

**FORWARD-LOOKING STRATEGIC EVALUATION OF THE UNICEF-
SUPPORTED FEMALE LITERACY PROGRAMME**

(2010-2013)

IN 34 PROVINCES OF AFGHANISTAN



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Table of Contents

<i>Executive Summary</i>	3
<i>Acronyms</i>	6
1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	7
Scope of the evaluation	
Literacy policy and practice context	
Purpose and objectives of the evaluation	
2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, DESIGN, METHODS & LIMITATIONS OF THE EVALUATION	15
Conceptual framework	
Design and methods of data collection and analysis	16
<i>Evaluation Team and Distribution of Work</i>	
<i>Data site sampling</i>	
<i>Data collection methods</i>	
<i>Data analysis</i>	
<i>Risks and limitations</i>	
<i>Ethical standards and safeguarding of respondents</i>	
<i>Stakeholder participation in the evaluation</i>	
3. DESCRIPTION OF THE UNICEF-SUPPORTED FEMALE LITERACY PROJECT	23
Rationale of the project	
Resources of the project	
4. PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS: PROGRESS ON RESULTS REALIZED AND FALTERING	25
Effectiveness	
Limitations on the analysis	
The numbers	
Learning outcomes	
5. STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND REALIZING RESULTS	30
Relevance	
Efficiency	
Sustainability	
Inclusion	
Appropriateness of human and learning resources	
Coordination	
Informed action	
6. CONCLUSIONS, LESSONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	48
Conclusions	
Lessons	
Recommendations	51
<i>Changing the paradigm</i>	
<i>Changing the project</i>	
Annexes	59
1. Contact List	
2. Bibliography	
3. Sample Selection: decisions, processes and rationales	
4. Evaluation Workplan	
5. Evaluation Matrix	
6. Interview questions/observation protocol	
7. National fieldwork team	
8. Evaluation TORS	

List of tables:

- 1- Table 1- Literacy rate (2007-2012)
- 2- Table 2-Net enrolment ratio in primary education
- 3- Table 3- A snap shot of fieldwork sites
- 4- Table 4- Literacy centers (2010-2013)
- 5- Table 5- Literacy rate & female primary education
- 6- Table 6- Literacy rate for rural adults and youths
- 7- Table 7- Evaluation matrix

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Overview the UNICEF-supported Female Literacy Project (2010-2013)

The project aims to contribute to national literacy targets through support to a 9-month “Literacy Centre” training course for rural women; delivered in 2 hour/day classes in private homes and mosques; by purpose-trained female teachers; using a gender-tailored curriculum. It expects to enrol and graduate 306,000 learners with skills in basic reading and numeracy and, eventually, “a 50% increase in literacy rates among females between ages of 15-24”, “the empowerment of women in the country” and “a better life for both women and children”. As part of the Government system, and within the framework of UNICEF’s more focused Country Programme, LCs continue to be opened and monitored by District Education Offices, Literacy Managers and Monitors in ten “most disadvantaged” provinces.

2. Evaluation objectives and intended audience

The purpose of the evaluation is threefold: to assess project relevance to, and impact on, the literacy needs of Afghan women; explore the likelihood of its uptake by government and other actors should UNICEF withdraw; and inform UNICEF and government of strategies for project improvement. More specifically, based on evidence of effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, sustainability and impact, the objectives of the evaluation are twofold, to: (i) conduct a “detailed and an in-depth” assessment of the project “that will lead to a well-defined strategic direction and action in the next Country Programme when the current cycle ends in 2014”; and (ii) “provide other literacy actors with up to date evidence-based lessons learnt that can inform decisions in the area of literacy training”.

3. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was managed through a two-tier team structure: an independent external consultant contracted by UNICEF as team leader to design, manage and ensure overall quality of the evaluation and write the final report; and a local Afghan national team of chiefly female researchers with direct experience of the selected sample provinces, contracted through a competitive process to conduct the fieldwork and coordinate the summary presentation of criteria-grouped English-language interview and FGD data to the team leader.

Five provinces were selected for the sample: Zabul, Paktya and Badghis (with active Centres) and Laghman and Balkh (with completed projects). Based on criteria of accessibility, security and project relevance, data were collected from four Centres in each of 9 districts following guidance of Provincial Education Directors, Literacy Managers and UNICEF officers. Three data collection methods were used: analysis of policy, project and evaluation documents and statistical reports; interviews or FGD with national and local stakeholders; and observation of literacy classes. Tools, translated into Pashto and Dari, generated context-specific data on stakeholder experiences, perspectives and opinions.

4. Key findings and conclusions

The project is providing the inputs as expected. The lack of infrastructural complexity in opening Centres has allowed most to become operational in a relatively straightforward and timely way, but also meant mixed classroom quality. Gathered into a single textbook, the curriculum has covered the basics of the national literacy curriculum grades 1-3, but with lessons specifically geared to subjects targeting women as homemakers.

As with the literacy sector overall, barriers to project success have tended to outweigh opportunities. However, progress has been realized within the narrow parameters of context fragility and limited resources it has faced.

The project appeared to be generally effective insofar as has enrolled the “right” people i.e. those adolescent girls and women denied the opportunity of a formal education. It has worked as intended in exposing learners to reading, although younger learners were progressing fairly quickly, while older ones struggled. Nevertheless, the majority were positive about all aspects of the LCs, the quality of teachers most frequently cited. Good links with communities appeared to be fostered.

Relevance was nuanced. While consensus opinion confirmed project purposes well aligned to stakeholders, both implied and expressed concerns suggested the scope should be broadened, for learners 15-20, to include a curriculum equivalent to Gr5 to support their “right age” entry to Gr6 and for those above 25 and married, to include rudimentary income generating skills.

Efficiency assessments were ambiguous. A per/student cost of \$61 for the 9-month course compared favourably with \$67 for general education and \$98 for national literacy provision. Critically, learner and teacher satisfaction levels confirmed cost-benefit for them and the community; dropout and absenteeism were non-issues. However, a one-size-fits-all curriculum, with teachers not readily able to adapt it, has limited realizing optimal learning outcomes for the variety of participants involved.

The project has been, by definition, inclusive in targeting illiterate marginalized females, but has not been proactive in “seeking out” those not on their own volition turning up; there has been no directive to include Kuchi.

Human resources have been limited and inconsistent throughout the delivery side, negatively affecting effectiveness at all levels with too few mechanisms in place to provide either comprehensive initial knowledge and skills for implementation or their regular updating. Learning resources have also been limited, crowded and lightly-resourced classrooms challenging application of a learner-centred, interactive and responsive teaching environment.

Coordination was considered generally weak across the literacy sector and with respect to the project. Multiple actors and limited joint action are exacerbated by inadequate, disparate planning, performance and outcome data.

The limited extent and quality of monitoring in the project has been a strong factor explaining challenges to effectiveness. Assessing project performance for the evaluation and for its own internal decision making has been weakened by lack of an operational definition of literacy, baselines and consistently collected outcome data.

Sustainability remained dubious. While the project has provided learners a first step toward literacy, it has overall been insufficient to consolidate capacity. While there continued to be strong expressions of interest among communities in what the project was providing, where UNICEF had withdrawn, the gap has not been filled locally or from Kabul.

A failure to clarify a definition of literacy around which to frame project design and outcome assessment has meant many rural and vulnerable girls and women, as graduates, deemed to be “literate” when effectively they are not. In consequence, they are unlikely to receive further needed support given the project’s emphasis on reaching new learners versus consolidating the learning of earlier ones.

5. Main recommendations

Changing the Paradigm

1. *Reframe and advocate for a concept of literacy that is more explicitly cross-sectoral as a catalyst for women's wider development, and put women at the centre.*
 - *Put women, gender equality, protection and peace-building at the centre of all literacy programming.*
2. *Reconceptualize literacy (and so the project) within the broader framework of the principles and practices of an emerging Nonformal Education sector.*
 - *Include concepts, delivery modalities and methods of adult and community learning in an expanded preparation of teachers.*
3. *Professionalize the teaching of adults as a legitimate and central area of teacher education within the wider Education sector.*
4. *Increase, stabilize and diversify the resource base of literacy within the wider development-and-equity mandate - including, but not restricted to, education.*
5. *Provide more intensive support and training to the development of M&E theory and practice, toward both a better understanding of the purpose of evidence-based planning and decision-making and a more consistent application of the full triple-A (act-assess-adapt) cycle.*
 - *Consider in the medium-term introducing use of the RBM framework, through systematic, hands-on training at all levels.*

Changing the Project

6. *Extend the range of content and duration of delivery channels for Literacy Centre teacher training*
7. *Allow and enable greater flexibility of programming that is more user-driven and locally managed with respect to options and resources. Three elements are suggested for this:*
 - i. *Where feasible, extend the duration of the single course format from 9 to 12 or more months and enable streaming within the period.*
 - ii. *Where numbers allow, divide the programme into various stand-alone courses based on learner goals.*
 - iii. *Provide a modular textbook format and training teachers in development and use of locally-made teaching-learning materials.*
8. *Support capacity building for outreach by and among local stakeholders.*

Acronyms

AIFLI	Afghanistan Integrated Functional Literacy Initiative
ALAS	Afghanistan Literacy Assessment Survey
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
APPRO	Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization
BEGE	Basic Education and Gender Equality Programme (UNICEF)
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CDC	Community Development Council
CFS	Child-friendly School
CLC	Community Learning Center
CPAP	Country Programme Action Plan
CPD	Country Programme Document
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DEO	District Education Office
ELA	Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (UNESCO)
EFA	Education for All
EJSR	Education Joint Sector Review (2012)
ELA	Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (UNESCO)
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
LCEP	Literacy and Community Empowerment Programme (UN HABITAT)
LD	Literacy Department
LEAF	Improvement of Literacy in Afghanistan (JICA)
LEAP	Literacy Enhancement for Afghan Police (MOI)
LEARN	Literacy & Education in Afghanistan, Right Now!
LIFE ¹	Literacy Initiative for Empowerment
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOLSAMD	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled
MTR	Midterm Review
NEIP	National Education Interim Plan
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
NFE	Nonformal Education
NFEMIS	Nonformal Education Management Information System
NFUAJ	National Federation of UNESCO Associations Japan
NLAP	National Literacy Action Plan
NPP	National Priority Programme
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NVRA	National Vulnerability and Risk Assessment
PED	Provincial Education Directorate
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VEC	Village Education Committee
WFP	World Food Program

¹ Initiated by the LD and UNESCO in 2008 as the framework through which all agencies would meet regularly, principally at national level, to discuss, share updates and generally “promote literacy education in a more effective and collaborative manner” (Adam Smith:69).

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Scope of the evaluation

Afghanistan continues to face a serious equality gap along multiple dimensions, all of which come together most starkly for rural, impoverished and illiterate women. Both Government and development partners recognize these inequalities and the education IR 3 of UNICEF's Country Programme Action Plan 2010-2013 sought to enable a 50% increase in literacy rates among rural women 15-24 through support to the "female literacy project" component of the Government's overall national literacy programme.

From a national perspective, the **theory of change**² implied by the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) suggests that support to women's literacy will contribute to its intermediate outcome of realizing a more "comprehensive and holistic" educational system, as a basis for moving toward its ultimate outcome of stable "qualified human resources (able to) meet the challenges of reconstruction". Within the framework of the NESP, education interventions are expected to reach "substantial targets, encompassing both equitable access to education and the quality of (that) education"; to be needs-based, accountable, transparent and regularly monitored; and to be conducted through "close partnership with communities, civil society, the private sector and government"³.

The **results chain** specifically for literacy, though not framed as such, could be inferred from the documentation as building from the *inputs* in rural areas - where "most literacy learners live" - of gender-sensitive community-based classes, female facilitators and learning materials "relevant to learners' lives"; leading to *outputs* of increased women's participation; and eventually to *immediate outcomes* of acquired basic skills and knowledge; with the potential for realizing the *intermediate outcomes* of the full participation of rural women in their "community and the wider society"⁴.

In terms of the **project's results chain**, again inferred, the financial support of UNICEF's Basic Education and Gender Equality Programme aimed to contribute to the national programme by supporting the

- *inputs* of a 9-month literacy training course for rural women, delivered in 2 hour/day classes of some 25 learners, in private homes and mosques, by trained female teachers through a gender-tailored curriculum;
- toward an *expected output* of mobilized communities totalling 306,000 young and older women enrolled in the course; and from there,
- to an *immediate outcome* of acquired skills in basic reading and numeracy among these women and, eventually, the *intermediate outcome* of "a 50% increase in literacy rates among females between ages of 15-24", "the empowerment of women in the country" and "a better life for both women and children"⁵.

As part of the Government system, LCs were to be opened, monitored and teachers trained by District Education Offices, Literacy Managers and Monitors, through shared resources. The project continues

² Enabling documentation of the project did not develop a Theory of Change or Logic Model. The evaluation attempts to suggest this minimal one, but more importantly explored underlying assumptions (theories of change) of stakeholders as to how these influenced project delivery, participation and outcomes.

³ MOE. "National Education Strategic Plan...": 3,4

⁴ MOE. "National Education Strategic Plan...": 15

⁵ TORS: 3

now in ten provinces, following UNICEF’s strategic refocusing of its Country Programme overall on the “most disadvantaged”⁶.

Literacy Policy and Practice Context

The project was designed to function as a UNICEF-supported project, managed as an undertaking of the MOE Literacy Department. Understanding why and how the project is being implemented as it is and realizing its intended outcomes cannot, therefore, be divorced from the wider political, economic, institutional and socio-cultural environment in which the Department functions. What has influenced the sector as a whole is what has influenced the project and will continue to influence its future trajectory. This section tries to examine some of these influencing factors.

The Numbers As policy documents indicate, the Government has “since 2002...invested heavily in the education sector and has attained progress toward the ultimate goals of educating all of Afghanistan’s children, reducing illiteracy, and creating a skilled labour force”. It has recognized that an “ability to read and write and knowledge learned in the education system are strong facilitators for adequate performance on the labour market and in social life. Households of illiterate heads are 31 percent more likely to be poor than those of literate heads, and the household poverty rate decreases steadily with higher levels of education”⁷.

The task is considerable. Afghanistan has among the lowest literacy rates globally due chiefly to long years of conflict, insecurity and gender discrimination, coupled with an attendant “myriad” of so far intractable socio-economic and systemic constraints: “shortage of qualified teachers, especially females; insufficient learning space and teaching/learning materials; poor institutional capacity to plan and manage education programmes; political and cultural conservatism; and traditional family structures”⁸.

