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Afghanistan: Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP)

First Joint Supervision Mission,
January 20-27, 2006
Input from the Norwegian part of the team

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List of Abbreviations

BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CARE	Catholic Aid Relief
CDC	Community Development Committees
DED	District Education Department
EERDP	Emergency Education Rehabilitation and Development Project
EFA	Education for All
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Program
FA	Facilitating Agency
IDA	International Development Agency
IIEP	International Institute of Educational Planning (in UNESCO)
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non Government Organisation
PED	Provincial Education Department
PTA	Parent and Teacher Association
QEG	Quality Enhancement Grant
SMC	School Management Committee
TEP	Teacher Education Program
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1 Summary and recommendations

1. Although EQUIP has only utilised about US\$ 2 million so far, there are good indications that the program can take off relatively soon. The bulk of the funds totalling US\$ 40 million are budgeted for school improvement funds and building school infrastructure, and preparations for this have started long ago. The EQUIP train is on track, now only a push is needed to start it rolling.¹ As the program begins operation regular program reports will be written in accordance to plans.
2. Facilitating Agencies (FA), CARE and BRAC, are soon to be contracted. The team's impression of these agencies is positive, as they both have the needed experience, capacity and a strong motivational basis.
3. EQUIP is indeed considered among stakeholders as an Afghanistan Government program. In practise, however, there is room for improvement in terms of integration in the normal structure and decision making system of MOE. There are tendencies of parallel structures, which need to be looked into over time.
4. A stable ministerial environment for the program is yet to be seen. An example is the recent changes of the EQUIP Coordinating Unit. With establishment of the new Parliament in the first part of February 2006, many observers expect the situation to change to the better.

Gender issues

5. The central EQUIP programme documents (such as PIM, ToR for FA) might be improved gender wise by being more explicit at every level regarding barriers, numbers, activities and responsibilities to ensure focus on girls' education and female participation;
6. As the gender perspective seems well taken care of at local level, both by FAs and local communities examples/best practices of social mobilisation strategies could be shared to provinces with negative attitudes to education in general and girls' education in particular;
7. Increased focus on retention of girls in schools is needed in EQUIP documents and strategies. It has become clear to the current team that the gender issue is on everybody's lips, but not sufficiently visible at document and plan level. There is also a lack of clear cut strategies;
8. Explicit strategies to increase the number of adequately trained female teachers and to enhance their capacity are needed. An investigation of various options in this regard would be helpful;²
9. Meeting immediate educational needs should go parallel with the strengthening of government's education system. It is necessary that NGOs get more involved in developing government's academic, administrative and managerial capacity at all levels.
10. In order efficiently to reach gender related objectives in education there will always be a need to balance with tradition and culture. To rush gender issues too much and without sensitivity might fire back in traditionally rooted localities and undermine the gender related objective of the programme. Very much will depend on the local "extension worker" and her/his ability to cooperate with local communities.

Decentralization and capacity building issues

11. *Capacity building in the MOE.* Most reports on the administrative system of education state that improvements on organization and capacity are needed. This is handled through the PRR process, which the current team has not studied in detail. One main reason for the delays in EQUIP seems to be connected with level of capacity and sometimes unclear responsibilities. The leadership from the MOE is important. To implement EQUIP the capacity building process in MOE has to be continued.

¹ For a brief description of objectives and program components of EQUIP, see Annex

² This was also proposed in Wirak et al. *Afghanistan, Norwegian Education team Report*, Oslo/Kabul August 2005

12. *The implementation of EQUIP.* An effective steering committee with a clear political tie to the Minister of Education and close cooperation with relevant departments in the MOE, to other Ministries, and to other relevant authorities will strengthen the implementation of EQUIP. This process has started through the internal steering committee, but will be improved by also including other relevant partners.
13. *Capacity building in PED and DED.* Also at the provincial level there is reported shortage of capacity. Capacity building of the MOE at central level should be coordinated with capacity building at the levels of PED and DED. This is particularly needed when MOE is implementing the EQUIP through the PEDs and the DEDs. Hence joint workshops might be preferable.
14. *Communication between levels.* For EQUIP to operate smoothly good communication between MOE, PEDs, DEDs, SMCs, and NGOs is essential. Hence all parties should be consulted in the process of developing a final PIM.
15. *Support to PED and DED.* The role of PEDs and DEDs in following up the local organisations in implementation of EQUIP is of outmost importance. This was evident during implementation of the EERDP. Special capacity building of PEDs and DEDs in terms of monitoring the SMCs and other local organisations needs to be prioritised.
16. *Decentralization.* In EQUIP especially component 1 School Grant is based on a decentralized process. This can make EQUIP a spearhead in developing more decentralized decision-making with more authority delegated to the PEDs. The financial system should be simplified with some of the authority left over to the PEDs. Also the following up on construction should be delegated to the provincial level. To implement this, the support system of MOE will have to be developed further and a general monitoring system, including more than the EQUIP monitoring component, must be effective.
17. *Review.* Under the present system the team will recommend that all EQUIP actions must be included in the guidelines that are given from MOE to the PEDs for every new academic year. By doing so EQUIP will be a theme in the mid-term review and in the final audit in the end of the academic year. In this way EQUIP can be fully integrated in the quarterly reports and in the supporting and monitoring system of MOE.

