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

Research Brief #7: Institutional Management Practices of Village Shuras in Rural Afghanistan: Competencies and Areas for Improvement

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Introduction

Community-based education (CBE) improves access and quality of education for children in the most remote areas of Afghanistan. However, the sustainability of the gains from CBE programming remains a key concern among CBE implementers, policy-makers, and donors. Local management of education services, with a strong role of community institutions, may prove to be a viable option for sustainability. The Afghan government's Citizen's Charter (CC) National Priority Program aims to expand basic services across the country by involving local community institutions. Inspired by the CC initiative, ALSE's Phase Two research tests a sustainability model of educational services co-managed by village-level institutions. To provide a baseline management overview, ALSE carried out an institutional capacity assessment with three shuras—Community Development Councils (CDCs)[1], Education Subcommittees (ESs)[2], and School Management Shuras (SMSs)[3]. In total, we administered surveys to 179 CDCs, 220 ESs, and 114 SMSs across 184 villages in Herat, Ghor, Bamiyan, Daykundi, Parwan, and Kapisa. This assessment helps us to begin to understand the current capacity of these community level institutions and what training topics would be the most beneficial in increasing their overall administration and management ability.

This research brief highlights findings from the institutional-capacity assessments with regard to competency levels on key management practices. Further details, along with results for an expanded set of topic areas (including shura functionality, previous capacity building, and linkages with governmental and nongovernmental organizations) can be found in our comprehensive Phase Two Baseline Report.[4]

Management Practice Results

Below we spotlight the competency levels of these institutions' key management practices and provide recommendations for future capacity building efforts. The management practices[5] evaluated were selected from the World Management Survey developed by Bloom and Van Reenen (2007)[6]. For the ESs and SMSs, seven key practices were identified that are relevant to the management of education at the village level. For the CDCs, two additional management practices were included, for a total of nine, to capture the previous roles of the CDCs under the National Solidarity Program (NSP).

The shuras were assessed on each management practice through a series of open-ended questions. The shura responses were scored using a predetermined scale of 1 to 5. A score of 1 indicates "low" level of competency, while a score of 5 indicates "high" level of competency.

Management Practices	CDC				ES				SMS			
	Low	Low Moderate	High Moderate	High	Low	Low Moderate	High Moderate	High	Low	Low Moderate	High Moderate	High
Performance Tracking & Management		x					x			x		
Performance Review		x					x				x	
Problem-Solving			x				x				x	
Consequence Management		x					x				x	
Target Balance		x					x				x	
Time Horizon of Targets/Goals		x				x				x		
Targets are Stretching		x				x					x	
Performance Clarity		x										
Financial Management		x										

Table 1: CDC, ES, SMS competency levels on key management practices across six provinces

[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.

[4] Please visit www.alseproject.com to access the full ALSE Phase Two Baseline Report.

[5] Please see Appendix A for detailed definitions of each management practice evaluated. Definitions are adapted from the World Management Survey developed by Bloom and Van Reenen (2007).

[6] Bloom and Van Reenen. 2007. Measuring and explaining management practices across firms and countries. The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 122(4), 1351-1408.

Table 1 above summarizes the results of these assessments. For each management practice, the average competency rating was computed for a given shura. This average was then classified as representing competency that was "low" (mean score between 1 and 1.99), "low moderate" (mean score between 2 and 2.99), "high moderate" (mean score between 3 and 3.99), or "high" (mean score between 4 and 5).

As a group, the CDCs scored the lowest on the management practices, achieving "high moderate competency" only on one of nine, while the ESs and SMSs exhibited "high moderate competency" on five of seven practices. Problem solving is a strength of all three institutions. The ES and SMS also showed moderate strengths related to reviewing and monitoring project performance ("Performance Review"), setting shura specific goals ("Target Balance"), and successfully following up on goals and managing missed targets ("Consequence Management"). All three institutions scored the lowest on practices related to short- and long-term institutional planning ("Time Horizon of Targets") and CDCs and ESs scored the lowest on setting institutional goals that are both realistic and challenging ("Targets are Stretching").

While none of the institutions scored "high competency" on any of these management practices, the concentration of the mean scores in the "low moderate" and "high moderate" ranges is promising. These results indicate that, on average, all three shuras have a baseline level of competency on key management practices that can be built upon and strengthened through future capacity training.