As indicated in the table below, however, the good news is that literacy rates are gradually improving. Repeating the message of the 2009 NVRA, the most recent statistics confirm the change for girls as especially significant; “in no previous living generation has the gender gap for literacy been so small.”⁹

Table 1-Literacy rate (2007-2012)

	Ages 15-24	Urban	Rural	Kuchi	National
Male	2007/8 ¹⁰	--	--	--	52.9
Male	2011/12 ¹¹	82.2	55.9	17.9	61.9
Female	2007/8	--	--	--	23.9
Female	2011/12	60.1	22.5	1.6	32.1
<hr/>					
	Ages 15+	Urban	Rural	Kuchi	National
Male	2007/8	62	35	14	39.3
Male	2011/12	68.7	39.1	13.2	45.4
Female	2007/8	33	7	3	12.5
Female	2011/12	37.8	10.4	1.2	17.0

⁶ See Box 1 at the end of this section

⁷ Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) 2008:14 and NRVA 2009:60 quoted in the “Education Joint Sector Review: Youth and Adult Literacy”. May 2012. p2

⁸ TORS for the Literacy Evaluation: 3

⁹ National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2013: 72

¹⁰ Central Statistics Office (CSO). NRVA 2007/08 (2009)

¹¹ Central Statistics Office (CSO). NRVA 2011/12 (2014)

The status of literacy has had a further boost from the December 2013 launch of the government’s *National Literacy Strategy*, to be underwritten in large measure through Sweden’s announcement of a US\$ 9.3 million addition to the US\$20m already allocated by Japan as part of the third phase of the MOE/UNESCO Programme for Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (ELA). In principle, this funding will “expand (Literacy Department) activities to 27 provinces, providing courses in basic literacy, numeracy and skills to a further 580,000 adults”. Notably, it will also allow “training more than 3000 literacy facilitators in learner-centred methodologies”¹².

The less good news, is the broad agreement that absorptive capacities are seriously limited; creating a base of facilitative competencies for adult learning in general and literacy in particular is a long-term and labour-intensive undertaking, not just a fiscal one. Constrained by poverty, difficult geography and rising levels of insecurity, the provision of an enabling environment for learning remains an elusive goal in much of the country.

Again, but in the negative, this is especially true for girls and women. Gains made in formal school access and the further progress envisioned by the Literacy Strategy and funding to ELA3 notwithstanding, female literacy levels remain well below those of men. A majority of Afghan women continue to suffer without access to the quality and depth of education they need to continue learning-to-learn and to establish a legitimate place for themselves in either domestic or public spheres. The fact that literacy rates for young women 15-24 are reasonably strong at 60.1% urban/22.5% rural, while those for women 15+ are only 37.8% urban/0.4 rural suggests that school access is having a good effect¹³. Unfortunately, primary school completion figures, the minimum level at which literacy can be assumed sustainable without further education, continue to be low. Rural girls are especially vulnerable, currently only 43.8% are in Primary school and 15.1% in Secondary¹⁴ -- this latter, crucially the level at which future female teachers are formed.

Table 2- Net enrolment ratio in primary education

	Boys	Girls	National
NRVA 2007/08	60.4	42.1	51.7
NRVA 2011/12	64.4	48.3	56.8

Ambiguity in policy and planning All national literacy programming is expected to be designed and implemented through, or at least with reference to, the policies, strategies and priorities of the Literacy Department of the MOE as it seeks to advance toward Afghanistan’s EFA and MDG targets of an educated, gender equal and economically stable population by 1399 (2020). For this reason, having and sharing a clear definition of literacy is important.

At its most basic, being literate means having the ability to read and write text and, in many cases, to manipulate numbers. In reality, it is much more than this.

“To be literate means to be able to fulfil one’s own goals as a family and community member, citizen, worker, member... of organizations.... This means being able to get information and use it to improve your life, being able to use reading and writing to do the things you decide to do, and being able to use literacy as a tool to solve problems you face in everyday life”¹⁵.

¹² Quoted from the UNESCO Office in Kabul website, February 12, 2014

¹³ GoIRA and UNICEF/MTR 2012: 12

¹⁴ NRVA 2011/12: 64

¹⁵ Gillespie, Marilyn. “Many Literacies: Modules for Training Adult Beginning Readers and Tutors”. 1990: p16

*“Adult learners view literacy as increasing their independence and personal power to act on the world. It means a level of reading and writing at which they can communicate with the competence they define as necessary to deal with situations and opportunities within their environment”.*¹⁶

*Literacy concerns “writing, reading and counting in order to enable the society to take part in the national/ public participation”*¹⁷

In a more recent statement of literacy policy for Afghanistan, the National Literacy Strategy (2013) presents an equally comprehensive vision, literacy as:

*“...the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential, and participate fully in community and wider society”.*¹⁸

Visionary definitions are useful; establishing the operational parameters of a literacy project is critical. Unfortunately, it is also a complex, often fraught, exercise and for the sector as a whole in Afghanistan, and the literacy project within it, there is not a more precise meaning of what literacy or “being literate” means, either conceptually or in terms of reading and numeracy proficiency¹⁹.

Clarity of definition is important because it allows orienting and delimiting the expected outcomes of an intervention and their indicators; setting feasible national and local targets; and, on the basis of both of these, providing the appropriate financial, human and institutional resources. In this respect, it is problematic that, according to many in the literacy community, learning outcomes and indicators across the literacy sector continue to be overly vague in policy and programme terms, learning targets to be too ambitious with respect to numbers reached, and resources too limited with respect to the scope of change envisioned.

In general, national literacy instruments are stronger on broad statements of purpose than on what successful realization of those purposes will “look like” and the mechanisms for realizing them. Expectations of transforming Afghan citizens into a “literate, numerate and technologically proficient” population²⁰ are important in providing a national vision, as is building a “national partnership programme of literacy and non-formal education”²¹. But both need to be grounded in indicators and mechanisms and this is not yet happening to a degree sufficient to mobilize specific and coordinated action. In consequence, perhaps, learning outcomes and indicators at project levels – including those of the Literacy Centres - tend to be framed in terms of inputs (numbers of Centres provided and women participating) rather than of “what will change” outcomes (how women at the end of the course will be different from what they were at the beginning).

Efforts to achieve greater clarity have been made. The *National Literacy Action Plan/NLAP* (2010-2014) aimed to provide “a clear indication” of what human, financial and material resources would be needed to address the literacy deficit. Various analyses consider it to be overly weak in the specifics, however, in leaving it to future planning “to determine how much” of these resources would be

¹⁶ Ennis & Woodrow. “Learning Together: The Challenge of Adult Literacy”. 1992: p9

¹⁷ Head of Curriculum Development for Literacy, quoted in Adam Smith International, 2010: 67

¹⁸ MOE/LD: 8

¹⁹ While doing so was originally a task assigned to this current evaluation by NLAP in noting that “key questions (would) include a clearer identification of the purposes and outcomes of literacy learning for the women in the programme” (NLAP:23), final TORS thankfully did not include it.

²⁰ From ANDS quoted in MOE/LD. “National Literacy Strategy: Policies, Targets and Strategies”. 2013 (p10)

²¹ NESD 1 quoted in Adam Smith International: 67

required²². Such ambiguity matters inasmuch as it leaves open the risk that progress in the sector might be rolled-back, especially for vulnerable groups and women, as policy-makers and donors come under pressure to privilege other priorities viewed as more important e.g. those with a higher profile, that are quicker to achieve or might be more helpful to personal advancement.

The *Literacy Strategy*, according to one senior advisor to the Department, “is designed to ‘operationalise’ the NLAP”²³. While “traditionally an action plan would follow a strategy with the strategy being a broader document and the action plan being specific in terms of targets and costing, in this case it is more the other way around. The Strategy is designed to flesh out a little how the goals specified in the Action Plan might be achieved....(it) defines the 3 Focus Areas and gives outputs specifically in relation to these”.

The Strategy has yet to be operationalized, however, and it will be important in doing so that it is contextualized at Provincial and District levels through the kind of situation analyses, needs assessments and community consultations that can give locally tailored flesh-to-the-bone of its projected inputs and outputs toward mobilizing local action and ownership.

Data from the evaluation suggest this process may not be straightforward. While the initial post-launch step bringing Provincial Literacy Managers to Kabul to discuss plans for local implementation was sound, comments from one made it less than clear what the take-away for them was in terms of any systematic follow-up happening. This Manager did not, for example, anticipate the need for particular action -- consultation, needs assessment or mobilization -- to translate the Strategy into a provincial plan. Rather, Provincial and District officers would simply *<follow the details of the Strategy>*²⁴. All that was required was *<budget>*.

With respect to budgets, while the policy environment for literacy projects is strongly supportive, it is less clear how “enabling” it is in actual practice. On the plus side, ANDS includes *skills development, encompassing literacy and technical/vocational education/training* as one of four education components; the NESP includes it as one of five “priority programme areas” for education²⁵; the several phases of ELA are promising in terms of building a strongly professional infrastructure of literacy leadership and technical capacity but have not yet been fully proven.

On the other hand, the allocated budget for literacy is relatively low in the overall education package. NESP1 assigned literacy and NFE only 3% of the total education budget. While some assess its share as having been on an increasing trend, rising to 8% in the National Education Interim Plan (NEIP) for 2011-13, this is still a minimal amount based on numbers, needs and challenges in the sector. Literacy has been the only sub-sector with a consistent shortfall over expected expenditure²⁶.

It may be the case that the literacy share will eventually “stabilize as a growing number of people acquire basic literacy”, but any such plateauing is a long way off. Very low numbers are currently being reached; there are considerable uncertainties about any acquired capacities being sustained; drop-outs from the formal system and those never-enrolled continue to be high, especially for girls and children in dispersed rural and ethnic minority communities; insecurity is growing and affecting the literal and psychological “space” girls and women have for participation. Significant literacy-specific allocations will necessarily matter at least until 2020, and no doubt beyond.

²² HRDB. “Education Joint Sector Review: Youth and Adult Literacy”: 6

²³ Email communication Jan 6, 2014

²⁴ < > indicate translated speech rather than direct quotes (which are in regular quotation marks)

²⁵ Swedish Committee for Afghanistan 2013: 2

²⁶ MOE & UNICEF. “Proposal to the Global Partnership for Education: p52, 55, 53

In terms of targets, in fact, the lack of established verifiable definitions, coupled with the realities of gender inequality, insecurity, poverty and geographic isolation that continue to prevail has led some to assess expectations as “hugely ambitious”²⁷. As of this 2010 analysis, it “would require four times the current budget” to increase the rate for illiterate adults aged 15 and above from 26% to 48% by 2014, making 3.6 million people literate.

As of the 2013 Literacy Strategy, the rate was still only 36%, suggesting the expectation of reaching 60% by 2020, with female literacy moving from 20% to 50%²⁸ may not be realistic. Some of these gains are expected to come from improved formal school access and completion. At first glance, this seems reasonable based on the relatively rapid increase in literacy rates for the under 25 age category. But most of these are in urban and more secure areas, not the ones in which UNICEF is focused. Other gains could come by providing more varied forms and purposes of “literacy” programmes, ones better-tailored to drawing in and successfully retaining a greater range of learners. But this is not yet happening to any extent and will be difficult to do without both greater clarity and agreement on what will “count” as literacy under earmarked funding; and creating the infrastructure of human and material resources needed to conceive, design and deliver diversity.

Box 1

²⁹ UNICEF’s Equity Agenda will move it away from one in which “conditions for programming have been relatively conducive, permitting security access in particular”, and toward one with fewer resources going to “the least accessible”, and simultaneously “most deprived” provinces. The new Country Programme seeks “to find alternative ways of channelling more support” to some 5.4 million people and 107 districts of these ten provinces³⁰, a strategy consistent with the perspective of the Common Country Assessment in recognizing that “one standard programme approach will not fit all; (that) the institutional arrangements for programme implementation will diverge and differ according to the status of the province...” and that a “critical” concern will be to develop “monitoring indicators and mechanisms that are suitable under these circumstances”³¹. Strategic partnerships will continue with often larger NGO and CBO implementers aiming to build on “a common vision, comparative advantages and complementarity of approaches”³².

Specifically with respect to education within this wider agenda, UNICEF is active in areas especially focused on marginalized and vulnerable children and women. In addition to female literacy, it is concerned with formal school through the framework of the Child-friendly School (CFS) prioritizing inclusion, quality of learning, safety and protection, community participation; in-service teacher training on advanced pedagogy, enhanced literacy and psycho-social assessment linked expressly to classroom practice; and teacher and materials support to community-based education (CBE) schools, a key modality for delivering services to marginalized and working children and girls.

It is within this context that UNICEF Afghanistan commissioned an evaluation of its literacy programme.

²⁷ Adam Smith: 67; HRDB. “EJSR Aide Memoire”: 1

²⁸ MOE/LD. “National Literacy Strategy: Policies, Targets and Strategies”. 2013: 20

²⁹ Paraphrased from 2013 Situation Analysis: Education Component

³⁰ UNICEF. “Guidelines for the Phase-in Process”. 2012 : 1

³¹ UNICEF. “Guidelines for the Phase-in Process” . 2012: 4, 1

³² UNICEF. “Guidelines for the Phase-in Process”. 2012 : text 2, comment 6

Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

Following the TORS, the overall purpose of the evaluation of the Female Literacy project (2010-2013) was:

“... to assess whether the UNICEF assisted literacy project effectively responds to the literacy needs of women in Afghanistan and any impact it had on the lives of women explore whether the project is sustainable i.e. whether the Literacy Department (LD) or partners have the capacity/willingness to continue the project if/in case UNICEF does not continue the same level of engagement (financial and technical)... inform UNICEF and the MOE Literacy Department the course of action for improving the current literacy project...(and) UNICEF’s next Programme of Cooperation³³.

Broadly stated in the TORS, the objectives of the evaluation were to

- conduct a “detailed and an in-depth” assessment of the female literacy project “that will lead to a well-defined strategic direction and action in the next Country Programme when the current cycle ends in 2014”; and
- “provide other literacy actors with up to date evidence based lessons learnt that can inform decisions in the area of literacy training”³⁴

More specifically, the objectives of the evaluation were to comment, through evidence, on the effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, sustainability, impact and lessons learned of the project by addressing, and expanding, the following sets of questions:

Effectiveness

- has the literacy project implemented the 9-month course as specified by the CPD and CPAP 2010-13 IR objectives;
- have expected and unexpected results been achieved; and
- have the curriculum content and duration matched learner abilities?

Relevance

- has the curriculum content matched diverse learner and implementer needs and priorities;
- are the textbook and materials aligned with diverse learner needs and priorities; and
- has the mode of delivery matched available time, learning environments, cultural setting?

Efficiency

- what have been the key bottlenecks in planning, implementation, management and quality of teaching and learning in the Literacy Centres; and
- have teachers adequately prepared and delivered the classes using adult teaching methods?

Sustainability

- does the Literacy Department have capacity to continue the project; and
- are women who have completed the 9-month course applying their knowledge?

Impact

- has the project affected girls and women from different socio-economic, geographic, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in durable ways?

³³ TORS: 3

³⁴ TORS: 4

Lessons learned

- what lessons can be drawn from the project as recommendations that will allow UNICEF management to decide whether to continue, exit or transfer it to the Government or to another partner?

On the basis of further references in the TORS³⁵, the evaluation attempted to confirm two additional, albeit implied, sets of objectives:

The validity of key conclusions of the 2010 assessment of the BEGE literacy project: that literacy teachers have “insufficient adult teaching skills” to assure quality teaching standards; that a 9-month project focused on “reading and writing, with not enough emphasis on life skills/functional literacy” was sufficient “for women’s empowerment” or to improving literacy; and that the project suffered from “limited or no linkages with other sections and projects”.

The appropriateness of the MTR recommendations that the literacy project “be aligned to the Government literacy age bracket for female learners of 15-45”; focus on “helping women to retain and enhance their literacy skills and build up on information that will help them improve their wellbeing” through functional literacy and post-literacy materials; and “work with other partners to improve what is already in place”.