Local level organisations' issue

18. In EQUIP the roles of local communities, in particular SMCs but also PTAs are essential for attaining the programme objectives. EQUIP documents base on international but also on experience from Afghanistan, and in particular the EERDP. Local school and community based organisations can be powerful in terms of school improvement and infrastructure development and EQUIP seems to have selected realistic approaches.
19. Although there might be some arguments in favour of using financial incentives for SMCs and PTAs, it is proposed to be very careful, due to sustainability and other reasons. The most important incentive for parents and localities is a functioning school for their children.
20. According to the PIM, new SMCs and PTAs are to be established. The team advises that great care and sensitivity is shown in this undertaking, as local groups might already be found, and as it is easy to contribute to confusion, overlap and even local conflict.
21. In particular relationships with existing Community Development Committees (CDC) should be explored.
22. Detailed lists of SMC and PTA responsibilities are provided in the PIM. It is proposed that these lists are considered as checklists rather than fixed mandates, and that local solutions based on local needs are chosen, but with a basic idea that SMCs primarily will deal with management, School Improvement Plans, financial duties and control in relation to purchasing and building, while the PTAs' responsibilities should be more on education quality issues and enrolment.

23. It is proposed to assess possibilities of engaging the SMCs for school maintenance in a systematic way. As these groups are going to have responsibility for building processes, they should also be able to take care of maintenance.

2 Introduction

24. Norwegian support to Afghanistan is mainly channelled through ARTF. In line with Norwegian priorities in development cooperation and the fact that education has been selected as a main focus area of support to Afghanistan, Norway has expressed a preference within the ARTF framework for the EQUIP with a particular focus on girls' education.³ Norway has expressed an interest in joining WB in supervision missions of the programme. This was convened during a mapping mission of the education sector in Afghanistan by a Norad team in February 2005. As EQUIP has needed some time to get started, this is the first relevant point of involvement of Norwegian members to the supervision mission team. The Norwegian Embassy in Kabul requested Norad to write TOR and set up a team to collaborate with WB for the mission.

25. The main output from the Norwegian part of the EQUIP Joint Supervision Mission is its contributions to the Aide Memoire, which will be the joint end result to be written by the World Bank Task Manager. However, as the team is also reporting to the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul, and as other stakeholders have indicated interest in the mission's observations, it was decided to write a short report which can serve several purposes; to feed into the Aide Memoire (The Task manager will be free to select from this paper) as well as presenting a broader picture for an extended audience.

26. When the Norwegian members of the First Joint Supervision Mission arrived in Kabul, the Washington based World Bank part of the team (2 persons) had already been in Afghanistan for some time. During the period from 20th to 27th January the whole team worked together. From 24th to 25th of January two fieldworks, each of one day's duration, were undertaken to Parwan and Kapisa. Due to security limitations one field trip to Logar was cancelled.

27. It should be noted that the fieldworks were performed in provinces where the gender issues are comparatively well developed, in an Afghanistan context. In some other provinces of the country girls enrolment is extremely low, due to culture and tradition and too long distances from homesteads to schools. In EQUIP implementation will be facilitated by NGOs in some provinces while MOE representatives at Province and District levels will be in charge of operations in other provinces. This team visited NGO provinces only.

28. EQUIP activities have not yet taken off, and field observations in terms of infrastructure were hence limited to results of the former Emergency Education rehabilitation and Development Project (EERDP) as well as the personnel and resources of CARE and BRAC, the provincial and district structures and most importantly; the local school based organisations and head teachers.

29. The members were Hilde Thyness, Norad, Bjørn Berg (University College of Hedmark) representing the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and Anders Wirak (LINS, DECO, Nordic Consulting Group) under contract with Norad.

3 Observations and conclusions

3.1 Overall programme process

30. Only about 2 million of the total US\$40 million of the EQUIP budget has so far been utilised. But this does not present a correct picture of the status of EQUIP, as many important steps have been taken in order to lay the basis for smooth and speedy implementation. The bulk of EQUIP funding will be for school improvement funds and building school infrastructure, based on plans and requests from School Management Committees (SMC).

³ Op cit

31. Before one can expect requests and proposals to come in by large numbers, the Facilitating Agencies (FA), CARE and BRAC, need to be contracted and start their motivation and mobilization activities. As the procedure is "single source" the formal process will be considerably shorter than if it was based on open competition and tendering. The team was informed that the contracts between MOE and BRAC/CARE soon were ready to be signed; only awaiting "no objection" from the World Bank. A time frame of a couple of weeks was mentioned.

32. An evaluation including assessment of the work of CARE and BRAC has been undertaken recently (under the auspices of the World Bank). Unfortunately this mission has not had a chance to read the evaluation report. Based on the observations made, however, these two NGOs seem

- a. To be experienced with development work in the provinces in question
- b. To have considerable knowledge and experience with education related work
- c. To have the necessary goodwill based on previous experience at province, district and local levels,
- d. To be in the position to expand fast in terms of capacity to embark on the EQUIP activities.

33. Based on observations and interviews, the Supervision Team was ensured that EQUIP indeed is considered among stakeholders as an Afghanistan Government program. Formally, also, there is little doubt of the ownership of EQUIP. In practise, however, there is room for improvement before EQUIP is thoroughly integrated in the normal structure and decision making system of MOE. There are tendencies of parallel structures, which need to be looked into over time. There are also considerable differences between MOE officials and EQUIP staff in terms of salaries and benefits which creates a sense of differentiation.

34. There are certain challenges facing EQUIP at Ministerial level, and a stable environment for the program at this level is yet to be seen. To exemplify: as of writing this report, the EQUIP Coordinator has resigned his post. With the establishment of the new Parliament in the first part of February 2006, many observers expect the situation to change to the better.

3.2 Some other education related issues – the EQUIP framework

35. During many years, NGOs played an important and in some provinces more or less dominant role in development of education in Afghanistan. Due to the massive needs for educational related services in the country and due to serious capacity challenges of the official system, NGOs will most probably continue to play a crucial role in the education sector also in the years to come. Too fast reduction of the NGOs' activities can create critical conditions for the supply of education as the government is not yet ready to take over on a sustained basis. These realities seem to be well conceived by the senior MOE representatives while there are voices in the donor community which stress the need for a more aggressive approach towards reducing the role of the NGOs in education in Afghanistan.

