australia's funding through the ARTF education program has helped to deliver 5,000 classrooms, train in excess of 90,000 teachers and award 3,351 scholarships to female recipients enrolled in teacher training colleges.¹⁶

13.15 Australia also provides assistance through programs such as the Malaysia Australia Education Project for Afghanistan (MAEPA), which is intended to strengthen the Afghan education sector. AusAID identified this program as one of the key development achievements in 2010–11 under which 30 master teacher trainers had been trained in Malaysia, including 10 women.¹⁷ This project has now trained 60 master teacher trainers, who in turn have trained 340 teacher trainers in Afghanistan.¹⁸ AusAID highlighted the cascading effect of this program:

Following the MAEPA course, the Trainers return to teaching colleges across Afghanistan to deliver pre-service and in-service training that improves the quality of Afghan teachers.¹⁹

13.16 Given the success of the model, the Prime Ministers of Malaysia and Australia agreed to explore opportunities for Afghan recipients of Australian development scholarships to undertake their studies at Australian institutions of higher education in Malaysia.²⁰

Recommendation 6

13.17 The committee recommends that AusAID should ensure that its support for the education sector includes an adequate focus on education quality, and specifically on learning outcomes and teacher training.

14 *Committee Hansard*, 22 March 2013, p. 9.

15 AusAID, answer to written question on notice no. 14.

16 *Submission 16*, p. 41.

17 AusAID *Submission 16*, pp. 32–33.

18 AusAID, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, p. 121.

19 AusAID *Submission 16*, pp. 32–33.

20 Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, Media Release, Australian-Malaysian Joint Statement, 3 March 2011, <http://www.pm.gov.au/press-office/australian-malaysian-joint-statement> (accessed 3 January 2013).

Recommendation 7

13.18 The committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to support the Malaysia Australia Education Project for Afghanistan and to explore ways to build on its successes. The committee recommends that the Australian Government give particular attention to achieving a significant quota of women for the program, which may require additional effort to ensure that young women are graduating from year 12 and then have the opportunity to take up the offer of a scholarship.

Recommendation 8

13.19 The committee recommends further that DFAT together with AusAID encourage, assist and fund the establishment of an alumni organisation designed to foster and strengthen the people-to-people links between Afghan graduates from Australian institutions under the various scholarship programs and the respective institutions.

13.20 The committee has considered the suspension of the Australian Leadership Awards Scholarships, which it regards as a very serious setback particularly at this most critical time of transition when consolidation of such programs should be a priority.

Recommendation 9

13.21 The committee recommends that the Australian Government ensure that the Australian Leadership Awards Scholarships for Afghan students, or a suitable replacement, commence as soon as possible.

Uruzgan

13.22 In Uruzgan, Australian aid has supported the building of numerous schools including the highly regarded Trade Training School. The committee has highlighted the development achievements in Uruzgan during 2010–11 which included boosting the capacity of the provincial government by providing literacy, numeracy and administrative training to its officials.²¹ In light of these achievements in education, the task ahead is to consolidate and protect these gains. Mr Philip informed the committee that:

One of the encouraging aspects about education in Uruzgan is that even though the province is often described as very conservative—rural and isolated—it was rare to come across a community that did not want its children to be educated nor schools to be constructed.²²

13.23 The Prime Minister has announced that through the transition two main projects would continue in Uruzgan. The first was working with Save the Children, on the four-year program 'Children of Uruzgan' project, which focuses on the delivery of

21 AusAID, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, p. 122.

22 *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2012, p. 14.

basic health and education services in the six districts of Uruzgan.²³ Save the Children Australia is working with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Public Health, local NGO partners and communities to deliver this program.²⁴

13.24 In 2011, AusAID awarded the agency \$36 million for the program. Save the Children, which has been in Afghanistan since 1976 and in Uruzgan for over 15 years, described this program as a flagship partnership with AusAID:

It is one of the most ambitious aid projects ever undertaken by an Australian NGO.²⁵

13.25 Building local capacity is one of the program's key goals with the objective of training 30 community leaders and nearly 2,000 members of health councils and parents' associations to become advocates for the importance of health and education in their communities.²⁶ It also hopes to train 1,000 teachers, including female teachers, establish 100 early childhood development groups and 125 literacy groups specifically for women.²⁷

Conclusion

13.26 Education is not only a sector where notable achievements have been made but also one of the key building blocks for future development. The committee supports Australia placing a high priority on education in its Afghan aid program but would like to see much greater emphasis given to improving school attendance and the quality of teaching. To achieve higher retention rates and uninterrupted schooling, the aid program must address the obstacles holding parents back from sending their children to school, especially girls. It must also provide a pathway to higher education.

13.27 The committee understands that the Australian Government needs to reconsider carefully how it can support work in insecure areas of the country, (especially in Uruzgan where Australia has had a presence). As Australian staff pull back to Kabul, agencies such as AusAID must develop strong partnerships with trusted NGOs and other organisations, which can absorb significant funding and

23 Save the Children website, 'About Children of Uruzgan', <http://www.savethechildren.org.au/emergency/cou/about-children-of-uruzgan/> (accessed 15 January 2013).

24 Save the Children website, 'About Children of Uruzgan', <http://www.savethechildren.org.au/emergency/cou/about-children-of-uruzgan/> (accessed 15 January 2013).

25 Save the Children website, 'About Children of Uruzgan', <http://www.savethechildren.org.au/emergency/cou/about-children-of-uruzgan/> (access 15 January 2013).

26 Save the Children website, 'About Children of Uruzgan', <http://www.savethechildren.org.au/emergency/cou/about-children-of-uruzgan/> (access 15 January 2013).

27 Save the Children website, 'About Children of Uruzgan', <http://www.savethechildren.org.au/emergency/cou/about-children-of-uruzgan/> (access 15 January 2013).

where they have strong links with, and support from, local communities. As the Uruzgan PRT dismantles, the committee underlines the importance of AusAID ensuring that there is a planned, carefully phased transfer of the responsibility for delivering services to government ministries or to NGOs on the ground. The NGOs should have a proven track record in the relevant sector and have cultivated deep connections with local NGOs, civil society organisations and, importantly, the local communities.

Recommendation 10

13.28 The committee recommends that the Australian Government expand its support for girls' education in Afghanistan.

Recommendation 11

13.29 The committee recommends that the Australian Government support the Afghan Ministry of Education to disaggregate enrolment figures by gender.

Recommendation 12

13.30 The committee recommends that AusAID increase its support for programs that aim to increase community participation in the management of schools, including supporting local governance structures.

Recommendation 13

13.31 The committee recommends that AusAID continue its support for the 'Children of Uruzgan' program providing a clear commitment to a reliable and secure source of funding post 2014.