In summary, taking into account the Government and UNICEF literacy programming context, and following the general guidance of the TORS³⁶, the evaluation:

- was conducted in selected LCs operating in the 2010-2013 period, sampled from all regions with UNICEF has zonal offices: Central, Western, Eastern, Southern and Northern;
- considered overall strengths, weaknesses, gaps and shortfalls of the literacy project with respect to planning and implementation;
- attempted to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of UNICEF’s financial management and the Literacy Department’s financial control procedures for channelling literacy project funds;
- reviewed levels of support to the project from LD staff at central, provincial, and district levels, and of inter-level collaboration/cooperation among LD staff;
- examined the quality of teaching and learning in the project, including any collaboration with other partners; and
- identified project results from current and closed LCs in selected provinces and districts of intervention.

³⁵ TORS: 3-4

³⁶ TORS: 5

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, DESIGN, METHODS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE EVALUATION

Conceptual framework

The evaluation was set within a broad conceptual framework of three “over-arching rights” to education and literacy within that³⁷:

right of access to a learning environment that reflects no discrimination of any kind;

right to a quality learning experience that is learner-centred, relevant, broad-based, appropriately monitored and adequately resourced; and

right to respect within the learning environment, ensuring each learner’s inherent dignity, protection, freedom from violence & recognition of language, ethnicity etc.

Questions were developed, data analyzed and project effectiveness assessed with respect to OECD-DAC factors as provided in the TORS (Section 1), elaborated along with four others associated with a rights-based approach specifically within the context of learner-centred andragogy³⁸.

*Effectiveness*³⁹ answered the question “was the programme working” as intended with respect to the right things being done, in the right way and from there realizing its expected outcomes.

Relevance answered the question of whether the rationale and objectives of the project addressed the priorities, needs and interests of its stakeholders to the extent they were willing to engage with it and take responsibility for its “working”.

Efficiency answered the twin questions of “were the procedures being followed in managing the LC programme cost-effective” and “did stakeholders agree they were worth the costs they incurred – monetary, time, risk etc.”

*Sustainability*⁴⁰ concerned the matter of “what would continue” as a legacy of the project and had two perspectives: that of the individual learner and teacher - would they retain and continue to use and develop the knowledge and skills they had acquired; and that of the supply-demand “system” - would government and donors continue to support women’s literacy through this type of nonformal learning channel, and would communities continue to demand it in this or a related form.

Inclusion answered the question of whether all of those who should be participating were both turning up and actively engaged in ways that will realize the intended outcomes of the intervention. In this case, inclusion was concerned with rural, poor and illiterate women, ethnic minorities and those with disabilities.

³⁷ Adapted from Stubbs: 42

³⁸ Andragogy is the technical term for the teaching and learning of adults, the equivalent of pedagogy for children.

³⁹ The evaluation understands effectiveness as ultimately a summative criterion based on the assessment of the other criteria.

⁴⁰ The TORS included both sustainability and impact among the evaluation criteria. There were relatively few data from the fieldwork dealing with the broad matter of stable, long-term change among participating learners, especially as diversified across the different ethnic and geographic/cultural communities (as specified in the TORS). For this reason, the concept of impact has been incorporated into sustainability.

Appropriateness of human and learning resources answered the question of whether there was a good match between the requirements of the programme; the knowledge, expertise and commitment of those responsible for its implementation; and the approaches they were using.

Coordination answered the question of whether within the parameters of the project and the education sector more widely there was adequate support to open communication, joint action and shared lessons.

Informed action answered the question of the extent to which the project was engaged in learning-for-change in terms of collecting, managing and adapting action on the basis of evidence-based, user-friendly monitoring. In other words: how robust was its M&E system.

The literacy project did not conduct intervention-specific baselines, referencing instead broader national statistics with respect to numbers of illiterates and targets to be reached. The evaluation, therefore, attempted to assess starting points of the sampled Literacy Centres in terms of stakeholder perceptions of the difference the project has made to learner capacities to read and write, do basic arithmetic and better manage within their environments and to the capacities and commitment of those responsible for delivering and overseeing it.

The evaluation also took into account the findings and recommendations of earlier programme assessments⁴¹ and reflected these in the questions asked⁴² through the several data collection tools and subsequently in the analysis of those data.

Design and methods of data collection and analysis

Evaluation Team and Distribution of Work

The evaluation was managed through a *two-tier team structure*.

- An independent external consultant was contracted by UNICEF as *team leader* to design, manage and ensure overall quality of the evaluation; specifically, to finalize the Inception Report, develop and guide piloting of tools and structuring of fieldwork data reporting, collect data at national level, and write the final report.
- A local Afghan firm was contracted through a competitive process as the *national team*⁴³ to conduct the fieldwork and coordinate the summary presentation of criteria-grouped English-language interview and FGD⁴⁴ data to the team leader. The all-Afghan national team was comprised of one Kabul-based coordinator/trainer (female) and five provincial teams (male and female). The latter were from and/or had direct experience of the provinces to which they were assigned. The core team in each case was the traditional 2-person interviewer and recorder, both with experience in qualitative field research and adult learning.

Implementation of the evaluation was in *four phases*:

⁴¹ Wirak, A. & J. Lexow. "Evaluation of MOE/UNICEF 'Basic Education and Gender Equality Programme' 2006-2008". 2008. Kabul & Oslo; UNICEF Mid-term Review, 2010

⁴² See Annexes 5 and 6

⁴³ See Annex 7 for names and details of the team

⁴⁴ Focus Group Discussion

Inception Report and Workplan: desk review of national literacy policy, strategy and project documents, previous analyses and evaluations of the literacy and wider education sectors, email and Skype exchange with UNICEF Education Section.

Tool development, piloting and national team orientation: Afghanistan-based finalization of Inception Report and Workplan; “supply” side interviews with Literacy Department, DPs, NGOs; orientation of national team on conceptual framework, strategies of the evaluation; piloting of tools in Literacy Centres in Bamyan (team leader only) and Kabul (national team members); site selection and scheduling of fieldwork⁴⁵.

Fieldwork: simultaneously in 5 provinces, three in which the project was currently running; two from which it had withdrawn.

Preliminary Analysis: summary of 5 data sets prepared by national coordinator, based on summary outcome & indicator grid of: core categories (inputs, outcomes, effectiveness, relevance, appropriateness, M&E, impact, sustainability, recommendations of stakeholders); and stakeholders (teachers, learners, Shura, family, Monitor, Master Trainer and DEO; as well as Team observations).

Report preparation: data analysis and first and final drafts of the final report, including feedback from UNICEF and Literacy Department.

In addition to team orientation meetings and the Kabul-based tool piloting, the team leader and national team coordinator maintained regular communication throughout the data collection and data reporting process. Each communicated directly with the UNICEF Education Section on logistics as required, and in identifying data as needed. The team leader and Education Section reported for the overall management of the evaluation to the UNICEF M&E Section, officers of which reviewed the Inception Report and confirmed appropriateness of the site selection process.

Data collection began immediately after the Inception mission, each of the five teams travelling simultaneously; it was completed and submitted to the national team coordinator within 3 weeks. A one-day regrouping meeting was held in Kabul with the full national team complement to review and confirm the work done, and the quality, completeness and cross-site consistency of the data. Translation, sorting and reporting of the data to the team leader, and based on the agreed summary grid, was completed over an 8-week period.

Data site sampling

The decision on specifically which Literacy Centres to include in the evaluation involved several steps combining some degree of randomness with purposive criteria aimed at allowing breadth of context, while recognizing security and winter travel restrictions. Selection was made with the collaboration of UNICEF’s Education and Security Sections in Kabul as well as Zonal staff. Criteria applied in the selection included:

- One province, randomly drawn, from each of Afghanistan’s five Zones and in which UNICEF-supported Literacy Centres were currently being (3) or had previously been (2) implemented;
- Purposive in reflecting a mix of ethnic groups, Pashto and Dari language;
- Literacy Centres and previous LC participants within a reasonably accessible radius to allow contextual variation with coverage still possible in the 10-14 day fieldwork window;
- Not considered in principle a ‘no-go’ security area by either the national team or UNICEF.

⁴⁵ See Annex 1 contact list

As described in Annex 3, the provinces selected were Zabul, Paktya and Badghis (current); and Laghman and Balkh (completed)⁴⁶. Based on a combination of accessibility, security and project relevance criteria, 13 districts were proposed for the evaluation fieldwork: the only one available in Zabul and three in each of the others. It was left to the field teams to make a final decision on which districts would be included following on-site advice of the local Provincial Education Director (PED), Literacy Manager and UNICEF officers.

In the event, nine districts were included, with four Centres visited in each. A concern that respondents in “completed” districts would be difficult to identify proved unfounded: according to the teams involved, District Education Officer and PED were “extremely helpful in this process. They had a detailed list of all participants (former learners and teachers) along with their contact information and using those, (we) were able to set up appointments”.

Table 3- A snap shot of fieldwork sites

Zone, Province	Districts, # of Centres	Learner Language	Literacy rates	Team	Data sources ⁴⁷	Learners
West/ Badghis	Ab Kamari, Qala e Naw Centres: 4	Dari	Adult: 11% (7%f) Youth: 5.3% f	1 f 2 m	<u>FGD</u> : 4 learners, 4 shura(m) <u>Interviews</u> : 4 teachers ⁴⁸ , 4 family (m), 2 PEO/DEO, 2 Monitors, 1 Master Trainer <u>Other</u> : Curriculum assessment & class observation: 4	Ages 15-40; most 18, single
Central/ Paktya	Sayed Karam Gardez Centres: 4	Pashto	Adult: 35% (26%f) Youth: n.a.	1 f 1 m	<u>FGD</u> : 4 learners, 4 shura (m) <u>Interviews</u> : 4 teachers, 4 family (m), 3 PEO/DEO, 1 Monitor, 1 Master Trainer <u>Other</u> : Curriculum assessment & class observation: 4	Ages 15-60; most married with children
South/ Zabul	Qalat Centres: 4	Pashto	Adult:18%, (1%f) Youth: 4% f	1 f 2 m	<u>FGD</u> : 4 learners, 4 shura (m) <u>Interviews</u> : 4 family (m), 4 teachers, 1 Monitor, 1 Master Trainer, 1 PEO <u>Other</u> : Curriculum assessment & class observation: 4	Ages 14-35; married, single with/out children
North/ Balkh	Dawlat Abad Mazar Centres: 4	Dari	Adult:44%, 32%f Youth: n.a.	1 f 1 m	<u>FGD</u> : 4 learners, 4 shura (m) <u>Interviews</u> : 4 teachers, 4 family (m), 2 PEO/DEO <u>Other</u> : Curriculum assessment & class observation: 4	Ages 14-50; most married with children
Eastern/ Laghman	Mehterlam Qarghayee Centres: 4	Pashto	Adult 26% (7.3%f) Youth: 2.3% f	1 f 2 m	<u>FGD</u> : 4 learners, 4 shura (m) <u>Interviews</u> : 4 teachers, 1 PEO, 2 DEO <u>Other</u> : Curriculum assessment & class observation: 4	Ages 15-60; most married with children

Data collection methods

⁴⁶ Bamyan is a currently LC-active province, reasonably accessible from Kabul and secure. The team leader conducted a brief field visit to two districts during the Inception mission to test the tools; the data collected are reflected variously in the analysis as/where appropriate.

⁴⁷ Each FGD included an average 6 people; meaning approximately 120 learners and 120 shura members provided data overall.

⁴⁸ The Centre had two male teachers, but data from the FGD did not distinguish the speakers’ sex. The team indicated on the classroom observation sheet that, in especially one of the classes, learners did not feel comfortable, but details were not elaborated.

Three data collection methods were used⁴⁹: analysis of policy, programme and evaluation documents and review of statistical reports (most provided by MOE/LD, UNICEF); interviews and/or focus group discussions (FGD) with national and local stakeholders; and observation of Literacy classes.

Tools (interview/FGD protocols) were designed to generate data reflecting context-specific experiences, perspectives and opinions of stakeholders involved with the project as providers, overseers and participants in the five sample provinces and communities⁵⁰. All questions were open-ended and teams were encouraged to be flexible in how they asked them and in selecting among them where it made sense. At the same time, they were expected to cover the core questions and themes detailed in the TORS and Inception report, and summarized in the analysis grid in order to ensure consistency and comparability of the qualitative and quantitative information collected i.e.: inputs and activities; outcomes and indicators; explanatory factors and analytical criteria indicators e.g. effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability.

Data analysis

Qualitative data from the interview and FGD data, complemented by those from the documentary review, formed the core of the evaluation analysis, conclusions and recommendations; they reflected stakeholder opinions about and experience with the Literacy Project as provider, beneficiary and observer and concerned what was happening in the project currently; what happened in earlier classes and to what effect; and what was expected or hoped to happen in the future.

The analysis attempted to answer, from stakeholder and “best practice” perspectives: were the right literacy and numeracy inputs, resources and contents being provided; were they being delivered, facilitated and monitored in the right ways to produce the expected outcomes; and were the expected outcomes - changes in knowledge, attitudes and skills of learners - happening?

The evaluation included both quantitative and qualitative analyses. However, given the relative lack of systematic quantitative information available in the project and the Literacy Department overall, emphasis was on the more “reflected” perceptions and assessments of stakeholders themselves concerning their experience with the project.

Risks and limitations

The most significant risk to the quality and veracity of the evaluation analysis was the “*three degrees of freedom*” (*stages of remove*) between the users of the tools and the designer; between the collection of the data and their interpretation; between the collectors of the data and the analyst. In terms of input, as described earlier, the evaluation was conceptualized and tools developed by the international consultant and provided to the national team in English, through the translation and further training of national team coordinator. In terms of output, the same 3-step process was followed: raw data collected by the team; sifted, grouped and translated by the national coordinator; and interpreted/analyzed by the international consultant within the parameter of the initial design. There was nothing to suggest a major disjuncture happening in these processes, but as the “whisper game” attests, it was likely that at each stage some misinterpretation, inaccurate emphasis or false conclusion went unrecognized.

⁴⁹ Statistical analysis of data bases with respect to patterns of LC spread, participation, completion and risks was not possible based on the still limited development of NFEMIS.

⁵⁰ See interview and observation tools Annex 6

The *security risk* was less of a factor than anticipated. While initial sample selection was influenced as much by having to ensure safe access as it was by where data might be most usefully collected, once selected security issues did not appear to be a major impediment to timely and planned completion.

The risk of not finding field teams with sufficient *capacity within the team for conducting qualitative data collection and analysis* was effectively mitigated through the experience of the national coordinator and her access to a range of data collectors with appropriate skills and familiarity with nonformal learning environments. There was no indication that fieldwork was impeded by poor communication with stakeholders, insufficient use of tools or within-team tension. The preliminary analysis and translation of data were of sufficient clarity and apparent completeness to allow a fair degree of confidence on the part of the team leader.

Diversity of culture and language did not appear to be a major impediment. Fieldworkers were from the sampled provinces, spoke the major languages of the selected communities (Dari, Pashto) and understood respective socio-cultural dynamics and traditions. Reports were written in the original languages and translated into English by the national co-ordinator who had strong facility in all three languages. This allowed for both clarity and consistency of the translations.