36. At the same time all stakeholders in education seem to agree that there is a need for stronger governmental coordination, control and implementation, while the NGOs should constantly assess the need for their corresponding phasing down along with the strengthening of MOE. It is a joint responsibility of all stakeholders in the sector to see that these processes can develop smoothly. Not least is it important that NGOs recognise their responsibility to participate in strengthening of government in terms of capacity development, competence building and development of physical resources.

37. In the provinces and districts visited by the team the general impression is that good and relatively efficient cooperation is established among the main stakeholders. Much of this cooperation is built on informal processes, personal contacts and mutual trust rather than formal written agreements and plans. NGOs are discussing and coordinating their plans with the PED, and PEDs are including activities of the NGOs in their plans and reports to MOE.

38. Although there is much discussion about the role of Community Based Schools (CBS) in Afghanistan, as well as in many other countries, most indications underline that schools established closer to the places where people live is the most effective way to enrol and retain girls, and to achieve the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals⁴. Hence, in particular at Provincial and District levels, the impression was that further development of CBS are deemed necessary, and hence also the operation of the NGOs in this area. As the team was observing BRAC more in detail, it should be noted that organisations like that with huge Community Schools programs for girls, are important in order to reach out to distant areas. It will take some time before the MOE will be able to take over such activities.

39. The Norwegian education delegation report of August 2005 proposed a review and comparison of different strategies and activities for community based schools. From the discussions with stakeholders, including Deputy Ministers and down to District officials, there seems to be considerable support for this idea. It should be added that one of the main focuses of such a review would naturally be how girls best can be reached by the education system. Both Unicef, Aga Khan Foundation, BRAC and CARE have supported this, and most likely the donors will also find such review beneficial.

40. In two of the provinces the EMIS appears to be carried out in accordance to normal procedure. All schools are filling in the data forms and these are sent via the District Education Department (DED) to the Provinces and finally to the MOE in Kabul. However, due to limited capacity at the Provincial Education Department (PED), these very basic educational data are not properly utilised at this level. This is very unfortunate as this could be important inputs to the Provincial education plans.

3.3 Towards a Five Year Strategic Plan for education

41. Most major stakeholders to the sector seem now to appreciate the process towards the preparation of a Five Year Strategic Plan for Education which will be developed by MOE with assistance from IIEP/UNESCO. A mission from IIEP visited Afghanistan in January 2006, and the EQUIP Supervision Mission had the opportunity to see how the final planning for the Strategic Plan was prepared, culminating in a dinner hosted by MOE for most significant stakeholders and reception 25th of January to mark the start of the process and cooperation between IIEP and MOE. As the process has come so far already it will most probably not be difficult to finance not only the first stage of elaborating the Strategic Plan, but also the necessary follow-up stages of competence development. Norway has indicated interest to assess assisting the first stage.

4 Specific issue 1: Gender

42. One of the main targets of the EQUIP programme is increased enrolment and retention of girls in schools. This is an overreaching and crosscutting target as the EQUIP programme document states that "The programme also aims to promote education for girls by putting a priority for female teachers and students within each component activity." As will be further elaborated on, this aspect seems well taken care of at local level, both by the FAs and the local community.

43. The post conflict situation in Afghanistan presents multiple challenges to gender issues; many of them are common to other post conflict countries, others relative to the Afghan society, culture and traditions. Attitudes about gender issues and particularly girls' education are deeply rooted and will require time to change. Simultaneously, parents are very eager and have a great concern to send their children to school, also the girls. The major feature of education and attitudes to girls' education in Afghanistan is the large regional disparities. In Kabul City 81 % of school age girls are enrolled in school. Net enrolment of girls is higher than boys in Herat City, Badakhshan Province and Herat Province. On the other end, total net enrolment is less than 20 % in Badghis, Hilmand and Uruzgan Provinces. And in Badghis and Zabul provinces the enrolment of girls is as low as 1 %⁵. Within this context, it is evident that there is a long way to go before 100 % girls' enrolment is reached.

⁴ MOE, *Education in Afghanistan, Challenges and Opportunities*, presented at the Regional Meeting on Education in South Asia: 2005 and beyond, strongly support this processes. (p 11)

⁵ ARTF, Education Quality Improvement Programme, Programme document.

44. The factors that seem to be of major importance to the issue of girls' education, after social mobilisation about the importance of girls' education, are security – between home and school and at school (including the issue of boundary walls), distance to school, lack of school buildings, female teachers and sanitation facilities.

45. The relevant documents to the gender issue within the EQUIP programme are the EQUIP programme proposal, the Project Implementation Manual (PIM), the Terms of Reference for the Facilitating Agencies, and their policies and strategies on social mobilisation and girls' education. Despite the critical review of those documents below, the team would like to emphasise the focus on girls as target group is well integrated in the programme at local level.

EQUIP programme document

46. Girls' education is a cross cutting target of EQUIP, "by putting a priority for female teachers and students within each component activity". Although clearly stated in the project description, the issue of girls' education and factors important to their education are not clearly visible throughout the programme document, except references to priority to girl schools and narrowing gender disparities. The training modules for teachers, schools principals, and the capacity development component intended for the Provincial and District Education Departments have no specific reference to female participation. The issue of female participation in decision making processes and women in decision making positions is not covered. Furthermore, there is no observable focused strategy to secure female participation in PTAs, SMC, school administration, DEDs, PEDs and at ministry level. Finally, the monitoring and evaluation is deficient in any reference to female participation and girls' education. However, EQUIP do provide funding for TEP, which includes a priority for female teachers.

