Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Social Effects of Community-Based Education, Afghanistan (ALSE)

Research Brief #6: Community Capacity to Co-manage Primary Education

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Introduction

The government of Afghanistan's new Citizen's Charter National Priority Program (or Citizen's Charter) outlines clear roles for local government to provide public services across the country, stipulating that Community Development Councils (CDC)[1], their Education Subcommittees (ES)[2], and School Management Shuras (SMS)[3] oversee the delivery of quality education at the village level. This initiative complements the Ministry of Education's Community-Based Education (CBE) Policy, which emphasizes villagers' active involvement in managing CBE classes. Although these local institutions—CDCs, ESs, and SMSs—will be instrumental in the future of universal education in Afghanistan, little is known about their ability to take on this role. For example, even basic information is unavailable, such as whether CDCs continued to function after the end of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP). Likewise, little information exists about the capacity of ESs and SMSs.

To strengthen and support these institutions in their new roles, it is critical to learn more about them. To this end, ALSE conducted institutional assessment surveys with CDCs, ESs, and SMSs in 180 villages in Herat, Ghor, Daykundi, Bamiyan, Parwan, and Kapisa provinces. The surveys covered institutional functions, participation in capacity building trainings, and management practices of these institutions. These findings will help efforts to sustain village-level education services in Afghanistan as envisioned by the Citizen's Charter and the CBE Policy.

This Research Brief presents results on key functions of these institutions, including frequency of meetings, members' attendance, regularity of meeting notes, and involvement of the community members in institutional decision-making processes. This brief foreshadows our policy report that will offer more details about these institutions.

[1] CDC is a village-level community institution initially established by National Solidarity Program (NSP). Under Citizen's Charter, the CDCs will be at the forefront of community-driven development and linked to the national government.
[2] ES refers to the education shura or CBE shura that was established by NGOs implementing CBE programs. The Citizen's Charter envisions that the education shuras will become Education Subcommittees under the CDC.
[3] SMS is the shura of a hub school, with members consisting of parents, teachers, and hub school administrators. The SMS is important to the sustainability of CBE, especially during the handover process as they provide the link to the district and provincial education offices.

Methods

ALSE administered a survey via face-to-face focus group interviews with the CDCs, ESs, and SMSs in the six provinces mentioned above. Two surveyors interviewed each focus group consisting of three to six members. To adhere to local practices, in some areas surveyors organized focus groups in separate subgroups of men and women.

Analysis

In total, we administered 179 CDC, 220 ES, and 114 SMS surveys and 715, 615, and 469 members participated, respectively. Table 1 presents the findings from four survey questions administered to all three community institutions. These questions focused on the *regularity* of official meetings for each institution and the *formality* of those meetings. To determine formality, we set two benchmarks: the ability of each institution to provide a written record of their meetings and the presence of at least half of the total membership of each institution in these meetings. The table presents provincial averages for each question, as well as an overall average.

	Bamiyan		Daykundi		Ghor		Herat		Kapisa		Parwan		Total	
	mean	count	mean	count	mean	count	mean	count	mean	count	mean	count	mean	count
Proportion with official meetings in past two years														
CDC	0.63	16	0.71	41	0.83	29	0.94	17	0.81	36	0.87	46	0.80	185
ES	1.00	17	0.92	36	0.96	23	0.95	22	0.71	41	0.90	81	0.89	220
SMS	0.92	13	0.88	25	1.00	23	1.00	6	1.00	16	1.00	31	0.96	114
Number of meetings held in past two years														
CDC	3.00	16	3.37	41	4.72	29	6.06	17	5.06	36	4.93	46	4.51	185
ES	5.71	17	5.81	36	5.22	23	6.18	22	4.22	41	5.33	81	5.30	220
SMS	5.46	13	5.36	25	6.30	23	7.00	6	7.00	16	6.23	31	6.11	114
Record of meeting minutes														
CDC	0.25	16	0.02	41	0.10	29	0.00	17	0.19	36	0.02	46	0.09	185
ES	0.29	17	0.06	36	0.17	23	0.18	22	0.15	41	0.07	81	0.12	220
SMS	0.77	13	0.20	25	0.57	23	0.00	6	0.75	16	0.65	31	0.53	114
Proportion of meetings with attendance of >50% of total members														
CDC	0.56	16	0.54	41	0.69	29	0.88	17	0.72	36	0.74	46	0.68	185
ES	0.94	17	0.92	36	0.83	23	0.95	22	0.68	41	0.85	81	0.85	220
SMS	0.69	13	0.68	25	0.87	23	1.00	6	0.88	16	0.87	31	0.82	114

Table 1: Frequency of meetings

All three institutions held a high proportion of meetings over the last two years, on average. Overall, the SMSs had the highest proportion with 0.96, or at least one meeting. The ESs and CDCs also had a high proportion of meetings, at 0.89 and 0.80, respectively. Provincial averages were similar among institutions.