The intention to “put the learner at the centre of the evaluation” may have been compromised to some degree, and thus less than fully complete or candid responses provided, with the presence of male fieldworkers, even where simply note-taking. There was no way to avoid this completely, given the cultural and security imperatives, but it was reportedly mitigated by the open-ended and relaxed atmosphere set by the female interviewers (see below). Though it is difficult to confirm the success of these steps, no particular instances of reluctance to participate were reported by the teams.

Ethical standards and safeguarding of respondents

Ethical standards in any context require informed and freely-given consent to participate; extra steps to ensure this are required where the respondents are vulnerable to exploitation due to age, disability, gender, social hierarchy. Cultural norms in the traditional rural areas of Afghanistan where women are in full or partial seclusion and separated from men in the public (and sometimes private) sphere gave fidelity to these standards greater weight.

The evaluation recognized that for all of these reasons, exposing female learners to the outside attention of the research teams, especially since these included men (because norms also did not allow female researchers to travel alone) was by definition putting them at risk - at best of social criticism and at worst of physical harm. It attempted to handle these issues in several ways:

- Criteria selecting the national team included that they be Afghan females, although in the end men were also included as necessary companions of the women to remote areas; that all of them be from and/or well experienced with the selected areas of the evaluation fieldwork, and had a sound understanding of the socio-cultural context of those areas, an ability to adapt to unexpected challenges and a clear sense of the security, gender and cultural realities of the country. The national teams eventually selected demonstrated all of these qualities. This allowed UNICEF and the team leader a reasonable degree of confidence in the ability of the teams to maintain sound ethical standards and safeguard the physical and psychological integrity of respondents.
- One member of each team was female, to interview learners and teachers. The other was a male relative, able to act as recorder in some cases. In three provinces, a second male member brought additional security and expertise. Teams reported having no problems with the gender mix.⁵¹

⁵¹ Soft Power Solutions (national team). “Final Report...”: 3

- While the same questions were asked of all respondents to allow capturing similar and divergent attitudes on common evaluation themes, these questions were also tailored toward the specific types of participants interviewed to enable them to respond on their own terms, within their own frame of reference. All explanations and questions from the fieldwork were translated into appropriate languages (Dari or Pashto) to ensure that the respondents had a clear understanding of what they were being asked and could express themselves easily. Interviews were undertaken over 50-60 minute periods, depending on the level of literacy of the interviewees, to give ample time for respondents to frame their ideas.⁵²
- A key step in conducting the interviews, especially with the learners, was in developing a good rapport. The field teams ensured this by introducing themselves, explaining the purpose of the study, putting the respondent at ease and listening and observing carefully as they guided them through the conversation until all of the important questions on the interview guide were covered⁵³.
- The field teams practiced “active listening” in rephrasing what was being said to ensure that the respondent’s meaning was understood as intended, to assist them in staying on track by limiting distractions, and to seek clarity throughout the interview. They took particular steps to reassure learners that the study was a legitimate one, to measure their opinion regarding the literacy project and that they would remain anonymous and their answers would be confidential.⁵⁴
- In the focus groups, field teams used indirect ways to probe respondents on sensitive topics, asking them to talk about their own views and their own experiences, rather than referring to what “people” think or “others” say. The field teams were provided pre-deployment training by the national team coordinator on managing group dynamics towards ensuring inclusive participation, getting a deeper understanding of “why” participants answered as they did and managing time so as to maximize each person’s coverage of the issues⁵⁵.

Stakeholder participation in the evaluation

Beyond responding to fieldwork questions, the level of stakeholder participation in the evaluation process itself was modest, largely a function of the time available both to the team leader (2 weeks in Kabul, with security restrictions on several days); and to the national field teams who had relatively few days allocated per district. Activities did allow for supply and demand side input, however:

- UNICEF/Education and the M&E section provided input to the Inception Report, including confirmation of the appropriateness of the site selection process and final designation of the sample.
- Interviews by the team leader were conducted with several officers of the Literacy Department and a range of DPs and NGOs in Kabul to confirm the conceptual framework and strategies of the evaluation; and a piloting of tools was conducted in Literacy Centres in Bamyan (team leader) and Kabul (team leader and national team members) to garner feedback on their appropriateness, relevance and comprehensibility within the Afghan context⁵⁶.

⁵² Soft Power Solutions (national team). “Final Report...”: 4

⁵³ Soft Power Solutions (national team). “Final Report...”: 4

⁵⁴ Reference from Soft Power Solutions (national team). “Final Report...”: 4

⁵⁵ Reference from Soft Power Solutions (national team). “Final Report...”: 5

⁵⁶ See contact list Annex 1

- UNICEF /Education and the Literacy Department subsequently provided feedback on the first draft of the report.
- Following deployment to the field, and prior to commencing actual field work, the field teams met with key stakeholders in the Literacy offices and community leaders to confirm the purpose and potential value of the evaluation to the project, enlist support and get buy-in before recruiting respondents for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions⁵⁷. This process also contributed to the ethical standards of the evaluation in terms of ensuring informed and voluntary participation.
- Finally, input from 10% of interviewed stakeholders was solicited through phone calls from national team coordinator following the fieldwork, to confirm with them the quality, relevance and veracity of the data collection process and cross-check the information on the transcript⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ Reference from Soft Power Solutions (national team). "Final Report...": 6

⁵⁸ Reference from Soft Power Solutions (national team). "Final Report...": 7

3 DESCRIPTION OF THE UNICEF-SUPPORTED FEMALE LITERACY PROJECT

Rationale of the project

The Education Sector Component Result 3 of UNICEF's Country Programme Action Plan 2010-2013 anticipated a 50% increase in literacy rates among women between the ages of 15-24 of from 18% to 27%⁵⁹. This was to happen within an overall Country strategy aimed to "strike a balance between normal development programming, effective emergency planning and response and proactive approaches to access new areas"⁶⁰. More specifically, the Literacy Centres were expected to target and accommodate 280,000 participants across 34 provinces by 2012,⁶¹ through a 9-month curriculum delivered in 2 hour/day classes of some 25 learners each.

While the evaluation did not include a detailed content analysis of the textbook, comments from local literacy officers, teachers and learners implied a relatively *broad definition of literacy* in the curriculum of the project, similar to that of the NLAP. In this respect, it moved beyond mastery of the "mechanical skills" of reading, writing and calculating, to anticipate an "ability to think critically and understand the context of one's life"; to "use new words, new knowledge and foster new attitudes to make informed decisions about productive and financial matters, family and community health, to resolve conflict and to better understand the teachings of the Holy Quran"⁶².

At the same time, the project did not encompass the significantly more ambitious goals of the NLAP with respect to "... enhancing the quality of health, raising livelihoods, fostering the ability to actively participate in society, and contributing to overall happiness and general well-being"⁶³.

Resources of the project

Based on data from the nine sample districts and Bamyan, the project was providing the inputs expected: targeting 15-45 year old female learners to enroll, delivering one textbook per learner, supporting teacher salaries and the training of/technical guidance to Literacy Managers, Master Trainers and Monitors who were mobilizing eligible communities and overseeing course implementation.

It is important to reiterate that the project did not provide buildings or classrooms. Implementation of the 9-month course happened in 2-hour daily classes held in mosques or family rooms contributed by the community. It aimed to provide participants a Grade 3 equivalency in reading and numeracy skills, as well as information pertinent to their lives as homemakers, mothers and community members. Once funding was committed by UNICEF, Literacy Managers and shura (effectively school management committees) either surveyed the community to see where an LC was needed or activated lists of communities that had already expressed interest. In order <to reach as many communities as possible> (Literacy Manager: Bamyan), priority was given to communities that had not previously had a Centre, a quite reasonable criterion in a situation of enormous need, but one which also had to be balanced off against enabling the potential of consolidation and sustainability.

⁵⁹ The General Education Interim Plan target for 2013 included 40% adult literacy, 31% f and 40% m. As of NVRA2013 (iv): only for men had these been met: 31.4% (17% f, 45% m). Youth literacy, promisingly, was much better: 47% (32.1% f, 61.9% m).

⁶⁰ GoIRA & UNICEF. 2010. "Country Programme Action Plan 2010-2013" (CPAP). Kabul: 12,9

⁶¹ This target could be assumed naturally to reduce after UNICEF's 2012 "focusing" to 10 provinces, although this is not dealt with in the documents.

⁶² MOE/LD. "National Literacy Action Plan: 2012-2015", 2011: 25

⁶³ MOE/LD. "National Literacy Action Plan: 2012-2015", 2011: 2

Although in some cases late approval or delayed funding had led to increased absenteeism as classes go into winter (most are unheated), the lack of infrastructural complexity in opening the Centres had allowed most to become operational in a relatively straightforward and timely way. As was to be expected in this circumstance, conditions of the classrooms were of mixed quality with frequent reports of insufficient basics: carpeting, cushions, heat, tables to make writing easier, book corners or library areas for supplementary reading materials and independent learning activities. Classes also tended to be crowded, with little space for group work (although in nearly all sampled classes, preference for group work was reiterated).

As effectively a virtual programme, it was unsurprising and indeed appropriate that most attention has been given to the matter of the textbook; the whole of the 9-month curriculum was gathered into this single, fairly large – some would say cumbersome - document. It covered the basics of the national literacy curriculum, but with lessons all geared toward subjects considered relevant to women as homemakers e.g. hygiene, food nutrition and preparation; basic health and childcare. Graduating learners were permitted to keep the text, in the expectation they would continue to use it; few reported doing so.

4. PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS⁶⁴: PROGRESS ON RESULTS REALIZED AND FALTERING

Effectiveness answers the question “is the programme working” as intended with respect to the right things being done, in the right way and, from there, realizing its expected outcomes.

Effectiveness The Literacy Centres appeared to be effective insofar as they were enrolling the “right” people i.e. those adolescent girls and women denied the opportunity of a formal education for reasons many of which the design of the Centre was serving to mitigate: gender-biased traditions, male teachers, requirements for domestic work, distance, insecurity and dangerous terrain. In all cases, learners indicated being in class with their families’ expressed approval. According to one father: *<we like to send our daughters to this programme since we will not allow them to go to formal school>*. The community-based location, the presence of female teachers, the lack of fees and relatively short daily duration and references in the curriculum to the dictates of culture and religion were all serving to mitigate family resistance. Several of the younger women hoped to use the fact of the Centre as culturally non-threatening and generally useful as a way to *<to open the window to continue schooling>* with their families.

From the perspective of stakeholders, too, it was clear that the project was generally working as intended, albeit within the constraints of the time, budget and human resources that it had. *<It gave me immense joy when my daughter was able to read and write and when she read me the newspaper headlines>*; *<When I see my wife practice her reading skills by reading the subtitles on TV and any boards, signs, banners, magazines that she comes across; I feel happy and amused at the same time.>* (family members: Balkh)

Learners, as the ultimate beneficiaries of the project, were necessarily the principal judges of its effectiveness. As reflected across the evaluation, the majority were positive about all aspects of the LC as they currently existed. The quality of teachers was among the most frequently referenced values. Learners in Zabul reflected the view of many:

<We are very happy with our teacher. She treats us like members of her family and teaches us with love and humility>; *<the best part of this programme is that the teacher gives us homework and evaluates us with great enthusiasm>*; *<Everything is good about the programme; the teacher is very kind, encouraging>*.

The project was proving somewhat less than fully effective from the perspective of what it “could be doing”, however. For many, if not most, there were cautions of *<not enough>*: of time, resources, infrastructure, academic and/or vocational training. The underlying constraint for many was the use of an undifferentiated curriculum, one that did not take fully enough into account the varying life situations and learning priorities of targeted women and tailor content emphases and methods to these.

Limitations on the analysis While literacy was recognized as a key determinant of progress in education in general – and the project was intended to contribute to that - assessing what was actually happening in the sector was tenuous, as was measuring rates of change. Basically, it was an issue of “the lack of assessment criteria for literacy achievement or any direct testing of sample populations..”⁶⁵. The project faced much the same dilemma. Its principal expected outcome was stated

⁶⁴ To keep section 5 a more manageable length, and recognizing its “summary” character, the criterion of *effectiveness* is discussed here as a separate section.

⁶⁵ HRDB. “Education Joint Sector Review: Youth and Adult Literacy”: 10

simply as a 50% increase in literacy rates for girls/women aged 15-45, from 18% to 27%. But there were no indicators of what “being literate” would mean in objective terms and no operational definitions in available policy or strategy frameworks from which a measure of progress could be extrapolated. The status of progress toward results, therefore, was based largely on what had been delivered and the numbers participating e.g. on classes opened, teachers and texts provided and numbers enrolled and graduating from the 9-month course. In other words, on inputs and outputs, rather than outcomes i.e. on what had changed as a consequence of those inputs and initial outputs.

Thus, for example, while many learners reported appreciating learning more about foods that were nutritious and household hygiene practices (an output), there were no indications of this knowledge leading to significant changes in their quality of life behaviours. In this sense, the target of a “50% increase” was and remained somewhat notional, in theory evidenced by the “number of females empowered with literacy”, but indicated only by participation and completion rates rather than by any pre-specified or objectively verifiable learning outcomes. Those stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation typically confirmed that testing happened, formally and informally, but beyond being able to write or read individual words on the board, it was not evident what if any criteria were being used to determine progress on any particular range or complexity of vocabulary and reading-for-meaning skills.

The numbers As of the 2013, a total of 164,206 girls/women had participated in 6,565 Literacy Centres⁶⁶, through interventions which until 2012 included as well as support for the Centres and teacher training in the use of the female-oriented textbook, 133 resource centres with ancillary reading materials⁶⁷, collaboration with the partners - notably the WFP in Kandahar, and community outreach through media advocacy e.g. Internews Network spots, dissemination of posters and billboards.

Through all of these, and integration with the work and structures of the Literacy Department at national and local levels, a “good momentum” for sustainable links with communities appeared to be being fostered⁶⁸. Further specifying the inputs provided and activities completed, the MTR noted that: 270 provincial literacy officials in West and Central regions had received management training; some 5,000 Literacy Centres and 133 resource centres had been established in 34 provinces; 5,000 female literacy teachers had been guided in the use of literacy textbooks; and supplementary reading materials had been disseminated aimed at enabling retention and extension of skills.

Table 4-Literacy Centres (2010-2013)

	2010	2011	2012	2013
# provinces	34	34	17	13
# LC	2,343	2,330	1,182	720
# learners	58,575	57,439	30,129	18,000

Somewhat less positively, it remained uncertain the extent to which these resources and activities were actually achieving the intended and implied outcomes of the project, given the “difficulty in assessing learning achievements related to interventions, especially literacy classes...”, and “a lack of

⁶⁶ Email correspondence from UNICEF Education Section

⁶⁷ The resource centres were subsequently merged into the *Community Learning Centres* managed by the Literacy Department toward the goal of strengthening the quality of literacy by “streamlining a little more the nature of literacy provision” through a “more consistent approach which uses existing capacity as much as possible. However,... there has been no structured plan for how to achieve this” (email correspondence from an advisor to the LD).

⁶⁸ GoIRA and UNICEF. “Country Programme of Cooperation 2010-13: MTR Report”, 2012: 38

coordination at community levels and among provincial and the national Literacy Department”. Overall, progress in the sector was assessed as “constrained”⁶⁹.