PIM

47. PIM includes some more concrete steps to handle this issue, such as giving the exact number of female participants in the different units at district level (PTA and SMC) and mentioning community awareness about the value of education with and emphasis on girls' education. Still, the PIM is not sufficiently specific about issues and strategies related to girls' education. It might be necessary to acknowledge the need to be more explicit at every level regarding barriers, numbers, activities and responsibilities to ensure maintained focus on girls' education and female participation. PIM is particularly important in this regard as this is the main steering document for all stakeholders in EQUIP. For more specific comments on the PIM, please refer to chapter 6.3.

48. PIM makes reference to the Programme Steering Committee which is to be led by Deputy Minister, MoE, and which is proposed in the PIM to include one representative from MoWA⁶. In a gender perspective, the inclusion of MoWA in the Steering Committee seems appropriate as MoWA is a policy influencing body.⁷ Furthermore, in a meeting with Deputy Minister Mazari Safa, MoWA, it was declared that MoE was MoWA's most important counterpart as girls' education is the main challenge for women in Afghanistan: education is fundamental for empowerment and access to democratic rights. It is the clear impression of the team that both EQUIP and MoWA will benefit from this institutionalised cooperation.

ToR for FA

49. The Terms of Reference for the Facilitating Agencies (FA) states that the FA shall develop a strategy for promotion and awareness creation activities for the Grant (EQUIP). The only reference to girls' education in the ToR is the priority for girls' schools. One would therefore think that the FA's documents on policies, strategies and their plans would be of major interest. Unfortunately, these documents were not easily available at meetings with the FAs. The team awaits these documents from the FAs. Clearly, the FAs have had in-depth discussions with the EQUIP coordination team and the WB personnel before going into an agreement. The MoE and WB are also familiar with the FAs in question through their implementation of EERDP.

⁶ The structure proposed in the PIM is not yet operative, but is expected to be so shortly.

⁷ "Status of Women in Afghanistan – and in programmes supported by Norway in Afghanistan", Norad mission 2005.

50. CARE and BRAC use their own developed strategies that are mostly known to be successful in other countries. If these strategies are successful in the different settings in the provinces of Afghanistan, it might be worth considering making use of these strategies also in provinces where MoE is the implementing partner of EQUIP.

Observations from field work

51. As mentioned, there seems to be poor reference to the gender issue in the documents related to EQUIP. However, information gathered through meetings with two facilitating agencies (CARE and BRAC) and in field trips (BRAC), seems to indicate that the issue of girls' education is well integrated in their programs and activities⁸:

- Both organisations' overall priority within education is on girls and gender awareness;
- According to the EQUIP programme documents, priority is given to building and reconstructing girls' schools. The FAs have supplied with the necessary facilities to satisfy cultural requirements;
- Both FAs emphasised the importance of community mobilisation with regards to education in general and girls' education in particular. They also referred to successful implementation of EERDP in this respect;
- CARE gave examples of topics of their training provided to PTAs and SMCs, and to DEDs and PEDs, which includes gender awareness, children's rights and community participation in school activities. CARE also mentioned that they are active in encouraging DEDs and PEDs for more female staff;
- Both NGOs acknowledge the acute need for female teachers to increase girls' enrolment and more crucially to ensure retention of girls beyond the lower grades. CARE specified one strategy to come about this on a short term basis, which is access to non-formal adult education followed by short teacher training courses for unqualified teachers. The proposed strategy must of course be considered as a provisional solution to cover immediate needs.

52. In meetings at school level with PTAs and SMCs, the focus on girls' education appeared very evident. The attitude to girls' education was positive, and the obstacles to girls' education were presented as more of a physical nature and related to safety. The shortage of female teachers was referred to by the SMCs, but the approaches were somewhat different. One SMC felt that the main problem was distance to school and safety, also for the female teachers. Another SMC recognised the factual deficiency of female teachers, a problem they had temporarily solved by appointing a male teacher. None of the SMCs/PTAs had a clear vision of strategies to increase the number of female teachers as this was considered mainly as a central government responsibility. As a general remark, the approach to education at local level seem to be leaving very much of the responsibility to central level.

53. It is important to keep in mind that the provinces visited do not have a particular problem with negative attitudes to girls' education. Knowing that the situation is quite different in other provinces, the continued emphasis on girls' education, in a culturally sensitive way, is critical. The participation of the local community is crucial in this work, not at least to ensure a sustainable education system at local level until the national system is well functioning.

54. Even though from a pure gender perspective, the above mentioned critical views of the EQUIP related documents are highly relevant, the team would like to say that to over emphasis the gender issues might also be considered as a risk factor, especially in the Afghan setting (with reference to schools being burnt, and teachers at girls' schools being killed)⁹ Therefore, the Afghan context and understanding of the issue will have to be balanced against an increased gender focus, in order not to undermine the very objective of the programme.

⁸ Information from field refer to experiences from the former programme, EERDP, please see introduction.

⁹ Status of women in Afghanistan – and in programs supported by Norway in Afghanistan. Norad mission 2005.

Case from the Parwan Province

In Parwan province the director of the PED is a woman, who is also parliament member. The Province also experiences an enrolment of girls which is higher than boys, very much due to the focus on girls' education and girls' schools during the EERPD programme. Important elements in this success seem to be the initial very positive attitude towards education in the community, the involvement of the entire community (parents, elders, Mullah), the short distance to school, the work of the SMC, the attitude and social mobilisation work of the Mullah, and the redesigning of the school to include a boundary wall, not planned for initially. The wall was mentioned to have several functions: it is critical for girls' enrolment in general due to safety reasons, but also: because it separates the girls from the open areas the girls can play basket and volleyball, activities which they are not allowed to do in the open, visible to people. In Parwan, the need for teachers in general, and for female teachers in particular, is immense, due to massive enrolment after the fall of Taliban. The increased enrolment moreover challenges the capacity of the school buildings, which are now sufficient neither in numbers nor in size.

