

Monitoring trends in educational growth in Afghanistan

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In Afghanistan, much has been invested in order to meet the goal of providing all school-age children access to quality, basic education. According to the Afghan Ministry of Education, the number of students in the education system has gone from fewer than one million in 2001, to around 10.5 million in 2013. Despite this significant achievement, 30 per cent of school-aged children, mostly girls, remain without access to school (Ministry of Education - Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2013).

While access to schooling is crucial, it is widely recognised that if students are to realise the full benefits of education, then attending school must involve learning. In 2004, the Government of Afghanistan established the Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP). Through school grants, teacher training and institutional capacity building, EQUIP aims to increase equitable access, especially for girls, to quality basic education.

As part of this program, ACER is working with the Ministry of Education to design and conduct

the first ever sample-based national assessment of learning outcomes in Afghanistan (Ministry of Education - Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2013). This study assesses Grade 6 students' abilities in mathematics, reading and writing. It takes a 'literacy' approach to assessment, aiming to measure how well students can apply their knowledge, skills and understanding in contexts beyond the classroom.

Alongside the assessment, a contextual questionnaire is administered to the assessed students and a school questionnaire is given to their school principals. These questionnaires gather data about the backgrounds and the learning environment of the assessed students, information that is essential for revealing the differences in learning outcomes across the Grade 6 student population. This will enable policy makers to make evidence-based decisions and develop targeted educational policies.

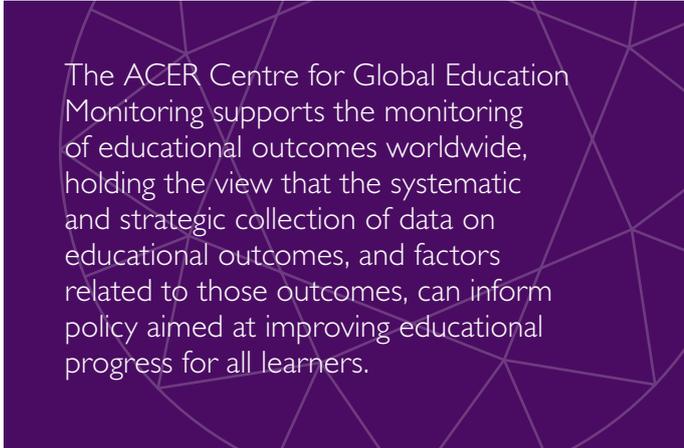
Another key aspect of ACER's collaboration with the Ministry of Education is building the Ministry's capacity in conducting large-scale assessments. A Learning Assessment (LA) Unit has been set up within the Ministry of Education to implement the assessment activities in the field. ACER is working closely with the LA team to provide guidance and support during all aspects of the assessment cycle. Thanks to this cooperation, the main survey was successfully administered in November 2013.

Approximately 6000 Grade 6 students from around 110 schools in 13 provinces participated in the main survey. The assessment was administered in both the Dari and Pashto languages and a representative sample of both boys and girls was included. In building a partnership of strong collaboration with the Afghan Ministry of Education, ACER has helped to develop and implement a high-quality and relevant assessment for this rapidly developing school system. The results of this survey will provide policy makers with valid and reliable data on the quality of education in Afghanistan.

References

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The ACER Centre for Global Education Monitoring supports the monitoring of educational outcomes worldwide, holding the view that the systematic and strategic collection of data on educational outcomes, and factors related to those outcomes, can inform policy aimed at improving educational progress for all learners.