As indicated in the table above, UNICEF had been gradually reducing the scope of its geographic focus since 2010, with 10 provinces planned for 2014. However, these had been among the most marginalized in the country, confirmed in the following table showing the changes in overall provincial female literacy rates. On the positive side, only 2 provinces (Laghman and Paktika) lost ground; five (Daikundi, Ghor, Balkh, Paktya, Bamyan) had made appreciable gains, albeit from a very low base. All remained unacceptably low with little likelihood of female literacy reaching a sufficiently critical mass to sustain a what might be termed a “reading culture” on the basis of the LC project alone i.e. without a much more robust and gender-equal primary education system than was currently the case in most of the provinces.

Table 5- Female Literacy rate& female primary education in 12 provinces

<i>UNICEF Focus Provinces, plus two from 2010/12 included in the evaluation.</i>	<i>Female literacy NRVA 2009 (p67)</i>	<i>Female literacy NRVA 2013 (p187)</i>	<i>Female Primary school NER - NRVA 2013 (p188)</i>
Badghis	4%	5%	46
Bamyan	8%	17%	63
Paktya	1%	6%	27
Zabul	1%	2%	4
Balkh – completed	19%	27%	64
Laghman – completed	8%	6%	64
Daikundi	11%	18%	72
Ghor	7%	15%	52
Helmand	1%	2%	10
Kandahar	1%	3%	15
Paktika	5%	3%	11
Urozgan	1%	2%	1

Learning outcomes It is important to reiterate that measuring increases in literacy in any objective way continued to be hindered by the lack of baselines and benchmarks for the Literacy Centres as they have opened. That said, and reasonably enough, the literacy status of the out-of-school adolescent girls and women who had been its target participants had been assumed to be low. Centres were by design established in the more marginal and rural areas of provinces where the national literacy rate for women had been abysmal: 7% as of NRVA2009 and was still only 10% in NRVA2013. The Shura of one community in Bamyan claimed a literacy of 50%, but the number in fact referred only to children currently in school.

Learners in the project were distinguished in two ways: younger and single, older and married (and these typically with children). Based on FGD with teachers and learners, age and civil status mattered to what learners were bringing to literacy by way of expectations and readiness to learn, and by what they were taking away. Overall, younger learners were catching on to the art of reading fairly quickly, almost irrespective of the skills of the teacher. A number of them claimed to be able to read the entire textbook; others that they were able to help their younger siblings who were in early grades of school; a few that they were able to understand textbooks of their in-school peers. Their strongly expressed desire, for some their intention, to continue studying subjects like advanced math and language skills

⁶⁹ GoIRA and UNICEF/MTR 2012: 38, 20

that would allow them admission to formal school at Grade 6 level suggested these reports of learning were accurate.

Older learners had less easily moved to reading independently. While some claimed to oversee their young children's Primary school homework, more often they and others described their new capacities in terms of the ability to read signs, decipher prices and programme their mobile phone. Few expressed dissatisfaction at the limited extent of their progress, however; on the contrary many of them, as well as their male family members and Shura neighbours considered it fairly significant:

<I feel more confident when I go out shopping. I know that the shopkeepers can no longer deceive me with their prices and calculations>;

<One of the most interesting things for me was seeing my wife assist my son, who is enrolled in grade one, with his school assignment after attending the course. Because of her and her efforts, he came first in his class>;

<The good thing is that these women not only learned how to read and write, but also how to become better mothers, wives and sisters >.

Somewhat contradictorily, there was on one hand a fairly wide consensus that arithmetic was difficult: that learners' development of numeracy skills did not go much beyond the simple recognition of numbers - *<the teacher is good, but we do not learn well>*, and that teachers were frustrated - *<I cannot get the women to learn>*. On the other hand, the most concrete and frequent expressions of the immediate and broadly empowering value of the skills learned were in reference to arithmetic:

<I am a tailor by profession and I used to use hands to measure. Since I have gained the ability to read, I no longer use my hands. Instead I use the measuring tape to ensure that I have the proper measurement> (learner: Zabul)

<The numeracy skills have been particularly useful for my wife as she is responsible for managing the economy of the houses and our expenses.> (family: Paktya)

<I realized how prone are those that are illiterate to being tricked by the shopkeepers outside... the feeling of being tricked always haunted me. I am grateful to the programme for enabling me to learn and become literate at this age> (learner: Balkh)

According to some respondents, women were *<gaining more confidence>* from the classes. Based on the frequency of references to learners enjoying group work and the rarity of any on liking reading, this outcome was likely more a function of having the chance to express and exchange ideas with one another than from a slightly enhanced ability to navigate the textbook. That said, moving beyond simply being able to "do" something to having an expanded, more confident, sense of self was important and implied some degree, at least, of *empowerment*. Equally important in a gender-challenging culture such as rural Afghanistan, were comments suggesting others – male family members, DEO, shura - were gaining an expanded sense of what women could and should be able to do.

Though none of this was dramatic, the project's effectiveness in moving even minimally toward empowering learners might be considered the most significant rationale for its design and mode of delivery.

<My life got better after attending the literacy course, because I have learned that a woman can also be a sound member of the society when she is able to read and write>; <I feel more

empowered now because I can read and calculate. My sister says that I have become more confident and talkative as a result of this program. > (learners: Zabul)

< I feel like I can enjoy all aspects of life now...I can not only take good care of my house, but also assist my children and serve the community>(learner: Badghis)

< Because I was unable to read and write, I always felt excluded. However, that changed when I joined and completed the course>. < I could not read something as basic as price tags in the shops, which was embarrassing for me because all the time I had to ask my daughter or son to read it for me. I fortunately now have the ability to do this and much more.> (learners: Balkh)

< A majority of the community residents are happy and satisfied with the literacy courses because you can see a major change in the women who attended and graduated from these courses....The programme has brought the women of this community from dark to the light> (shura: Balkh, Zabul)

There were also other, somewhat less expected, indications of change being generated through the programme. According to a DEO in Balkh, for example, there were important follow-on implications: *<We have educated not just 400 women, but also 400 families through the literacy programme in Balkh. When a woman is educated, it impacts the entire family especially the children because she is the primary care taker>*. A group of learners in Bamyan described a similar idea, changes in themselves serving as a role model to others in the community: *<More girls are going to school now with our example, because we are encouraged to speak out about the importance of girls' education>*. While it was difficult to assess the full significance of such comments, the potential for sustained, cumulative outcomes was important to note.

5. STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS: NARRATIVE DISCUSSION

This section draws on the questions of the evaluation design matrix and interview/FGD tools developed for the evaluation⁷⁰. Not all questions could be answered through the data generated, but all of the main themes are discussed below and address the objectives and core questions of the TORS⁷¹.

Relevance answers the question of whether the rationale and objectives of the project address the priorities, needs and interests of its stakeholders to the extent they are willing to engage with it and take responsibility for its “working”.

With respect to the relevance of the project to local stakeholders, the answer overall was “yes, but with modification”. On the first, the consensus opinion across the range of respondents confirmed that, in purpose and expected outcomes, the project was very much aligned to their own.

In Balkh: *< The Literacy Department / Directorate aimed to decrease the illiteracy rate in here and we supported them wholeheartedly because it is a good program > (family). <Most of the families were very supportive of the program. There were a few that were against it initially, but once we met with them and informed them about it, they became supportive > (teacher) <The community including the Mullah and elders campaigned for the program, so people are more aware and supportive of it.> (shura)*

In Paktya: *<85% of the women are still illiterate, and we are trying to address this problem through the literacy program....Literacy is a basic need for both men and women. We did not have any literacy programme in Paktya for a long time. However with the cooperation of the local people, we established the programme to address their needs and to enable them to become literate.> (DEO)*

In Badghis: *< It is very important to have literacy courses at the district and province level. There are many people who have been unable to continue their education during the three decades of war and it is important that we provide them with the opportunity to become literate and continue their education so that they can also serve their community, province and nation one day > (DEO)*

In Zabul: *<Since there are no high schools for women in Qalat, the literacy course is a great opportunity for women to become literate and open minded>; <People want their daughters to go to formal schools, but the environment is not conducive for them because the schools are very far. Therefore, we send them to literacy centres, which are closer to us and safer > (teachers, shura)*

In terms of the “modification”, there were a number of implied and expressed concerns that the project was not equally suited to all; that it was *<more useful for younger women because they are quick learners in comparison to the older ones >* and that *<urban women benefited from the programme more than the rural women because they had access to more opportunities >* (teachers: Laghman). A DEO in Badghis saw a more balanced benefit: *<The programme has been helpful and effective for both categories of women: for those who attend the literacy course and then shift to formal schooling and for those who attend the literacy course to acquire the ability to assist their children in their school assignments>*, but this was not a commonly expressed opinion.

⁷⁰ See Annexes 5 and 6

⁷¹ As noted earlier, *effectiveness* is discussed separately as section 4.

Many of those 15-20 were looking for an extension to the project that would provide an equivalent of Gr5 so that they could apply for “right age” entry to Gr6. Aiming for Secondary completion, in some cases access to university, required an extension to the course that would include as well as advanced math and language skills subjects such as geography, history, social sciences.

While older women, especially those already married, considered domestic knowledge, along with a capacity to oversee their children’s reading, necessary, they too felt an extension was needed to help them address family poverty. A rudimentary level of income generating skills (typically crafts making) were priorities for many who wanted *<to be good mothers>* and also *<contribute financially>*.

Probably because they were realistic about the limited opportunities for women to participate in the public sphere, very few learners – and only the younger ones – expressed any interest in developing capacities related to community governance, political engagement or public policy. None commented having acquired capacities in these areas, beyond the more general interest in using literacy skills to support their potential membership in the Shura.

Motivation Experience from practice holds that it is learners themselves, pushed from the inside by their own interests or felt need to become literate, who are the “necessary condition” of a successful literacy programme ⁷². Where a programme effectively allows learners to address the concerns of their internal motivation, i.e. is relevant to them, they will learn and, where at all possible, take action to sustain that learning.

In all sampled provinces, the majority of learners – young and old - were motivated in large measure by the opportunity provided them *<to come together and to learn something>*; a place *<to share experiences>*. In one case, *<even if we learn just one word a day, that’s good. If we have a problem at home, we can come here and talk about it>*. *<The literacy centre was not only a place for them to learn, but also to meet each other and share their experiences with one another. The learners’ used to say that it is more like a support system for them>* (DEO: Laghman)

According to one Monitor, the women in Bamyan wanted to learn nutrition, and the textbook included this. Also, they liked to be able to *<check their children’s homework; were more capable in the market, reading signs, prices, counting change>*. His anecdotal evidence, that *<they come to class regularly>*, that they missed class only for a *<special family events or illness>* confirmed to him that they considered the project relevant. At the same time, however, few in any of the Centres indicated undertaking any form of sustained reading for their own purposes at home, either the textbook or other materials.

As suggested elsewhere, younger learners were more often motivated by more *external goals*, for which the LC was a first and necessary, but ultimately insufficient, step. They wanted to acquire vocational skills, but beyond the craft-level that interested older ones, and to include topics such as marketing, so that they could find permanent work. Many aimed to gain access to formal school *<even to join next term, if the LC finishes in time>*. Motivating these learners in part appeared to be other girls in the community who were in school as family attitudes were beginning to shift. An 18 year old learner in one Centre could *<see the textbooks>* that others their age had and, in essence, she wanted in.

Efficiency answers the twin questions of “are the procedures being followed in managing the LC programme cost-effective” and “do stakeholders agree they are worth the costs they incur – monetary, time, risk etc.”

⁷² See Lind & Johnston 1990: chapter 8

Overall, the project as delivered and received could be considered efficient. This judgement took into account several dimensions.

Efficiency is most typically measured in budgetary terms as “value for money”. The evaluation was able to collect only a minimum of budget data for the project disaggregated by activity: cost per LC estimated by UNICEF as \$1530, including for teachers, their training, salaries and materials kit; for students a materials kit and textbook; as well as blackboard and floor matting. This broke down to a per/student cost of \$61 for the 9-month course. An additional annual cost of \$220,000 supported awareness raising campaigns⁷³.

Assessing the “efficiency” of this was complicated by a limited comparative base. The evaluation did not have access to data from other NGO literacy programmes, but in any case, the contexts of their delivery were substantively different. These were programmes with relatively limited reach, operating largely independently of the government system and on a relatively labour-intensive basis.

Comparing the project to other, more large-scale, costs in the education sector was also tenuous given the different parameters. Nevertheless, they did justify a reasonably good efficiency rating. Based on 2011 figures, the per/student cost in General Education was \$67 (\$72 for Gr 1 and \$103 for Gr 6 factoring in uniforms, supplies etc.). Nationally, costs of literacy were appreciably higher than the project’s at \$98/student (though it was unclear the basis of this calculation). Notably, literacy, together with TVET, reflected only approximately 18% of the education budget, raising the question to some as to “how ‘pro-poor’ the education budget is since relatively little goes to where the poor are...”⁷⁴, something the UNICEF-supported project funding does. Yet more critically, and as noted earlier, even this marginal funding to NFE/literacy was judged to be “inadequate and diminishing; the current target of 3.6 million adults by 2014 would require four times the current budget”⁷⁵.

From another perspective, according to UNICEF figures from 2010-12, efficiency may be considered weakened by the fact that the percentage of planned budget allocated was fairly small (65%, 53%, 41%); in 2013, however, it was considerably better (74.8%), perhaps because of a much smaller, more focused, coverage area⁷⁶. As a better measure of efficiency: from 2010-12, the percentage of allocated budget spent was good (95-100%); in 2013 it was slightly less (89%), in part a function of “insufficient absorption capacity at the national level”, but also, more positively, the savings gained by “local agreements with WFP to jointly undertake the project; WFP’s contribution entailed food rations for teacher that replaced our incentives and for students as well.”⁷⁷

In the context of looking to the eventual sustainability of a social development and learning programme, a perhaps more reasonable and realistic measure of efficiency concerned stakeholders’ assessment of the *benefits gained by them as worth the resources expended by them* in gaining those benefits. Efficiency in this sense is a judgement based less on money than on the perception of personal and opportunity costs - in time, effort and risk. In this case, comments from learners, family members

⁷³ Email communication from UNICEF April 24, 2013

⁷⁴ Extrapolated from the UNICEF. 2013. “Situation Analysis: Education Component”: 23-4

⁷⁵ Afghanistan Education Joint Sector Review. “Aide-Mémoire: Executive Summary”. Information for the Tokyo Conference, July 2012: 1

⁷⁶ Compared to the Ministry’s weak capacity for delivery, these figures are reasonably good. According to one estimate, approved MOE development budget activity expenditures were “less than one-quarter of (its) estimates”; and the “execution rate in 2008/09 was just 38%” (World Bank & DFID. “Working Paper 5: Afghanistan Public Expenditure Review 2010 – Education Sector”. 2010: 9)

⁷⁷ UNICEF email communication 11.2.14

and teachers confirmed the project as efficient insofar as a range of responses indicated satisfaction with their participation, for themselves and other members of the community.