5 Specific issue 2: Decentralisation and capacity building

55. When the schools start in March this year there will, according to an estimate from MOE, be approximately 6,5 million children in the schools, and around 140 000 teachers will be needed to teach them. Education has a very high priority in building up Afghanistan, and the Afghanistan Constitution declares that every child should have a right to education. The increased enrolment after the fall of the Taliban and the focus on education put an enormous stress on the education sector at all levels. There are not enough decent buildings for all the pupils. There is a shortage of textbooks and qualified teachers, and there is not enough administrative capacity at any levels to handle this. The quality of the education suffers because of the low educational level of the teachers. Less than 1000 teachers have a master or bachelor degree. Approximately 20000 have a Teacher Training College grade and approximately 70000 are high school graduated. The remaining 39000 teachers are below that level.

Central level

56. Approximately 2000 persons are working in MOE, which has 26 departments. The capacity of the ministry is considered as low. The ministers have changed 4 times during the same number of years. Since the educational system of Afghanistan is centralized and almost all decisions have to pass through the MOE, all changing processes will proceed slowly.

57. A coordination unit in MOE has been established to run EQUIP. This coordination unit was active from September 2005. At that time the former Grant Management Unit (GMU) was closed. The EQUIP coordination unit is headed by a coordinator. The unit is responsible for the day-to-day activities and is cooperating with relevant departments within the MOE and other Ministries on program-related matters. The coordinator is reporting to the Deputy Minister responsible for EQUIP.

58. The Deputy Minister is also chairing the Steering Committee for EQUIP. The Steering Committee is currently limited to include internal MOE departments such as the Department of Planning, Department of Construction, Department of Teacher Training and a representative from the Teacher Education Program (TEP). The Steering Committee meets regularly, usually once a month, to review progress, propose action plans and discuss all matters concerning the program.

59. The EQUIP Coordination Unit is situated in the MOE and is recognized as part of the official structure of the Ministry, but is seemingly still not completely integrated into the Ministry, but all decisions concerning the project are made by the Deputy Minister in charge of the project. The unit is cooperating directly with the PEDs and DEDs and FAs on implementing the project in the districts. The EQUIP team has together with other relevant departments in the ministry missions to the PEDs which assemble the DEDs.

60. A Public Restructure Reform (PRR) is being implemented and this will also change the MOE. The purpose of the PRR is to enhance the cost-efficiency and the capacity of MOE. At present there is a new plan for the structure of the Ministry and also a reorganization of its leadership. The number of departments will be reduced and so will the number of employees.

Decentralization

61. Afghanistan has a highly centralized government system. Such a system will have both pros and cons. It makes it possible to follow up the same priorities in every part of the country. In the educational sector both production and distribution of textbooks and the salaries for teachers are provided from MOE. However, if it is very centralized it will be less efficient. Today most decisions are taken or at least approved by the MOE. The work on decentralizing the administrative system has started and the PEDs are now allowed to recruit some of the teachers. On the other hand if the educational system is decentralized without sufficient support for the provincial level it will not be efficient either. Currently MOE has neither the capacity of an effective centralized agency nor the capacity to support the province and district level. A reorganized MOE through the PRR might be able to give better support to the provincial level and implement a monitoring system.

62. In EQUIP there is an option to decentralize some of the decisions. All the activities in component 1. School Grant can be decided at provincial level based on proposals from SMCs in cooperation with PTAs and other community organizations. The steps proposed in PIM on making and implementing the SIP can be described as decentralized decisions. In addition the PEDs could also be responsible for the funding for the school grant. In EQUIP the construction or rehabilitation of the school buildings is based on guidelines from the MOE on the number of classrooms and other facilities and options for design. Here the opportunity to build in accordance with local traditions and designs should be great if the guidelines are not too rigid. In the EERDP the team did not see much diversity in design, but this is possible to improve in EQUIP if there are local needs. These processes are important in order to reach the objective of more community-based decision-making.

63. A working monitoring system is a precondition for decentralization. Without a proper monitoring system the MOE will not get sufficient information to form an efficient educational policy for the country. The team experienced that EMIS was used in the provinces visited even if it was not fully utilized at provincial level. This is a start to get some basic statistics, but a monitoring and evaluation system must also focus on the performance of the educational system on output indicators like student learning achievement, completion rates and dropout rates. The monitoring and evaluation component in EQUIP described in PIM can be the start of a general system and therefore be a prerequisite for further decentralization. It is therefore important that component 3 of EQUIP is developed parallel with the other components.

Province level

64. The PED has the responsibility for all educational activities in a province. In Parwan the PED has a staff of 80 persons, led by a director and 3 deputy directors. Of these approx 1/3 are working with academic matters. Since this is a centralized system, all instructions will come from the MOE.

65. PED prepares an annual work plan for the province. PED also sends quarterly reports to MOE which include the activities of the NGOs.

66. The support from the MOE to the PED during an academic year consists of three phases, which include visits to the PED:

1. In the beginning of the academic year new guidelines on the work for the coming year are given. This could be new curriculum and administrative matters. The EQUIP has not been put into those guidelines thus far.
2. In the middle of the year the MOE will come to see improvements, review reports and give recommendations.
3. In the end of the year there is a final audit, which controls all the activities of the PED.

67. There are also irregular meetings with all the provincial directors in Kabul. The frequency of these meetings depends on the Minister. Last year there were two such meetings. One meeting was about funding and the other about academic matters. At one of these meetings the deputy director also took part. The duration of these meetings is about one week.