It is also important to note the variation between the three shuras. The CDCs' poorer performance on this assessment may be attributed to the fact that NSP has now ended and thus trainings may not have been conducted recently enough to reinforce skills related to goal-setting, tracking performance, and performance review. The higher level of competence the ESs demonstrated on the tracking and monitoring performance indicators and problem-solving are likely linked to their roles established by the NGOs and the trainings they have received. The SMSs as part of the formal MoE system, demonstrated a moderate level of competence in general day-to-day operations – problem-solving, performance review, and managing missed targets.

Conclusions

The past experience of each of these institutions and their performance on the management capacity assessment demonstrates that the three shuras, together, have potential to create an effective institutional system to co-manage educational services in their villages, as CC envisions. CDCs are competent in problem-solving and have worked to carry out development projects under NSP; ESs exhibited "high moderate" competency on the practices related to performance monitoring and have experience working with CBE classes, teachers, and parents; SMSs also scored well on the practices related to performance monitoring and have connections with government bodies. However, in order to realize this potential and provide a strong local management for the village-level education services, these institutions need further strengthening and capacity building. Capacity trainings need to be carefully designed and implemented, taking into consideration the different roles each institution plays and the management strengths and weaknesses exhibited by each.

Recommendations

Based on the findings presented here along with those in the comprehensive baseline report, we make the following recommendations for the future training of the three shuras:

- The content of future capacity training should include components on improving the shuras' key management practices, such as project management, strategic planning, performance tracking, and performance management. It should be flexible enough to respond to the different roles of each institution and a variety of local contexts.
- All three shuras lack skills related to goal-setting—that is, setting short- and long-term goals that are both challenging and achievable. Future training on institutional planning should emphasize these skills, based on a village-level needs analyses.
- All three shuras need support to enhance their links with government and non-governmental bodies outside their villages. Connecting these institutions with the formal government system will increase the likelihood that shura members can convey their needs and interests to government officials, which will be instrumental in the successful delivery of education and other services. Trainings on advocacy could help bolster these interactions.
- CDCs will oversee the village-level education service provision and management of funds under the CC. Future training for CDCs should focus on strategic development and institutional planning, project and financial management, and accounting skills. Under NSP, the CDCs' functions focused primarily on implementation of infrastructure projects. In the CC framework, CDCs will become multi-tasking organizations with several thematic subcommittees, including the education subcommittee. Thus, CDCs will need training support during this transition and to develop competence on effective coordination and resource allocation among the subcommittees.
- Future training for ESs should take into account that they will be working with the CDCs under the CC structure, instead of operating as an independent group. Since ESs will be the main shuras working on education in the villages, trainings on educational strategic planning will be important. Moreover, continuous support on classroom management, student and teacher monitoring, and education policy is necessary.
- Future SMS training should focus on building a relationship between SMSs and ESs and how they can work together to ensure effective sustainability for the CBE gains made in the village, including facilitating the smooth transition of CBE graduates to the nearest hub schools and opening and/or continuing CBE in the village. Ongoing training on the pedagogical and psychological aspects of classroom management and teacher evaluation is necessary for both ESs and SMSs.

Appendix A

KEY MANAGEMENT PRACTICE QUESTIONS SURVEYS FOR CDCs, ESs, AND SMSs	
Performance Tracking and Management	Does project progress documentation occur regularly or on an ad-hoc basis? How often are progress indicators identified and reviewed?
Performance Review	Is project performance reviewed frequently or infrequently? Who is involved in reviewing project performance? Is performance reviewed with the goal of continuous improvement or done on an as-needed basis only when problems arise?
Problem-Solving	Are problems identified through a formal monitoring system or through informal means? Are improvement plans part of regular practice or only done as problems arise?
Consequence Management	When follow-up action plans are identified, to what extent are the plans achieved? Does failure to achieve agreed-to objectives carry consequences, which can include reassigning the plan to another member?
Target Balance	Does the institution set goals for itself or does another institution set the institution's goals? To what extent are the goals explicitly linked to the projects being undertaken by the specific institution? Are members held accountable for achieving the goals?
Time Horizon of Targets/Goals	Does the institution set both short-term and long-term goals, and is there a method to prioritize the goals? Are the timelines set to achieve goals attainable within the timeframe or impossible to achieve?
Target Stretching	Does the institution set goals that are either too easy to achieve or too difficult? To what extent do members feel motivated by the goals that are set? Are members held to the same standard for achieving the goals?
Performance Clarity (only CDCs)	Are individual performance indicators defined? Are the performance indicators reviewed routinely and reinforced by other members?
Added by ALSE: Financial Management (only CDCs)	Are budgets regularly reviewed and do financial transactions follow standard financial protocols, or are there no financial protocols? To what extent are all members aware of any financial protocols?