The second question focuses on the number of meetings over the last two years. Again, SMSs met most frequently, with 6.11 meetings over the past two years. The overall averages for ESs and CDCs were 5.30 and 4.47, respectively. CDC scores in Bamiyan and Daykundi were

lower than the overall average, each averaging around three meetings. Qualitative data suggested that CDCs met regularly when they were first formed under the NSP, but after that, tended to convene only if there was an NSP-associated project or in response to a specific issue in the community. If there were no projects or no issues that needed the CDC attention, the council typically did not meet.

Next, we present the proportion of institutions that maintained written records of meeting minutes. In total, around half (0.53) of SMSs were able to provide notes. However, very low proportions of ESs (0.12) and CDCs (0.08) were able to do the same. The low proportions for ESs and CDCs may be because these community institutions hold meetings informally, thus building documentation or written evidence for their meetings is relatively rare. Also, according to our observations, compared to SMS members, ES and CDC members appear to have lower levels of literacy, thus affecting their ability to record meetings.

Finally, we present the proportion of meetings with at least 50% of all members of the institutions in attendance. The national average for the ES and SMS is high, but the average proportion for the CDC is notably lower at 0.68. However, the provincial averages for CDCs cover a wide range, from 0.54 in Daykundi to 0.88 in Herat. The low proportion of fully-attended CDC meetings in Bamiyan and Daykundi (discussed above) is likely related to their infrequent meetings.

To better understand how decisions are made at meetings, we looked at who is involved in the decision-making process. Since the Citizen's Charter aims for community members to initiate requests for services, their input and involvement will be critical to meet the communities' needs.

Figure 1 presents information on *inclusivity* in the decision-making process for each institution. Surveyors presented each institution with three options to choose from to explain who was involved in their decision-making processes: (1) the institutional head, (2) all members of the institution, or (3) all members and community members. For all three institutions, a significant majority of respondents reported that their decision-making process involved both members of the institution and other villagers.

To verify and clarify these findings, we explored the high reported rates of *involvement* of community members in the institutional decision-making process. The surveyors probed the respondents for details about whether and how the members share information and decisions of their meetings with the rest of the villagers. Many talked about how the decisions are *shared after-the-fact* by holding meetings with the rest of the villagers, village elders, or often via informal meetings held at mosques or after evening prayers at the mosques. Some CDC members mentioned how they *announced* the CDC meeting decisions at the mosques as well. Only a few CDC members said that they invited

villagers to their meetings, thus the meetings took place with the presence of the villagers. Hence, the high recorded rates of inclusivity in the decision-making process may well be due to the members' misunderstanding about *involving* the community in the decision-making process versus *informing* them of the decisions.
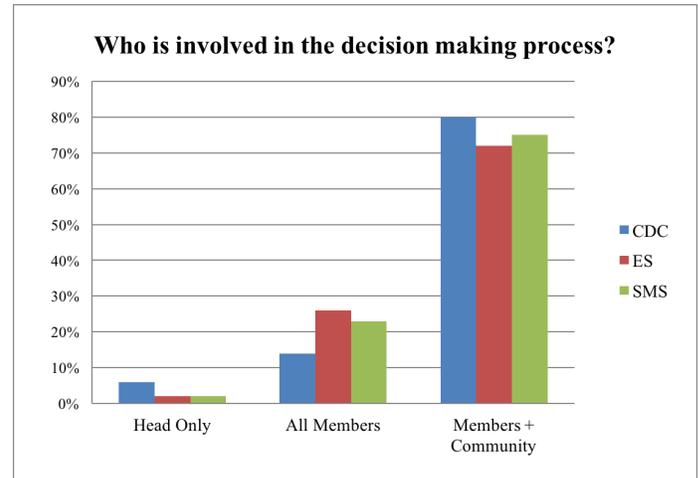

Figure 1: Inclusivity in the institutional decision-making process

Conclusions and Policy Implications

The data show that these three local institutions (CDCs, ESs, SMSs) continue to function. They meet and record meeting minutes occasionally. The village level institutions (CDCs, ESs) operate substantially less formally than the SMSs, which are an inter-village institution tied to a hub school and, therefore, more immediately connected to the District Education Departments. All three community institutions reported a high level of villagers' involvement in institutional decision-making processes. However, further questions revealed that village leaders typically shared institutional decisions with the larger village community after-the-fact.

Because CDCs, ESs, and SMSs exist and function, they can be harnessed to facilitate the provision of services, specifically education, as envisioned by the Citizen's Charter; however, training will be needed to bolster their current capacities.

Future capacity building programs should target these institutions by building on their current ability to hold meetings and involve other community members. We suggest that future support for these institutions focus on the following topics:

- Formalize institutional meetings so that meetings occur regularly with a high attendance of members and information is recorded.
- Formalize information sharing in communities so that all community members are aware of the initiatives and work of the institutions.
- Help the institutions understand the reasons for involving community members in the decision-making process and how to do it.