68. In a province where a NGO is active as a FA it seems as if all quality improvement activities were done by the NGO. For example in Parwan and Kapisa a 27 days workshop in Kabul was held for

principals. In Logar the director of PED stated that the NGO had trained the teachers in a proper way, always in consultation with the PED. The NGO has an experienced staff, aware of the culture. Their activities were transparent and the people were satisfied with their work. The NGOs are getting close economic supervision through the usual economic channels. The Ministry of Finance is the key organization for financial management, disbursements and reporting. It should be added that the economic transactions go through several units and it takes at least 24 days for money to reach the SMC at the community level.

69. In EQUIP these processes can be continued with a NGO, as FA, assisting the MOE in EQUIP implementation, and working in close cooperation with the PEDs and the DEDs. Experience so far shows that this cooperation can be managed in an efficient way, but there is still room for improving competence and the authority of the PED. In other provinces where the EQUIP will be run through the MOE there will be an EQUIP officer at the PED. In this case a capacity building at the PEDs and DEDs will be needed. With increased decentralisation of authority to PED, some improvements are needed to get a more operative financial system.

District level

70. Each district has a District Education Department (DED). In the district we visited in Parwan it had a staff of 6 persons, 1 manager, 1 academic and 6 other employees. The DED is responsible for all education within their district, recruiting teachers, following up building and rehabilitation activities, and student enrolments, but they need the PED's approval on decisions. On building activities they are under the supervision of the Department of Construction in MOE since the PED has no capacity on construction. Due to the size of the provinces day-to-day following up of the schools is the responsibility of the DED. Once a month all the district managers are assembled to a coordination meeting and every second month the PED visits each DED. There could also be even more frequent contact between the PED and DED, based upon needs.

Community level

71. In EERDP School Management Committees (SMC) were initiated. Two NGOs were FAs on implementing this program and SMCs were successfully established. These SMCs were appointed by and had representatives from the local community such as the Shura, Imam community and the school. The SMC's responsibility was to identify the needs of the community and the school. They will speak to people to get them to send their children to the school. They were cooperating closely with the DED and meeting with the PED to discuss their problems. In two of the provinces the SMCs were focusing on the building process. The design of the school building and technical specifications were decided by the Construction Department in the MOE. The SMC had the responsibility for acquiring land, often paid for by the community, and then following up the contractor during the building of the school. In the two other provinces a quality grant was also added. The SMC then made proposals for the use of this grant. But some quality enhancements were made by both the NGOs, mainly the training of principals or teachers.

72. In two of the provinces Parent-Teacher Associations were formed. The members were representatives for parents, teachers, community leaders, and the imam and the principal. Their main responsibility would be to form a close connection with the community and support the SMC. In the two other provinces there was cooperation between the same groups of representatives without establishing a PTA formally.

Conclusions

73. Most reports on the administrative system of education state that improvements in organization and competence are needed. One main reason for the delays in the program seems to be connected with insufficient competence and unclearness in responsibilities. Also in the case of EQUIP the competence building process in MOE has to be continued.

74. An effective steering committee with a clear political tie to the Minister of Education and close cooperation with relevant departments in the Ministry and to other relevant authorities will strengthen

the implementation of EQUIP. This process has started through the internal steering committee, but could be improved by also including other relevant partners.

75. The EQUIP could also be a part of a more decentralized educational system. In such circumstances the support system of MOE will have to be developed further and a general monitoring system made effective. In a more decentralized educational system it is possible to give the PEDs a mandate to take many decisions concerning the implementation of EQUIP, based on PIM and guidelines from MOE. But also under the present system the team will recommend that all EQUIP actions must be included in the guidelines that are given to the PEDs for every new academic year.

76. Also on the provincial level there is a reported shortage of capacity. The capacity building of the MOE must also include the PEDs and the DEDs. This will be specially needed where the MOE is implementing the EQUIP through the PEDs and the DEDs. Joint workshops for the MOE and the PEDs would facilitate the implementation process of EQUIP.

77. The following up process from PED and DED on implementing EQUIP through SMCs and PTAs is of outmost importance. This is shown in the implementation of the EERDP done by the NGOs who were involved. The following up process must therefore be given the highest priority because it is essential for the success of the EQUIP. Without full involvement from the SMC (and PTA) it will be very hard to reach the aims of the program.

Case: recruitment of teachers.

An example of the cooperation between authorities at different levels could be the recruitment of a new teacher. The Deputy Minister stated that a first step in decentralization was to leave some of the responsibility for the recruitment of teachers to the provincial level.

The initiative for having a new teacher will come from the principal. He or she will have a staff schedule that decides the number of teachers. A new teacher will be needed only if one teacher retires or the enrolment increases. The teacher-pupil ratio is set to be 1 : 70. The DED will confirm that a new teacher is needed according to one of those rules, and the principal can come up with a candidate. If the DED agrees upon that, the proposal will be sent to the PED for approval. If the PED approves the matter will be settled.

In the traditional system, which we found still working in another province, the recruitment of a teacher had to be at least formally confirmed by the MOE because the PED did not have the authority to finalize the process. In that case the MOE was also able to provide a teacher for the job. This process will be more time-consuming than when the decision can be made on the provincial level. It will also tax the capacity of the MOE.

6 Specific issue 3: Local level organisations for education

78. There is a general and international trend and increased awareness of the importance of mobilization of local communities for education development. It has been found that local organisations can play important roles in many ways:

- In linking the school and the communities around the schools, and in particular between parents and families of students and the schools,
- To mobilise the community for education in general and in particular to secure that children are sent to school,
- In formalising of local control of schools (both buildings and the education),
- By contributing with extra financial and other resources such as labour, material, networking etc,
- In securing and lobbying for education and school interests in local government institutions,
- By providing assistance to school management,

- Monitoring educational quality of the school,
- Assisting in solving internal and external school related conflicts,
- Taking responsibilities for school construction,
- Being in charge of maintenance of schools.

