

Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Social Effects of Community-Based Education in Afghanistan (ALSE) Funded by USAID

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Why Conduct Research in Conflict-Affected Countries?

- Because many children have abysmal prospects
- Because we spend lots of money on aid and social programs
- Because we think rigorous research can help guide education policy and improve lives

Outline

- Introduction
- Background
- First study: Overview and outcomes
- Current study
- Research Design and Data
- Next steps

Motivation and Overarching Question

(First study funded by: Spencer Foundation, National Science Foundation, USIP, Weikart Family Foundation)

General consensus—more primary education desirable, especially for girls:

- MDG 2: Universal Primary Education by 2015
 - 50+ million primary age children out of school living in conflict affected countries (Save the Children 2013)
- MDG 3: Eliminate Gender Disparity by 2015
 - Majority of out of school children girls (UN, 2008)

My first study (with Leigh Linden): How does the availability of community-based schools affect girls' and boys' educational enrollment and achievement?

In Afghanistan: no good stats, but approximately:

- 2 million primary school-age children (50-60%) out of school
- Estimated 1.3 million of them girls

Two types of barriers assumed to block access:

- Structural and attitudinal

Background: Afghanistan

- National conditions at the time of first study
 - Most insurgency limited to south and east
 - Educational infrastructure limited country-wide
- Conditions in northwest
 - Low levels of enrollment: Boys 35%, Girls 18% (MRRD, 2007)
 - Relatively stable
 - Lawlessness: Crime, tribal, and inter-village conflicts
 - No acid attacks, no attacks on girls' schools, etc.
- Educational system receiving international assistance



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

Background:

Community-Based Education

- Community-based education is a common intervention in regions/countries where the state is weak and access to education is limited
- Communities provide infrastructure and a teacher; **NGOs** provide community-organizing, training, and monitoring; government provides textbooks



First Study: Research Questions

- Primary Research Questions:
 - What are the causal effects of community-based schools on **participation and learning**?
 - What are the effects on the gender gaps in participation and knowledge?
- Secondary Questions:
 - What is the net effect of distance overall and by gender?

First Study: Research Design

Mixed method design

- Cluster phased-in randomized trial **plus** qualitative interviews in two districts in Ghor (all villages received schools in year two)
 - Control conditions: No schools in any of these villages, some children (mostly boys) walking long distances to access schools (we call them traditional schools to distinguish)
 - Randomly assign 13 schools to 31 villages

First Study: Research Design

- Sample:
 - Villages clustered in groups: 2-3 villages each group
 - Originally, 34 villages in 12 groups, lost one group
 - 5 treat groups (13 villages), 6 control/phase-in (18 villages)
 - Approx. 1,200 households; Approx. 1,500 children between the ages of 6 and 11
- Timing:
 - June 2006 pilot (different program and location)
 - May 2007 randomization
 - July 2007 schools start
 - Oct/Nov follow up survey
 - Mar/Apr 2008 spring survey

Data Collection

- Two survey rounds: Fall 2007 and Spring 2008
 - Matched over time: Longitudinal
- Survey structure
 - Education census of villages
 - Child and household demographic information
 - Child enrollment questions
 - Tested children directly: Math and Dari
 - Pulled directly from government curriculum
 - Attitudinal questions for parents as well
- Qualitative data collection (nested analysis):
 - Program documents
 - Qualitative interviews with program staff
 - Semi-structured interviews with village leaders and parents

Results: Enrollment

Did providing access to CBS increase enrollment for boys and girls? YES

Without the intervention, girls' enrollment rate in school is 18% and boys' is 35%

With the intervention:

- Enrollment increased by 42ppt for all children
- Girls' enrollment increased by 51ppt for a total enrollment of 69%
- Boys' enrollment increased by 34.4ppt for a total enrollment of 69.4%

