



Save the Children

education global challenge

AFGHANISTAN BRIEFING



Parwana at HIFA's school for hearing-impaired children in Kabul, Afghanistan.



Mirwais is one of Kabul's 65,000 street children.

“Now we have a lot of friends. I want to finish school and go to university. More than anything else I want to be a teacher for other deaf children.” Parwana, 13, Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's civil war, flamed by foreign interests, began in 1978. Fundamentalist Taliban control ended in 2001, but despite reconstruction efforts, Afghanistan is deeply poor with chronic malnutrition, lawlessness and frequent violence against children. Girls are still excluded from many activities. We're calling on your support to help us recreate schools for all children, and redevelop essential skills in the country.

The issue

Access: not enough places to go round

Half of Afghan children between seven and 13 attend school, but only a third are girls.^{1,2} In rural areas, girls' attendance can be very low, due to inadequate school facilities for girls, the distances many girls must travel to attend school, and the very limited number of female teachers. The education budget covers only teachers' salaries and though there are no school fees, some families are too poor to invest in education; they need the short-term benefits of children's wages or household support instead.

The solution

Ensuring places for all

- Conduct research to determine where schools are most needed and how best to allocate limited resources for school construction.
- Encourage communities to set up schools or centres for 'equivalent' education for groups of children, such as older girls or working children, who are excluded from the government system, and demonstrate flexible arrangements for working children.
- Help train more female teachers.

The issue

Quality: Education without motivation

Most qualified teachers, heads and trainers fled the conflict. It will be many years before Afghanistan regains an adequately-trained teaching force. Fewer than 15 per cent of teachers hold professional credentials,³ and very few are trained to teach through child involvement. Learning by rote in an authoritarian system is widespread, a problem worsened by a severe lack of teaching materials and education supplies.

Protection: Danger, violence and disease cast a shadow

Many circumstances prevent fully effective learning in most schools. Physical and psychological punishments are currently common in both homes and schools, and classrooms can be seen by pupils as violent places, both emotionally and physically. Teachers often lack skills to discipline children in a constructive way. Families are also reluctant to send girls to school if they would have to travel far as this can expose them to risk.

Finance: An ignored need

The Afghan government's resources for education are very scarce and its budget priorities are generally short-term. Nearly all the budget for education comes from donors and it can be unevenly distributed. Unpredictable financial flows make long-term planning for reform hard. In 2003, for example, there was a shortfall of \$123 million in the planned education budget. The difficulty of co-ordinating the organisations involved can lead to waste.

The solution

Active learning with trained teachers

- Supply teaching and learning materials to schools.
- Help run teacher-training programmes, including workshops and classroom support on teaching and learning methods that improve children's learning. Assist communities to prepare their own teachers.
- Add to the ministry of education's ability to support and advise teachers and to improve teaching, as children will not enrol and stay in school if it is not relevant, interesting and safe.

Strong, healthy and safe

- Demonstrate 'child-friendly' principles for schools, to promote improved learning through safer and more protective environments.
- Encourage changes of behaviour through codes of conduct for children and teachers, with a referral and monitoring system to make sure they work.
- Help encourage alternatives to physical punishments in schools and homes and set up discussions on ways to encourage behaviour that respects children's rights.

Ensuring investment for the future

- Seek resources from the authorities, donors, aid agencies and development partners to ensure lasting improvement and the continuity of good education for all children and so retain the advances already made.
- Help the ministry of education argue for a greater share of the national budget.
- Help district and provincial education officers and teacher trainers better support and advise teachers to plan for more effective use of available resources.

How Afghanistan measures up

- 46% of children aged 7-12 are out of school¹
- 60% of girls aged 7-13 are out of school²
- Fewer than 15% of teachers have a teaching degree³
- Just 20% of pupils starting primary school complete grade 5⁴
- 27% of teachers are female but most are in urban schools⁵
- 92% of girls in some rural areas are out of school⁶

"We love our children but we don't respect them. Adult Afghans have an attitude that oppresses children's views. This is our biggest challenge."