79. The structure and function of these local communities varies much from country to country, and even from school to school.¹⁰ The large international NGOs have played a significant role in the development of local school organisations, and they have experimented, copied from each other and expanded various models and patterns of school organisations. In many countries ministries of education have showed increasing interest for the work of local organisations, while the tendency in other countries has been that these organisations are seen as nuisance in the machinery of education. As a result of EFA and MDG, however, with the international attention on the need for increase in school attendance and with particular focus on girl's enrolment, the local organisations are in many cases powerful tools for attaining such goals.

80. It has been pointed out, however, that in post-conflict countries, and due to damaged community networks and linkages, families tend to be preoccupied with rebuilding homes and reconstruction their own lives. "This results in limited participation of parents and communities in improving the school environment of their children".¹¹ This might be a correct observation for some areas of Afghanistan, but from field observation and discussion with SMCs, and interviews with staff from experienced NGOs as BRAC and CARE with programs in many provinces one tend to think most often these local and school based organisation already are, or could easily become, important stakeholders for school development.

81. In EQUIP the role of local communities is essential. Building on experiences from projects and programs in Afghanistan and other countries, and even from IDA financed programs (as in India and ...) the EQUIP documents spell out in detail procedures for selecting and composition of SMCs and PTAs. In the following some reflections based on observations during field work are presented. Some of them may have relevance to the planning and implementation of EQUIP.

Use of incentives

82. Use of financial incentives for SMC and PTAs were discussed during meetings. Although there might be some arguments in favour of such practices – for instance that it would be according to culture and customs, and that this would encourage activities – most probably it is best not to establish financing such services. Firstly, it is important to underline that the main "incentive" for a PTA or a SMC is the fact that school is operating and that education is provided. For parents, but also for other members of communities, this should be enough as incentives. Secondly, providing incentives would not sustainable over time and one can easily create conflicts between schools practising incentives and those who do not. Thirdly, the practice will be very difficult to handle administratively and in a fair manner. Fourth, The EQUIP funds for quality improvement can actually be considered as incentives.

Sensitivity in terms of establishing local organisations.

83. According to the PIM, new SMCs and PTAs are to be established. In many schools, however, such or similar organisations are already active. Before EQUIP embarks on mobilising for new organisations, sensitivity is needed in order not to create confusion, overlap and even local conflict. Existing organisations might be utilised, for instance after minor changes in composition and mandate. The critical point is whether they are supported by parents, teachers and local community.

84. The National Solidarity Programme was instrumental to establish Community Development Councils (CDC) in 19 provinces which were to decide on own village priorities (to be funded by

¹⁰ In Madagascar such communities are at present selecting and hiring about one third of the teacher force of the country. In SNNP Region in Ethiopia local communities are collecting funds for school building and other infrastructure, in some instances by very large amounts.

¹¹ This is an argument given by Spink, J. et al; *Situation Analysis, Teacher Education and Professional Development in Afghanistan*" AREU, August 2004, page 31.

Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)). Often these CDCs selected schools as their main priority. Naturally, then, these organisations need to be consulted and taken into account by EQUIP. Also the traditional local community based meetings which are to decide over local affairs, the Shurias, need to be considered as the EQUIP embarks on project work in new localities.

Responsibilities of SMCs and PTAs.

85. PIM presents detailed lists of the main responsibilities of the SMCs and PTAs (PIM page 20-22). It is proposed that these lists are considered as checklists of responsibilities, rather than fixed mandates to be applied everywhere. Great care and competence is needed for the preparation of mandates for these organisations, which ideally should be undertaken in close cooperation with the Head Teachers and representatives from the District. As the lists of responsibilities are presented now, there are several overlaps, as exemplified in the following:

SMC	PTA
Ensure enrolment and attendance of students in the school	Encourage the community to send their kids to the schools especially the girls Ensure students attendance to the school regularly
Support girls/boys education in home and school	Support the girls and boys to prepare their homework

86. The main responsibility of the SMCs are thought to be related to management issues, the preparation of the School Improvement Plans, financial duties and control in relation to purchasing and building, while the PTAs should be more on education quality issues, enrolment and similar issues. In principle SMCs have a shorter period of functioning than the PTAs.

Strengthened focus on school maintenance.

87. Maintenance is crucial for all infrastructures and not least for schools. Large number of students in several shifts every day, will mean a constant pressure and both day to day cleaning and regular maintenance will be needed. The present system for initiating both small and large maintenance work seems to be very cumbersome and bureaucratic, involving reporting to the District and Province. It is proposed to assess possibilities of engaging the SMCs for school maintenance in a systematic way. As these groups are going to have responsibility for building processes, they should also be able to take care of maintenance.

7 Some specific comments to the PIM

88. Programme Implementation Manuals are normally considered to be the main steering document for all participants of the programs. The EQUIP PIM version as of December 2005 is considered as a draft to be tested out in the field in order to be refined and developed. At present it is of 48 pages and with 15 annexes. It was drafted in collaboration between WB consultants and the EQUIP Team and officials of MOE have read, commented and approved the documents and these are formally the property of MOE.

89. In the opinion of the Joint Supervision Mission many elements of the PIM, and in particular in the field of social mobilisation, will necessarily have to be considered as models and examples rather than rules and regulations to be followed step by step. This is in respect to the large variations of conditions of the areas where the EQUIP activities are to take place.

90. Since the PIM in its present form is a comprehensive document it is important that all levels responsible in implementing EQUIP have an opportunity to comment in order to simplify, and later report their experiences for further improvement. In this way the ambition of creating a living document can be maintained.