Results: Test Scores

Did providing access to CBS improve educational outcomes for boys and girls? YES

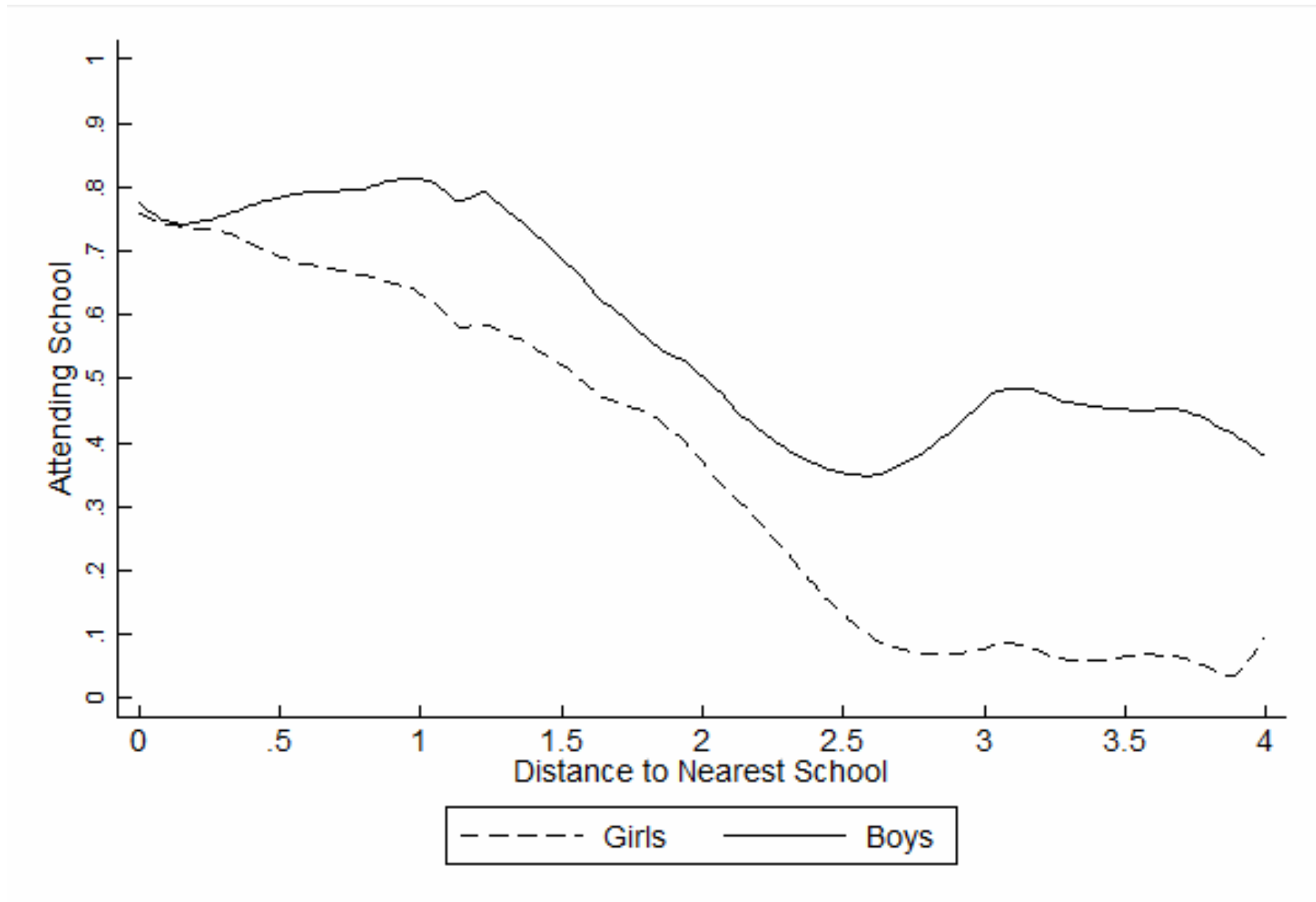
- Large effect on test scores in both surveys
 - Overall effect of 0.5 Std Dev
 - Larger effects for math than Dari