Hangama Anwari, head of children's rights, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

References:

1. SC Sweden, 2004; UNDP, 2004, p.2; Wirak et al., 2005, p. 25 2. SC Sweden, 2004; UNDP, 2004, p.2; Wirak et al., 2005, p. 25 3. Wirak et al., 2005, p. 27 4. HRRAC, 2004, pp. 4-5 5. CSO-Teachers, 2004; World Bank, 2004 6. Wirak et al., 2005

MIRWAIS' STORY

“I dream of a country that is not at war”

“Some of my friends were hit at home. I went home to one of them and said to the parents that they shouldn't hit. I told them that my friend couldn't earn money or go to school if he was hit. He lost his courage. They accepted this and changed both their behaviour and attitude.”

Mirwais is a popular 14-year-old. He works on the Kabul streets but receives schooling through Save the Children. The income he earns is important to his family. But he also helps other children facing violence at home or school. A Save the Children report showed that after more than 20 years of war, almost all the children in Afghanistan are beaten by their parents or teachers, or know children who are.

Nooria Isaqzai and Sharifa Rasa, child psychologists with the Social Volunteers Foundation, explain, “There are many examples of the consequences war has had on family life: stress, lack of hope for the future, and fear that as an adult one will be unable to get work. This creates many problems and the parents lose their patience. That is why they begin hitting their children.”

Top right: Mirwais at his home in Kabul.

Bottom right: Child psychologists Nooria Isaqzai and Sharifa Rasa in conversation with Mirwais.



“I want the entire Afghan people to stand together. People have to understand that this is their home. Also, I would like all school children to have uniforms in order to avoid discrimination.” Mirwais, 14, Kabul, Afghanistan

Help us meet the challenge of education in Afghanistan.

AFGHANISTAN MEETING THE CHALLENGE

We aim to increase the number of children – especially girls and those in rural areas – able to attend school, and help them afford to complete formal education. We will enhance and complement the government's own provision and will emphasise the wider community responsibility for ensuring the right to education for all Afghan children.

Our target

We need the international community to create a climate where Afghanistan can afford to, and has the long-term stability to, deliver its education goals. We will help the Afghan government to:

- raise the shortfall in funds – of around \$500 million a year
- increase enrolment at primary level to 75 per cent for girls and 85 per cent for boys
- ensure 70 per cent of teachers meet a defined level of competency.

Our direct practical work with community and government partners will help 36,000 more Afghan children go to school by 2010, and offer these plus 108,000 others a better and more relevant education.

Save the Children is putting \$17 million towards these aims. We need to raise many millions more from our partners and supporters. The issues are complex, the solutions must be versatile. Above all, the world must take seriously every child's right to an education.

We will regularly monitor our work in Afghanistan, tracking enrolment, attendance and class sizes. We will also monitor the government's relative spend on education. Donors will receive three regular reports of our progress during the programme.

Help us meet the challenge

Save the Children will work in practical ways to address the availability and quality of schooling for many of Afghanistan's poorest and hardest to reach children. Here are some examples of how your support might help.

Access: Ensuring places for all

- Create new schools in the most beneficial locations.
- Provide improved teaching materials and equipment to schools.

Quality: Active participation with trained teachers

- Run teacher training programmes.
- Provide school management training for head teachers.
- Support school nutrition activities to improve 'readiness' to learn.

Protection: Strong, healthy and safe

- Emphasise teaching on health, hygiene and HIV and AIDS.
- Press for improved learning through safer and more protective physical environments.

But we cannot do everything. Although Afghanistan has a clear plan and targets for education, the government does not give it enough resources. We will also press the government to:

- ensure personal poverty does not deny a child their right to education
- seek long-term and predictable funds for education
- change the negative attitudes to the education of girls.

All costs quoted are in US\$

To join our Challenge, visit
www.savethechildren.net/education



Left: Boys at school in Afghanistan.