91. The PIM proposes engineering support units within PED. Even if staffing of such units could be a challenge this mission will support the idea of building up local capacity on construction and

maintenance. Some central arrangement of supporting this units through EQUIP in cooperation with the Department of Planning in MOE must be found utilizing regional or central sources.

92. The PIM should be more specific and explicit on barriers, numbers, activities and responsibilities regarding girls' education and female participation, including female teachers. This could facilitate the monitoring of this issue and help identify problem areas;

93. The PIM does not refer to female participation at provincial and central level. It is mentioned by the MoWA, amongst others, that there are not many women in decision making positions. Role models are important to young girls in school;

94. The document does not spell out any details of strategies and methods used in the girl focused social mobilisation work. It would strengthen the document if it could at least refer to the FAs' strategies, if available.

95. Calculation of amount of Quality Enhancement Grant (QEG) to schools is based on student enrolment in a step-wise system. Schools with less than 500 students will receive US\$ 2000, schools with 500-999 students will have US\$ 3000 and above 1000 students the contribution from the fund is US\$ 5500. A number of considerations need to be taken in establishing such formulas. It should be feasible, fair, easy and relevant. However, considering that a school with 999 students will receive US\$2500 less than a school with 1000 students and that a school will receive US\$ 2000 whether it has 20 or 499 students, is evidently not "fair".

96. Taking a per enrolled student approach instead, as was applied in the EERDP, some of these problems would be avoided. Or one could split up in even smaller categories. This team likes, anyway, to propose that the distribution criteria are considered once more.

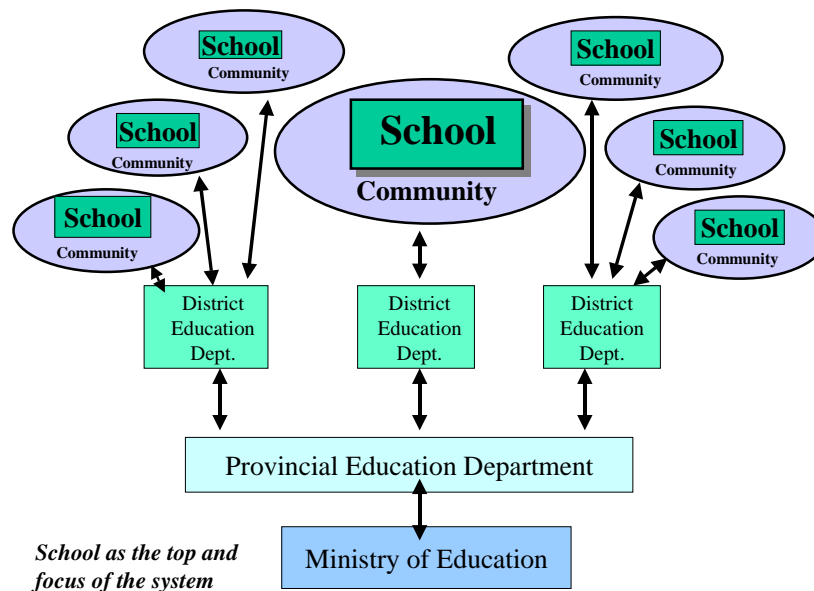
Annex 1. Brief Program Description

Program Development Objectives¹²

EQUIP aims to improve the quality of educational inputs and processes as the foundation for a long-term strategy to enhance the quality of educational outcomes. This will be achieved through: (a) a focus on schools and communities to strengthen their capacity to better manage teaching-learning activities; (b) investment in human resources (teachers, principals and educational administration personnel) and physical facilities; and (c) institutional development of schools, DEDs, PEDs and the MOE. The program also aims to promote education for girls by putting a priority for female teachers and students within each component activity.

As shown in the figure below, the program aims to put schools at the center of activities and the top of the system whereby PEDs and DEDs and the MOE will be supporting the well-functioning of schools.

Figure: School as the Top and Focus of the Education System



Program Components

To achieve the objectives, the program would finance the following components:

- (1) Grants to schools for: (a) quality enhancement; and (b) infrastructure development;
- (2) Support to schools through human resources development and institution building for: (a) teacher development programs; (b) school principal selection and training; and (c) capacity building of PEDs and DEDs to strengthen their school support functions; and
- (3) Support for policy development and monitoring and evaluation.

¹² The World Bank: "Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, Education Quality Improvement Program Proposal", (not dated) p. 3

Project Components and their implementing agencies¹³

<u>Com-ponents</u>	<u>Subcom-ponents</u>	<u>Imple-menters</u>	<u>Facili-tators</u>	<u>Primary Super-visors</u>	<u>Secon-dary Super-visors</u>	<u>Budget</u>
1. School Grants	1.1 Quality Enhancement Grants	Schools (PTA/ SMC)	DEDs/ PEDs	PEDs	MoE/ EQUIP Unit	US\$10.0 million
	1.2 Infrastructure Development Grants	Schools (PTA/ SMC) through Local Contractors	DEDs DOC NGO	Engineers in PEDs, Engineers in NGOs	MoE/ DOC	US\$11.0 million
2. Human Resource Development	2.1 Teachers' Training	TEP, TTC, NGOs	TTD	MOE/ EQUIP/ TTD	Core Team of TEP	US\$7.0 million
	2.2 Development of School Principals	TEP, PEDs, NGOs		MoE	TTD	US\$1.5 million
	2.3 Capacity building of District and Provincial Education Departments	DED, PED		PD	MoE	US\$3.0 million
3. Policy Development, and Monitoring and Evaluation	3.1 Policy Development	PD and other relevant dept. of MoE		PD	MoE	US\$1.0 million
	3.2 Monitoring and Evaluation	PD Third Party M&E		PD	MoE/ EQUIP	US\$1.5 million
			Total			US\$35.0 million

¹³ PIM for EQUIP page 14.