Distance

- Program works by reducing distance children have to travel.
 - Average reduction is 2.7 miles
- Distance is **EXTREMELY** important
 - Enrollment: decreases 16 ppt per mile
 - Test Scores: decreases 0.19 St Dev for each mile

Families are far from schools so some adopt compensating strategies

Figure: Enrollment by Distance and Gender



Background: Community-Based Education

Burde and Linden (2012; 2013) research shows that CBE in remote rural villages in Afghanistan eliminates gender disparity in enrollment and significantly decreases the achievement gap

Obstacles to Research

- Time required to build and maintain relationships
- Intensive training for research team
- Explaining and preserving the integrity of the study
- Safety of the researchers







Current Study: Preparation

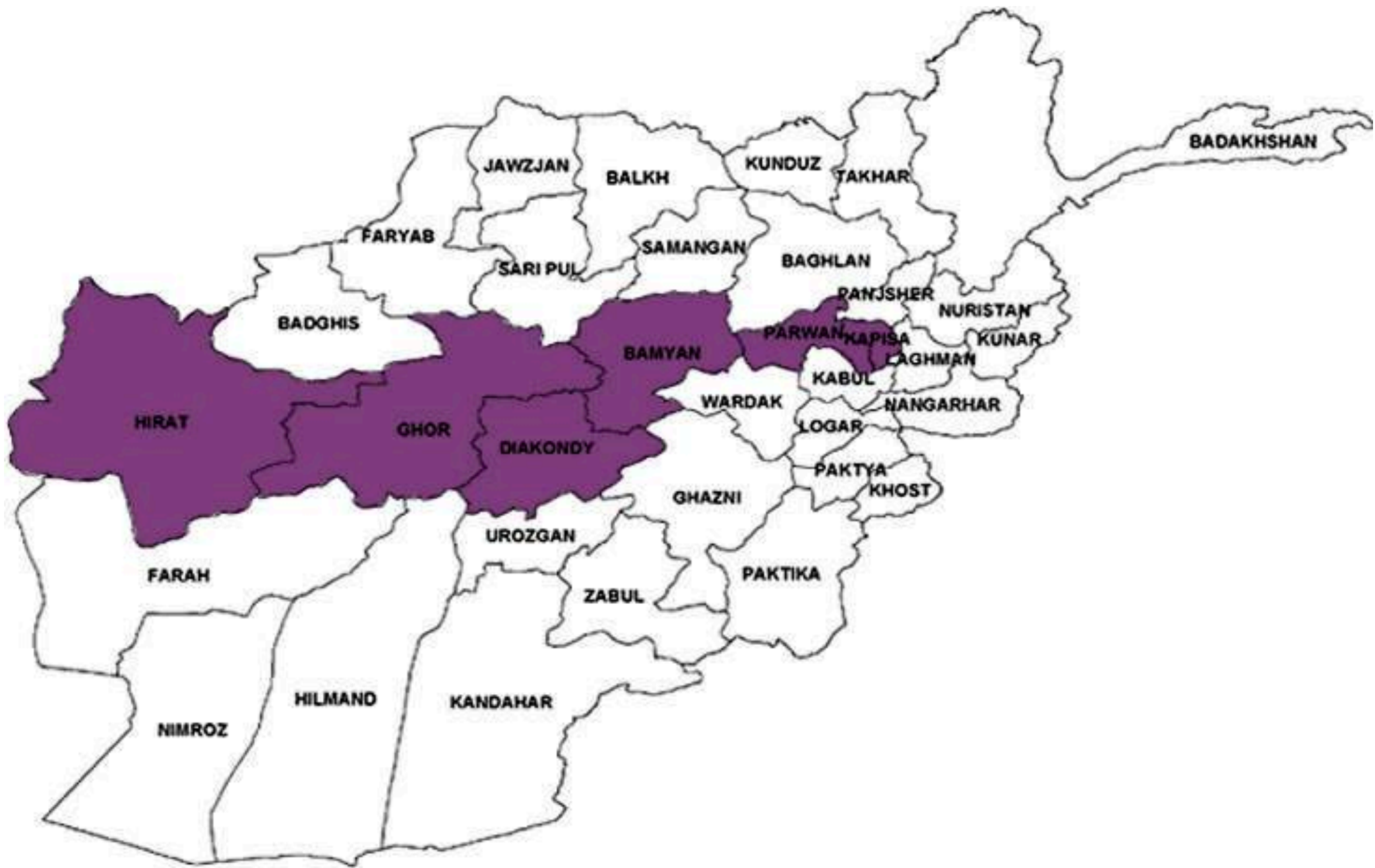
- Afghan government and donors asked if I would do follow up research (2011/12)
- 4 governments, 2 International NGOs, and one “Global Network University” (Afghanistan, US, Canada, Denmark, CRS, CARE, NYU)
- 1.5 years of discussions and relationship building before project started