<There is a lot of respect for the teachers and the personnel of the literacy centre and we are very grateful for the work that they are doing> (family: Badghis);

<This programme provides us all the skill we expected during enrolment and much more>(learners: Paktya)

<.....we always encouraged our daughters and our friends to enroll themselves in the literacy programs, whenever they were offered in our area.> (learner: Laghman)

A further indicator of efficiency in the programme, with few defined parameters and voluntary participation, has been whether stakeholders were choosing to stay involved as measured by rates of dropout and absenteeism. The first was reasonably seen as an indicator of relevance; the second of effectiveness. In the case of the Literacy Centre, there were no indications that either dropout or absenteeism was to any degree a problem. Neither appeared to be an “issue” for respondents and, according to UNICEF, its own records indicated “minimal to no dropout rate”⁷⁸.

In Balkh, the DEO noted that of the *<around 400 learners who had enrolled in this programme... only 15-20 had dropped out due to getting married, moving to a different location and other problems. The rest of them completed the programme because they really liked it>*. According to the shura in Badghis, *<most of the women who enrolled in this course have successfully completed and graduated. We have had a very low rate of drop outs>*.

<In fact, there were no problems in the learners’ attendance in this community...a majority of them came to the sessions happily and gladly because they saw this as an opportunity to see each other in addition to learning something> (teacher: Balkh). This was reinforced by both the DEO: *<We did not have problems with the teachers or learners’ attendance because they were interested...>*; and a father: *<my daughter never wanted to miss a session because she loved the course, her teacher and the whole environment>*. In Bamyan, fewer than 5/25-30 women were reported as being away, and these chiefly because the lack of heat in classes forced them to keep the children who usually accompanied them at home.

Sustainability⁷⁹ concerns the matter of “what will continue” as a legacy of the project and has two perspectives: that of the individual learner and teacher - will they retain and continue to use and develop the knowledge and skills they have acquired; and that of the supply-demand “system” - will government and donors continue to support women’s literacy through this type of nonformal learning channel, and will communities continue to demand it in this or a related form.

Sustainability as an evaluation factor and goal of the project was conceptually different from the others discussed above; while the others attempt to explain why the project was realizing the outcomes it was, sustainability concerned its durability. Whether there was durability to outcomes with respect to

⁷⁸ Email correspondence from UNICEF April 24/2014. According to this note, there is a “dropout rate of 50% (as) a national figure including all types of adult literacy in Afghanistan, which may not necessarily be true with all”.

⁷⁹ The TORS included both sustainability and impact among the evaluation criteria. There were relatively few data from the fieldwork dealing with the broad matter of stable, long-term change among participating learners, especially as diversified across the different ethnic and geographic/cultural communities. For this reason, the concept of impact has been incorporated into this on sustainability.

the two perspectives described in the box above, of course, was in large measure a function of the extent to which all factors serve to enable their viability, consolidation and/or institutionalization. Broadly, the answer from the data appeared to be “partially”.

Question 1: will learners continue to read and calculate, will teachers continue to teach, and will both continue to use and strengthen their respective capacities to develop and empower themselves?

Based on the field data, the consensus appeared to be that while the LC project has been necessary for learners and teachers in taking the first step of engaging with literacy, it has overall been insufficient to enabling them to maintain their skills and go further.

In general, younger unmarried students seemed likely to try to maintain their learning because they were motivated:

< I continue to grab and read whatever I can get a hold of, whether it is the newspaper that is wrapped around bread, or children’s books or the banners outside the house. I just do not want to lose what I have gained> (Balkh).

In Zabul, <The past learners are continuing to develop their learned skills; they practice it by assisting us informally with our studies>.

Others wanted to move on, either into formal school or paid work:

<most of the students wanted to become literate so that they could continue further and learn a profession> (teacher: Balkh);

<One of the most positive results of the programme is that a number of those who have graduated have continued their education and have either become teachers in schools, or in other literacy courses>(shura: Badghis);

<... after the graduating, some women continue learning at home and others enroll themselves in formal schools> (DEO: Paktya), a task that would be significantly enhanced most felt <if the programme continued its support up to Grade 6 entry capacity> (learner: Bamyan).

Those who were married or older were more likely gradually to lose their still fragile literacy because they had no clear “next step” that required them to retain it. In an FGD with graduates in Bamyan, all learners were reported to have completed the project, but while four of the older graduates had learned how to better care for their families and read signs, they had by now *<forgotten almost everything>*; they had not continued to practise and there appeared to be little to push them forward. One 35 year old, though not married, had not been able to follow-up her LC experience because her family *<was not supportive>*. She could read some signs and had learned about hygiene, but was *<not educated enough to find her own way>*.

The critical caveat here for all of these and others still in the project was the absence of the vocational training which would have enabled them to improve their household income and provide a greater sense of autonomy. According to many, more important than reading as such was their ability to *<earn money and be independent from our husbands>* (learner: Bamyan).

Box 2

A positive sustainability case study: One graduate, from a family with no formal education and parents who were themselves illiterate, had participated in a series of LC programmes over 5-6 years. Offered by a variety

of agencies in and beyond her own community, she had activity <looked for these because I wanted to be like the teachers I saw>. She was eventually contracted by the Literacy Manager as a Monitor and was now - at 23 and not married - fulltime with the AKDN training CBS and ECD teachers. As a variant on sustainability of results, she had also served as exemplar to a younger sister who had graduated from the UNICEF-supported LC, completed another privately funded course supported by her family and passed the Gr 5 entrance. She was now, at 19, in Gr6 while also teaching in a Save-funded ECCD programme.

On the matter of teachers, data suggested that many would like to continue teaching literacy to out-of-school girls and women. This was an interpretation drawn in part from the way they described the reasons for applying in the first place as well as their expressed intention to improve and stay on -- not apparently on the potential of a stable career, but as a way to serve their community. Thus, a “problem-solving” motivation considered to be the strongest indicator of sustained commitment to an action:

<The benefit of being a literacy teacher is serving the community and the satisfaction that one gets from helping those in need>; <I would like to remain a literacy teacher and serve my sisters and my community>. (teachers: Zabul)

<We have get-togethers with other teachers in the area and share our challenges, teaching methods and overall experience so that we improve further> (teachers: Badghis)

< I became a teacher based on my own interest and the demand and encouragement of my family and community members>; < I want to continue working as a teacher because I earn an income through this and support my family in addition to reducing illiteracy in my village> (teachers: Paktya)

<If you know something, you should teach it to others who do not know as well. I asked women in the community if they would like to learn and they said yes so I went to ask the Literacy Manager if I could teach and he said yes> (teacher: Bamyan)

Question 2: will there continue to be funding support for, and community interest in, women’s literacy and support for a Female Literacy project?

Two “sustainability streams” are important to consider here: demand and supply. For the first, there was little doubt that in principle there would continue to be strong and growing interest in what the Literacy Centres were providing, though for some this meant reading, and for others a more diffused opportunity to learn. Whether this demand would persist, of course, depended on how low resources become and for how long they might be available, as well as the evolving security situation⁸⁰. As of now, however, learners were enthusiastic.

⁸⁰ Security is not a marginal issue in Afghanistan, of course, although to some extent insecurity, threats of violence and actual harm have become such facts of life, especially for those in more remote areas, that it tends to be left unstated as a determining factor in decision-making. That said, when asked directly, people (especially girls) are fearful and becoming more so as the 2014 US/NATO withdrawal takes hold. It was clear to many that “gains made in education in general are being threatened by both a reduced impetus and a perhaps weakened rationale for reform on the part of cash-strapped donor countries, this despite the persistent demand especially for girls’ education, CBE classes and literacy programmes in rural areas. Troubling, too, is the expectation within the education community, including girls themselves, that gender equality gains will be lost as girls’ education becomes once again the ‘first soft target (for) political and military change’, whether through direct exclusion by Taliban, the criminality and abuse of renegade local militia in government-controlled areas or communal fighting”.(SCA.2013.“Strategic Plan 2014- 2017: Context Analysis, Education”: 8-9 quoted in UNICEF.2013.“SituationAnalysis:EducationSector”:46)

In Badghis, *<we would definitely encourage our family members, friends and neighbours to enroll in this programme because they too are interested in becoming literate>*; and in Paktya, *<if there is anyone illiterate in our neighbourhood or among our friends, we will encourage them to enroll themselves in the program>*.

Suggesting the importance of increasing attention to a role for families, men also expressed readiness to support women's continued access to learning:

<since we have done this ourselves we would not hesitate to encourage other families to send their daughters, sisters and wives to the literacy course> (Zabul);

<...we have many books in our house and we encourage our family members to read often so that they retain and further enhance what they learn in school and in the literacy course> (Badghis)

Actions to sustain the project were being taken.

In Zabul, *<One of the ways that we support the literacy centre is by trying to find additional donors that are willing to fund the programme>* (DEO);

Shura in Balkh *<always encourage people to participate in the program, through elders and religious leaders at mosque>*; and in Zabul, *<We definitely support the continuation of literacy programs and centres and would do anything within our might to ensure that they are successful; ...Due to insecurity, one of the centres was closed, but we intervened and took the necessary measures to ensure that the environment was conducive and the programme is secure>*.

As noted, data were collected in two provinces (Laghman and Balkh) and one community (in Bamyan) in which UNICEF no longer supported Literacy Centres, the aim to assess what was left of the experience with respect to learners' acquired skills and community commitment to the cause of women's literacy. Insights here were limited, with little to differentiate the Literacy Centre experience of these provinces from the others⁸¹. With respect specifically to the closure experience, however, the conclusions were generally negative:

Learners in Bamyan who had not continued with formal school claimed to have forgotten most of their site vocabulary and, from their demeanour, had little interest in reading. Others expressed regret.

According to the DEO in Balkh, *<it was a major disappointment for us, the teachers, learners and families when UNICEF stopped supporting the literacy program;...Everyone including the elders, residents of the area and Mullahs were major supporters of the literacy program. They still ask us when UNICEF is going to reopen the centres>*. According to the national team, teachers in Balkh who had taught in the Centres were *<jobless now>*.

Laghman painted a similar picture, *<when the centres were open, women were learning. Now that they have closed, they are no longer able to learn and it has affected them negatively>* (teacher). Presumably older learners *<after completing the program,... did not enroll in any other course and do not work>*, although for younger ones: *<the programme was very useful ... (they) enrolled themselves in formal schools after graduating...>* (shura).

⁸¹ It is important to note that the reason for ending LC support in Laghman and Balkh was not specific to the project, but part of the UNICEF-wide refocussing on just 10 more vulnerable provinces from the previous 34.

The consensus opinion from both Balkh and Laghman, not surprisingly, was that the Literacy Centre project, or some version of it, should be restarted. Arguments were based on much the same rationale: the desire for durable access.

From Balkh:

<We always encouraged our neighbours and family members to enroll in the programme because we believed in it and still do;...We need UNICEF's support to start reading and writing once again> (learners)

< We are in the service of our people for as long as possible and definitely would not hesitate to support the programme if it was to restart.> (shura)

<I do not want the hopes of my younger daughter to go in vain since she envisioned herself being part of this program...> (father).

From Laghman:

< The programme should restart because we are poor and deserve to be enrolled in such programs;... the number of literacy courses should be increased because there are very few formal schools in this area>(learners);

<In the past, the security situation was not good in these areas. However, now that they have improved, these literacy programs should restart >(teacher);

< ...these courses should be on a continual basis and for a longer period> (DEO)

Although it was not clear why, the provinces differed in the initiative taken to reinstitute provision. In Balkh, there appeared to be little if anything done, even by the system:

<No actions were taken because UNICEF had to make a decision, not us. We are not the decision makes in here and do not have the authority> (DEO)

<I do not think any measures were taken to restart literacy courses because if they had done so, then the literacy courses would have started by now> (teachers)

< I do not know if any measures were taken to restart literacy courses, we have not heard anything from anyone in this regard.> (learner).

In Laghman, a number of local actions were taken, but appeared to meet blocks within the system:

<We contacted the LD in Kabul and asked them to restart the literacy programs, but they said that because of low budget, priority was given to other provinces> (DEO)

<We tried to contact the respective entities to restart the literacy program, but we received a negative response> (learners);

<We tried to restart the programme ourselves but due to financial problems, we were unable to do so;... We can be effective in encouraging the students and in providing the space. Beyond that, our hands are tied when it comes to financially supporting the centre> (shura).

On the second “supply” stream, the picture was again mixed. In principle and policy, the launch of the Literacy Strategy backed by funding from Japan and Sweden under the auspices of ELA3 and partnered

by UNESCO bode well. It was still early to say how broad the reach or how comprehensive the coverage may eventually be in terms of operationalizing the Strategy, of course. As noted earlier, nothing much was likely to happen unless ownership was taken up at local levels through community consultations and mobilization. Upcoming elections, the draw-down of aid and potential increases in violence and action against women will undoubtedly delay, if not preclude, serious policy and programme action.

At the same time, there continued to be structural impediments to sustaining commitments to women’s literacy. Three were especially pertinent in the form of still largely unimplemented policies to open more Community Learning Centres, build Adult Literacy Schools in rural areas or create a National Qualifications Framework.

As proposed in the Strategy, the CLCs were “an attempt to strengthen quality by streamlining a little more the nature of literacy provision....to have a more consistent approach which uses existing capacity as much as possible”. However, “there has been no structured plan for how to achieve this”⁸².

Intended as venues through which older students were provided an accelerated learning curriculum from Grades 1 to 12, the ALS were a preferred option for many, but the 60 or so currently in place were too few to meet demand and in any case were in urban areas. For many young women, the importance of having a Literacy School in the community was clear: *<we cannot go to another village because it is far, but we need education, because without it we is like we are blind>* (Bamyan). At least one Literacy Manager as well as several DEO and Shura were also supportive and had made several applications. These were as yet unanswered.

Lastly, the proposed NQF aimed to “provide a framework for the recognition of learning levels which at the lower end ... will have a strong focus on literacy”⁸³ remained unimplemented, meaning that the door remained still closed to LC graduates who wanted to have their skills tested toward entry into TVET programmes or employment.

The somewhat better news on sustainability were the most recent NRVA data showing literacy rates as rising for rural women in both absolute and comparative terms, and especially for those 15-24.

Table 6- Literacy rate for rural adults and youths

	Rural adult		GPI ⁸⁴ rural adult	Rural youth		GPI rural youth
	female	male	female	female	male	female
NRVA 2011/12	10.4%	39.1%	.27	22.5%	55.9%	.40
NRVA 2007/08	7.0%	35.0%	.20	n.a.	n.a	.31

The less good news was that it has taken a decade of international support to reach even these rates, and they were too low to assume that women would sustain a capacity for reading as aid levels declined. It was of concern then that the 2012 EJSR⁸⁵ noted an already 18% reduction in the number of courses being delivered nationally. And there remained the fact that literacy takes time and experience to consolidate to a point where withdrawal of support was unlikely to result in neo-literates

⁸² UNESCO advisor email communication.
⁸³ HRDB. “Education Joint Sector Review: Youth and Adult Literacy”. May 2012: 16
⁸⁴ Gender Parity Index: Ratio of female literacy rate to male, as a “measure of progress toward gender equality...a key indicator of the empowerment of women...” (NRVA 2011/12: 70)
⁸⁵ HRDB. “Education Joint Sector Review: Youth and Adult Literacy”. May 2012: 7

forgetting how to read. International experience indicates Gr 5 or 6 as requisite to stabilizing capacity; at best, young and middle-age women were graduating from LCs with only Gr 3.