Research Design

- The Canadian government is providing funding to support community-based education programs implemented by CARE and CRS explicitly to be randomized and studied by Principal Investigators at NYU;
- USAID Is funding our research (impact evaluation) to assess this project

Research Design (funded by USAID)

- Original sample included 220 villages: 160 “treatment,” 60 “control”—down to about 186, total; Guarding the phase-in approach—mitigating effects of the delay;
- 157 clusters (1-2 villages per cluster)
- Study to take place in 6 provinces: Herat, Ghor, Bamiyan, Daykundi, Kapisa, Parwan
- Different interventions (or variations) within treatment include:
 - (1) testing different approaches to (a) increase girls’ and boys’ access to school, and (b) narrow the achievement gap between them, and
 - (2) testing different approaches to sustainability



Research Design

Problem: Not enough qualified teachers

For teacher recruitment and sustainability, ALSE will experiment with two models:

(1) Recruiting from “within” the community model:

- Model prioritizes community ownership and acceptance, although teachers may not have MoE standard credentials

(2) Recruiting accredited teachers model

- Model seeks to recruit only those teachers who possess credentials, but teachers may need incentives to move and communities may need incentives to accept them

Research Design

Problem: Community commitment to education

For community engagement and boosting commitment to girls' access and learning, ALSE will experiment with two models:

(1) NGOs standard community sensitization practice (status quo)

- NGOs have established practice aimed at building community awareness and buy-in for educating children, especially girls.

(2) Enhanced community sensitization activities (status quo *plus*)

- NGOs will use Qur'anic messages to enhance community support for girls' and boys' education and small scale adult learning programs (community libraries).

Challenges and Efforts to Mitigate Challenges

Challenges:

- Unpredictable, rapidly changing environment
- Weather conditions
- Deteriorating security
 - Vigilante activity vs. Taliban strategy (wrong place, wrong time)
- Rapid staff turn over at all partner organizations (ministries, funders, NGOs)
- Timely and clear communication with all partners—esp. government representatives in districts

What We've Done and Next Steps

- March/April: Needs assessment
- May/June: Delays
- July: NGOs started schools
- August: Survey teams trained; Baseline data collection began
- October/November:
 - (1) NYU/project registration completed
 - (2) Complete baseline data collection
- November: Start qualitative data collection (PACE-A)

Policy Implications

- Data presented to Afghan Ministry of Education in March 2009; 2012; 2013
 - Shift in strategy from rural central schools to more government support for CBS
 - Funding from bilateral organizations

Relevant Literature (first study)

Two approaches yielding conflicting results:

- Effects of school placement in villages
 - Identified through IV and natural experiments
 - Find large effects on participation
 - Foster and Rosenzweig (1996), Pitt, Rosenzweig, and Gibbons (1993), Duflo (2001), Andrabi, Das, and Khwaja (2010), Kazianga et al. (2010)
- Elasticity of enrollment in distance
 - Primarily cross-sectional estimates
 - Elasticities are implausibly low
 - Filmer (2007) Niger: 4.8 pts per mile
 - Lavy (1996) and Handa (2002) are other examples
- Build on larger literature exploring the education production process