Inclusion answers the question of whether all of those who should be participating are both turning up and actively engaged in ways that will realize the intended outcomes of the intervention. In this case, inclusion is concerned with rural, poor and illiterate women, ethnic minorities and those with disabilities.

In a broad sense, the project has been, by definition, inclusive in that it has targeted specifically illiterate adolescent girls and women living in poverty in rural and remote areas in the most disadvantaged provinces and districts of Afghanistan.

That said, proponents at neither local nor national levels appeared to have taken an especially proactive “seeking out” role in looking for, identifying and promoting participation of those who did not on their own volition turn up. To some extent, this was beyond the remit of UNICEF as funder; the project has been implemented by the Literacy Department through its local Provincial and District officers. Accordingly to UNICEF, there was no particular directive that Kuchi be included, for example. Implementation of the LC was presumably, therefore, as inclusive as local officers were motivated and energized to make it and communities were to demand it. Based on the data of the fieldwork, only two LC among the sampled sites reported having Kuchi learners; a few had learners with disabilities. However, according to the national team coordinator (who translated all of the field interview and FGD data in English), there were “no data on how these learners were being supported” in the class – tailored support a key criterion of inclusion.

Appropriateness of human and learning resources answers the question of whether there is a good match between the requirements of the programme; the knowledge, expertise and commitment of those responsible for its implementation; and the approaches they are using.

Appropriateness of human resources

A crucial challenge to the effectiveness of the project – both to the quality of its implementation and to its outcomes -- has been the *limited and inconsistent professional capacities of teachers and of the Literacy officers supervising them*. This concerned the weak control teachers and monitors had over both andragogical (adult learning) methods and strategies for teaching reading in the technical sense i.e. developing the skills involved in word recognition and in the more complex tasks of reading for fluency and meaning. Without these teaching capacities, it will inevitably prove difficult for learners to move beyond the acquisition of a fairly superficial and ultimately easily lost level of literacy, and toward consolidating a sustainable commitment to and capacity for reading as a learning tool or for pleasure.

The matter of limited human resources was a major one, affecting not just the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process, but also the various other tasks of delivering and overseeing the effort e.g. mobilizing the community in favour of female education; monitoring inputs, outputs and outcomes in a systematic, evidence-based way; interpreting and using the information generated through M&E to inform and improve practice.

Like much else with the programme, the picture was a mixed one. Clearly, training was happening at different points in the delivery system; at the same time, the type and quality of learning outcomes realized by these initiatives were uncertain, but generally considered insufficient. There is a delicate chain of capacity required within a project like this, from one level to the next in something of a cascaded model. Weaknesses in the links at any point inevitably undermine the strength of the whole. There were too few mechanisms in place in the LC project to provide the initial knowledge and skills needed at each point in the chain and their regular updating.

Teachers As in any education initiative, teachers have been central to effective learning outcomes. What they know, think and do with respect to learning and learners has mattered. This is especially the case in a largely unstructured and modestly resourced programme like the Literacy Centre where the ability of teachers to engage as facilitators of learning for often uncertain, tentative adults with little if any formal learning experience is crucial.

On the positive side, data from the fieldwork indicated that the teachers were committed, motivated and appreciated and, as such, proving to be central to project success.

For Badghis and Zabul shura, *<One of the many strengths of the programme is the positive and friendly attitude of the teacher towards the learners>; <The teachers are dedicated towards the programme and their students and that is one of the major strengths of the programme since the teachers play a crucial role throughout this process>.*

For a Badghis Monitor: *<The teachers' teaching method has been participatory rather than just lectures which encourages participation and puts the learners at ease>.*

For a Balkh DEO: *<The teachers were very professional and punctual and their teaching methods were user / learner friendly. We never received any complaints about them>.*

Somewhat more speculatively, but positive in coming from a male family member: *<One of the significant changes that I have seen in the programme during the past two years (in Zabul) is the increase in the number of students. I think the teacher's positive attitude towards the learners and the learners' interest in the programme may explain this>.*

Although chorus recitation of vocabulary and sentences appeared to be the norm in many of the observed classes, a number of teachers and learners in fact claimed a variety of techniques were being used, all of them consistent with good practice: asking questions, reviewing previous lessons, organizing in working groups, using local materials for counting. From Zabul, for example: *<When we teach the students, we try to relate the concepts to their lives and use day to day life examples so that they grasp the concepts easily>; <I prefer teaching them by asking and answering questions. I find it an effective method as it enables students to learn quickly and grasp the concepts in a better way>.* These self-assessments were confirmed by another province's field team *<Despite the time constraints, learners were asked open ended questions and encouraged to participate often; ... teachers' behaviour and attitude were positive and friendly...>.*

While there was no reason to disbelieve these reported teaching strategies, quality of implementation remained an unknown in the absence of technically strong monitoring. The report of the field team in Zabul mirrored those of others in casting some doubts. Although *<teachers received professional development support from literacy officers about learner-centred and gender sensitive teaching, they considered that these were not sufficient and that they needed additional trainings on a regular basis so that they were more up to date with the various teaching methods and materials>.* A DEO from Badghis agreed with respect to the broader meaning of reading: *<teachers are trained well enough to provide the needed scope of literacy learning, but require additional trainings to further enhance learners' understanding of the content>.* And there were inconsistencies even within the same

province. One teacher in Laghman confirmed that her *<teaching methods improved a lot>* after the 6 day training, for another they were *<insufficient>*. Whatever the reason for the difference, the mix of experiences made assessing training effectiveness rather tenuous.

Such concerns were not unreasonable. Teachers had very limited training, only 6 days through which they were provided the basics of lesson planning, use of the textbook and, potentially most significant, the principles of andragogy – how to facilitate adult learning. According to one Master Trainer, the training focused on ensuring *<the teacher has respect for learners, makes them feel comfortable>*. According to teachers, they had learned how to teach in this manner - to *<encourage participants>* by finding methods that *<help them learn, because they learn in different ways>*. To some extent, evidence that the approach was working was in the positive comments of learners: from one in Bamyan *<we can ask for help when we need it; we are not afraid of the teacher. We like everything we do here.>*

There was less evidence of the effect of training on reading outcomes, however, and realistically it seemed unlikely that the minimal exposure to facilitative methods would leave much of a base of expertise from which teachers might draw. And in the classroom, they had little time or opportunity to work through trial and error: *<the teachers teach the learners in good and easy manner, but there is no enough time to practice the old lessons and prepare for new ones>* (learner: Bamyan). Further undermining potential effectiveness, the professional support teachers receive in-class was compromised by monitoring that tended to be irregular (as discussed below) and a general absence of peer mentoring – only one teacher in Paktya claimed such support.

Finally, selection of teachers was problematic. As required by the programme, they were identified by the community; in one Bamyan case on the basis of their being *<from the community and clever>*. Ideally, more than one candidate was presented for approval to the Literacy Manager or DEO, enabling a comparison of capacity. Approval was most frequently, however, *pro forma* where a single candidate was named; even if considered academically weak, she would be contracted.

According to one Literacy Manager, this reflected a structural problem, not simply one of availability: the tendency to prioritize candidate proximity and character over tested capacities: *<they don't always provide me with candidates with the right skills, or provide only one name. The priority should still be someone from the community, but if there is no one who has the skills, I want to look to a neighbouring community>*. It was positive that in several sample sites, selected and contracted candidates were actually themselves students in Primary or Secondary school; they studied in the afternoon and taught in the morning, or between semesters.

Shura Members of Shura, chiefly the women, were the main channel linking local literacy officials, the community and the mobilization and management of the Centres. Their responsibilities were much the same across all sites: to ask who in the community was interested and available, encourage those wanting to improve their skills as mothers and homemakers to join, and identify teachers.

Despite the importance of these roles and their own generally negligible education, shura reported having no literacy-specific training, *<...not for undertaking the monitoring visits, but we do prepare a schedule and based on that, two designated members visit the centre every week>* (Badghis); *<we do monitoring using our personal experience>* (Paktya). Some had received management training from NGOs and it might be assumed that some of this capacity was being transferred to their monitoring and outreach with the Centres. In principle, however, the lack of tailored training or mentoring of these women must be seen as a gap, both for them as women who were also without education access and for the effectiveness of the programme.

Master Trainers The potential range of training-of-trainer skills required of Master Trainers was significant, two areas of competency especially key: the basics of teaching reading and numeracy and consolidating these and the concepts, principles and practices of andragogy (adult education) as applied in a nonformal learning context. Based on interview data, there appeared to be a reasonably appropriate focus by Master Trainers on the second, but less so on the first. There remained, however, questions as to how effective a control they had over either since, according to one in Zabul, *<we train newly recruited teachers for 15 days, but we have not received any specific training ourselves from any entity>*. Another in Bamyan had been trained, but through what appeared to be somewhat ad hoc workshops organized at the national level, rather than through a planned programme of professional development. In the case of Badghis, the trainings had been *<very helpful, but not sufficient...we want the donors, especially UNICEF, to conduct additional trainings and workshops for us...we are trained once in a year, but we have not been trained by UNICEF>*.

District Monitors As with other officers with Literacy Centre oversight roles, the capacity of the monitors was unclear. Most appeared to be reasonably confident in their supervisory and guidance work with teachers, but what they actually did was vague. One in Bamyan noted that he had *<respectful and encouraging interaction>* with teachers, but his evaluation of their teaching was actually based on learners' capacities to read and write, not on the teacher's performance: *<if the women are learning, the teacher must be doing a good job>*. Only one had *<participated in various monitoring workshops, but this was not specific training from UNICEF to perform my duties as a monitor>*.

District Education Officers Several DEO commented positively on their ability to support the project. For one in Laghman, *<my capacity for monitoring and management has improved significantly as a result of trainings.... from entities such as IRC, JICA, LEAF>*. Another in Balkh had been helped through seminars provided by the Literacy Department in Kabul. Others were less clear as to the purpose of workshops they had attended, beyond enabling them *<to perform our duties and oversight role>* in the Centres. There was less a sense for many of how these lessons related to the Literacy Centres in particular versus their formal education responsibilities more generally. While this was not necessarily negative, it was also not especially beneficial for the particular needs of the adult literacy teachers under their supervision as opposed to those in the formal school where demands and resources differ considerably.

Appropriateness of learning resources

The single room, often crowded and lightly resourced nature of the project infrastructure, with a minimally trained teaching cadre, challenged the application of learner-centred, interactive and responsive methods characteristic of strong adult teaching and learning. So, too, had the reported need for more learning, and learner-support, materials. Albeit with few specifications as to what these might be, broadly they referred to items such as chalk, stationary and writing equipment.

While the effective use of the textbook as a basis for learning to read with fluency and independence was less than clear, as a vehicle for word recognition and learning-through-discussion the general consensus among teachers and learners was very positive: it was relevant to their needs, accessible to novice learners, and interesting.

According to a teacher in Bamyan, it *<encourages learners to come>* because the contents relate to their daily lives and are helpful; and to one in Zabul, *<it is very effective in teaching learners how to read, calculate and write; I have the "Come to Learn" primer and use it as part of my curriculum. It is written in simple language and is very clear and easy for the learners to grasp>*. A favourite among many younger learners was the *<story of a young girl, Amina, being able to go to school>*, but reflective of most age groups, *<the most popular are "marriage*

changes our life” and “my family; “raising healthy children”, “health is wealth” and “eating healthy”> (teachers: Zabul).

At the same time, the textbook - and thus the curriculum - did not address all needs of all learners. For those who would try to enrol in school, for example, there needed to be more academic lessons (geography, history, social studies); and for those wanting to improve child and home care, and contribute to family income, more on thematic and vocational-cum-livelihood skills. Most were fairly vague with respect to precisely what should change, but nonetheless suggested the need for more attention to the scope and tailoring of topics and the accessibility of their presentation:

<Some changes should be brought to the textbook so that it is more effective>; <I do not think there is a need for anything to be removed (but) I think there is a need for more things to be added to the textbook>; <textbooks should be made clearer so that we could study some lessons in advance at home>; <contents and topics are interesting, but some of the words are difficult to grasp>;<The math book has not been that helpful because of lack of learning materials for calculation.>

Again not surprisingly given the essentially decentralized nature of project implementation, while many teachers appeared to assume an influence over use of the text, there were significant differences in how much scope they felt they had to “manage” or tailor it – critical actions to be able to take in the context of adult learning. For some, it might be a matter of capacity, for others the degree of permission they felt they had.

Teachers in Paktya, for example, believed they had *<no authority to change the contents of the lesson>*, although they could request Literacy officers to do it. In Badghis, one felt she did *<not have the authority to change the lessons or the curriculum>*, but did feel comfortable to *<add religious studies as another subject based on the students’ demand>*.

Farthest along the path to teachers exercising professional discretion were those in Zabul who assumed *<flexibility in changing the lesson. For example, if we come across something that is culturally inappropriate or sensitive in nature, instead of dropping it altogether, we use a different approach to convey the essence of the content in a more culturally appropriate way>*.

On a more pragmatic level, the textbook was large: for some, daunting to work through, cumbersome to carry and not sufficiently flexible in requiring everyone to be on the same page at the same time (although some teachers said they did move back and forth within the chapters as they felt appropriate). According to one Literacy Manager, the amount of content all in one place made it *<too difficult to capture the ideas>* or to *<link them to tasks>* in a motivating way. In this sense, division of the text into divisible modules based on difficulty level and/or topic was seen by several as a better format. It was also one that would allow for locally-generated pieces to be inserted, add context-specific variety and recognize the fact of learning as a process with some learners moving quickly through the material, others needing to repeat.

Coordination answers the question of whether within the parameters of the project and the education sector more widely there is adequate support to open communication, joint action and shared lessons.

Within the education sector as a whole coordination was limited, but improving through the aegis of initiatives like the NESP. Within the NFE/literacy subsector, the picture was not as positive. Indicative perhaps of a disinclination to commit to joint action was the fact of still apparently quite separate

actions and agencies in the literacy sub-sector as a whole, by MOE, MOLSAMD, donors and NGOs, as well as units within the MOE itself. According to the recent draft Situation Analysis of the sector

“Rather than creating a purposively *coordinated link* among these, and between formal and nonformal programmes – in other words, the “seamless” bridging called for by EFA – a separate Deputy Minister is now responsible for the literacy and NFE. While not in itself a negative, it is an arrangement that seems likely to make it more difficult to facilitate the easy enrolling of permanent absentees, official drop-outs or over-age youth into NFE programmes and life-skills courses and, from there, enable their entry to equivalency or re-entry programmes and formal school certification. An initiative of the World Bank, promoted also by UNESCO, to establish a competency-based Afghan National Qualifications Framework (ANQF) for the whole of the education sector (GED, TVET and NFE), remains on hold”⁸⁶.

As a further barrier to coordination, literacy data were still not considered adequate for agency planning and programming. Most government and donor programmes generated and managed their own information, “and the Literacy Directorate -- responsible for bringing it all together -- is ‘not yet integrated into the EMIS’. Most seriously, ‘the data themselves are neither consistent nor complete’”⁸⁷.

With respect to the project itself, there was a certain degree of ambiguity around the quality and extent of coordination among those responsible within the system for its implementation. The Literacy Centres functioned in conjunction with the Literacy Department; UNICEF functioned in coordination with other partners as a member of the LIFE initiative, albeit tailoring the literacy curriculum (LAND) and textbook to subjects of interest to the women who were its targeted learners. The planning and execution of Centre activities was viewed by some as not always as collaborative as it could be, however, and needed to be made less “confusing”. According to the Director of Curriculum and the Literacy Strategy, the LAND curriculum was to be reviewed and revised early in 2014 to make it more context-specific and learner-centred; one UNESCO officer encouraged UNICEF to do more to align its curriculum with this process and become more of a part of overall forward planning and budgeting.

At the same time, when asked the likely impact on the LC of the new Literacy Strategy and the requirement that Provinces and Districts roll-out their own plan – specifically if they would cooperate to take on the coordinated planning task -- one District Literacy Manager foresaw no problem: *<coordination in the Literacy Department is good and people in the province want to be educated; we have enough human resources here, Gr12 graduates looking for a job. We can do it if we have the budget>*.

Informed action answers the question of the extent to which the project is engaged in learning-for-change in terms of collecting, managing and adapting action on the basis of evidence-based, user-friendly monitoring. In other words: how robust is its M&E system.

A programme that engages regularly and systematically in tracking its inputs, implementation and outcomes on the basis of agreed indicators and evidence, and takes corrective action on the results, is inevitably going to be more effective than one that does not. The extent and quality of monitoring in the project was a factor that both enabled effectiveness and explained challenges to it.

⁸⁶ UNICEF. 2013. “Situation Analysis: Education Component”: 27

⁸⁷ UNICEF. 2013. “Situation Analysis: Education Component”: 28

The 2008 BEGE evaluation noted that “neither the Literacy Department nor UNICEF have yet established any mechanism for following up of longer term effects for the learners.”⁸⁸ This was not unique to UNICEF; the Literacy EJSR noted of the system overall: “performance figures in literacy refer exclusively to inputs and outputs, but not to outcomes. That, and the unreliability of the data, makes it difficult to assess the overall results of the literacy effort”⁸⁹.

A second analysis reiterated the problem from the slightly different perspective, that of indefinite standards. It had been a challenge also for the LC project: “One of most critical weakness of literacy programme management is perhaps the most fundamental: there is no definition pertaining to the specific objectives constituting the acquisition of literacy. As a result, it is difficult to determine the specific level of literacy skills which are being acquired by the tens of thousands of persons who are ‘graduating’ each year.”⁹⁰

In analyzing the perceptions, conclusions and recommendations of respondents to the evaluation fieldwork, the definition of literacy was fairly nuanced. At a minimum, it concerned simply word recognition; and at a maximum, the learning of broad life-management knowledge. Thus, it meant variously that:

<women can read signs and banners of shops, pharmacies, hospitals, schools and others>(teacher: Badghis);

< during shopping, we properly understand the price for each item> (learner: Zabul); and,

<they can assist their families financially, effectively manage their households, raise good children >(shura: Laghman).

From a different perspective, there were references suggesting that the definition of literacy was also understood by communities in some more actionable ways, using commonly agreed indicators:

<the programme keeps getting better day by day...if it was not effective and if it had not improved the capacity of the learners, their families would have stopped them from attending the classes by now (monitor: Paktya)

<we are making a difference in the lives of these individuals and I think the community recognizes that since it encourages us to continue working as literacy teachers>(teacher: Zabul)

<The programme is very important; it is empowering the weaker members of the society to become productive, self-sufficient members who can contribute and serve the society and no longer feel like a burden to it>.(shura: Zabul)

Monitoring was very much an indefinite activity in the Literacy Centres. Like literacy itself, it was not very clear what people meant by it. On the positive side, there was good evidence that stakeholders at all local levels accepted the importance of ensuring some level of accountability. Data from all sampled Literacy Centres and Literacy officials confirmed that something called monitoring was being done: of teachers by Literacy Managers, Master Trainers and Monitors and of learners by teachers and shura.

⁸⁸ Wirak, A. & J. Lexow: 22

⁸⁹ HRDB. “Education Joint Sector Review: Youth and Adult Literacy”: 10

⁹⁰ Adam Smith: 69

< We get monitored on a monthly basis by the centre and it is extremely helpful in knowing whether or not we are moving in the right direction and achieving the objectives> (teacher: Zabul)

< My duties include monitoring and assessing the overall implementation of the plan, the teachers' teaching methods, and the learners' performance> (monitor: Paktya)

<we evaluate teachers and the effectiveness of their teaching methods by how well the students have learned and the kind of impact that the course or its content is having on them> (DEO: Zabul)

<Among many other things we were responsible, one of them was closely monitoring the centres, ensuring that the provided space is sufficient and well maintained and making sure that the programme responds to the needs of the community > (DEO: Laghman)

<One of the priority tasks for us is to monitor the centre, assess the effectiveness of the teaching methods and the progress that the learners have made> (shura: Badghis)

It was apparently on the basis of these actions that stakeholders considered the project to be effective e.g. that expected resources were being supplied, actions taken, skills acquired and corrections made. Again, however, the details were much less clear as to what specifically was being assessed as an outcome (what was changing), as an indicator (what the evidence was) or as a measure (what the target was and how close they were to it). Statements like the following from stakeholders in Paktya, Badghis, Laghman and Zabul reflected the ambiguity:

<We assess the learners based on their assignments and daily class activities>

<Teachers are monitored according to the pre-prepared plan....to see if they are implemented in the programme as envisioned, planned and taught to them...if not, we will advise them accordingly>

<We normally assess the teacher's teaching methods to ensure that they are suitable for the various groups of learners>

< I monitor the teachers and the students directly – those students that work hard, I encourage them more by giving them additional stationary>

None of these described the criteria used for the assessments, the basis of comparisons or how deviation from plans was measured. One Manager noted simply that tests were given by teachers at the beginning, middle and end of the course, and that he and the Master Trainer were *<satisfied that participants learned something>* over the 9 months.

Also generally unclear was how, based on the evidence, conclusions were being drawn about subsequent actions that needed to be taken, if any. In other words, if or how well monitoring was understood as a cycle of action-assessment-confirmation/adaptation. Although, there were some signs that a base on which to build such an understanding was in place especially as teachers in Zabul, Badghis, Paktya attempted to use monitoring to improve their practice:

< The assessment is very useful in improving my teaching – It is like a reality check because it gives me the assurance that the learners are learning and that my efforts are paying off>;

< I assess my students every 15 days. I normally ask them questions and based on their answers I estimate how much they have learned.>

<The assessment is useful in improving my teaching. For example, when I first give a student a test and if the test has four questions, she would respond to two of them. However, when I gave the test the second time, she will usually try to respond to all four questions>;

<I assess my students through question and answer...and by asking them about the previous lesson before stating the new one>; <I assess my students through quizzes and assignments. The assessments are helpful because through them I learn whether or not the students have progressed in comparison to the last session>;

< The monitoring is based on the literacy centre's plan...and has been very useful in guiding us and in informing us of our performance>

And according to one group of learners in Bamyan, *<at the end of each month the teacher gives us paper and asks us to write something. Those who do well feel encouraged; others are asked to learn better and she helps them with any problems; and we help each other...>*. This was in line with the plans of the Literacy Strategy to “put proper mechanisms in place to monitor progress in literacy achievement through appropriate assessment tools”⁹¹ which, according to UNESCO, would include training teachers in methods of “continuous learner assessment”. It was a recommended course of action that this evaluation would strongly endorse.

Given the weak monitoring in general, however, precise indicators or measures of learning outcomes were not available to the evaluation. More significantly, they were also not available to DEO and Literacy officials beyond rather loosely-gauged assessments and anecdotal evidence. Again, the problem was not unique to the Centres. According to the Literacy Deputy Minister, there remained throughout the sector as a whole an important knowledge gap; “we need evidence from learners what they have learned and what they still need to learn”; others noted that NFEMIS was still largely inactive and that results from the 5-province LAMP pilot had not yet been produced as of late 2013.

⁹¹ MOE/LD. “National Literacy Strategy: Policies, Targets and Strategies”. 2013: 22

6. CONCLUSIONS, LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The following discussion does not attempt to summarize the previous analysis or retrace the evaluation criteria point by point. Rather, it highlights what in the judgement of the evaluator are critical issues to be reiterated and, where appropriate, elaborated to reinforce the earlier analysis.

The project in context Confirming a point made earlier, the project has existed, and can realistically only be understood, within the context of literacy provision more generally in the country. Based on the sampled LCs and districts, it has been broadly consistent with this context in terms of barriers to, and opportunities for, realizing effective outcomes. As with the sector overall, the barriers have outweighed the opportunities to a considerable degree. As noted in UNICEF's 2013 Situation Analysis for the education sector:

“... much of the current NFE/literacy provision remains limited: in *quality* (qualified female literacy teachers are rare, efforts like that of UNESCO to identify and train Gr 12 graduates “need to be scaled up”); in *duration* (typically only 9 months); in *content relevance* (based often on the Primary school curriculum, “literacy learning may have little to do with the actual context in which literacy is used (and) may not be linked to relevant purposes in learners’ lives”); and in *reach* (the annual enrolment of some 500k is well below the needs of an estimated 10m illiterates and 3.5m expected to be reached by 2014 under the NLAP)”⁹².

Beginnings of a demand side Given this situation, the analysis went on to suggest “a certain urgency to ‘translate the stated political commitments on international best practice’, including NFE, into action and...to ensuring that this involves a central role for the community in determining how it happens”. While data from the present evaluation did not directly raise such a sense of urgency in terms of enhanced community participation, they did indirectly indicate the importance of the “delivery” side recognizing the “demand” side more proactively in highlighting comments of learners and teachers asserting some degree of direction over the trajectory the project; over what it should do with respect to content, design and duration to better meet their needs.

Reasonable Inputs, mixes efficiencies and uncertain outcomes This was important because, broadly speaking, the project's efficiency rating can best be assessed as ambiguous. On one side, it has achieved its input objectives of providing literacy-oriented courses to many hundreds of rural adolescent girls and women otherwise denied access to formal education. The 9-month curriculum has given them the opportunity to acquire rudiments of literacy skills through inputs of trained and salaried teachers, a fairly comprehensive grade 1-3 textbook and agreement with communities to provide learning spaces.

On the other side, the extent to which participants have realized sound learning outcomes has not been very clear. Many were reported by themselves, teachers, family members and Literacy officers as having learned “to read words”. It was less clear – and indeed based on teacher training/methods and students’ descriptions of their capacities serious doubts were raised – that very many graduates had acquired the fluency needed to handle narrative text independently and with comprehension. This, presumably, the definition of being functionally literate.

By following an essentially one-size-fits-all curriculum design, with minimally trained teachers not readily able to adapt it in a responsive way, the project has been somewhat less than efficient in

⁹² UNICEF. 2013. “Situation Analysis: Education Component”: 36

realizing optimal learning outcomes for the variety of participants involved. As suggested above, it has moved probably most of them ahead of where they were, but it has not allowed the kind of tailoring necessary to create enduring, sustainable change: younger women were not acquiring the grade level equivalency they needed for closer-to-age enrolment in the formal system; older women had not gained enough capacity as readers to consolidate their skills and continue to evolve them.

Effectiveness of the project through its relevance to some The rating is ambiguous, too, because relevance matters as well as efficiency, and relevance is a relative term. It concerns the perceived match between what a project offers and what specific stakeholders need, want and prioritize. The more relevant the project, in theory at least, the more likely stakeholders are to engage, feel satisfied and assume ownership. On the positive side, comments of learners, teachers and communities across the six provinces of the fieldwork indicated that the Centres were, for most, reasonably well-aligned with local expectations; it has provided a good starting point and in that sense, it has also been effective.

At the same time, the relevance, and therefore effectiveness, had not been equally strong for all. For many marginalized homemakers, it has been important in contributing to a greater sense of control over their lives as individuals and as members of their families and communities through new home management ideas and practices. Whether they learned to read narrative text with fluency and comprehension was less important to them than that they acquired and shared new knowledge, and gained self-confidence and agency in the process. How they came by this learning was also less important than that they did; and that they did so in a reasonably easy way e.g. through discussion and activity-based learning, not necessarily text.

Literacy-as-reading cannot be put aside totally, however, and younger women looking for formal education or permanent work have been less well served by the curriculum and approach. While the project opened otherwise unavailable doors to something beyond their present situation in terms of a first step toward a potentially full education, it has not gone much further than that. It has also not given much more than the potential of increased involvement in the public sphere – as the girls and women themselves recognized.

From a sustainable development and women's empowerment/gender equality perspective, as noted earlier under "learning outcomes", the project could be considered only partly effective, therefore. It was not yet creating a viable balance between providing some women rudimentary word recognition and numeracy skills, along with basic knowledge of domestic life-skills, and others an opportunity to take up a wider and longer-term development and empowerment agenda – such as that which might be offered through a nonformal education system with varying streams, levels and scope of literacy capacity within it.

Defining literacy is a critical gap Part of the problem, and as noted earlier, has been a failure to clarify the definition of literacy, and to frame the project around that. Definitional clarity is key in ensuring policy-makers and implementers are moving in the same and consistent direction when establishing, resourcing and assessing the progress of policies and programmes intended to facilitate literacy acquisition. This is especially true in the context of nonformal and adult education where those progress benchmarks and standards available to formal education do not typically apply.

In analyzing the documents and through the FGD, it was clear that there was as yet no effective working definition of literacy – even in the newly launched Strategy – that is adequate to providing such guidance to planning and practice. Instead, references have remained broad: a literate learner as one able to use and produce written text as a way to develop herself and the society by acquiring and exchanging information. While not inaccurate, it is a reference not proving especially useful as a way to set benchmarks for planning, practice or holding literacy projects accountable for outcomes. The

result has been that perhaps many hundreds of rural, vulnerable girls and women have been declared literate when, in any effective sense, they are not; but in consequence of being declared such have been unable – or are at least unlikely – to receive much more support given the project’s emphasis on reaching new learners versus consolidating the learning of earlier ones.

Evidence-based project maturity Monitoring and evaluation of the varying purposes and methods of the project are critical determinants of effectiveness at all levels and in all aspects. The fact that project management oversight has been limited and continuing assessment of teaching and learning essentially absent have inevitably affected quality of implementation and outcomes and slowed the development from what is basically a transient project toward something that might become more permanent as part of an NFE system. Weak M&E was not unique to the LC project; indeed, the scope and quality of data collection and analysis for the entire sector were considered insufficient, inconsistent and under-utilized: by the Literacy Department nationally and locally, and also in programmes supported by Development Partners and NGOs.

One positive sign, most respondents acknowledged the importance of monitoring by claiming to do it and praising its being done. However, beyond fairly generic references to confirming attendance, teaching methods and learners’ reading and writing, few were able clearly to explain what they were looking for, against what targets, and how they were using their findings. In consequence, it was not possible for the project, systematically or in a timely way, to gauge outcomes and take corrective action.

Sustainability of project influence Data of the evaluation confirmed previous analyses⁹³ that cast doubt on the likelihood that literacy gains will be sustained. For especially older learners, the hold on reading and writing appeared to remain at best “fragile”; where Literacy Centre support had ended, most had “forgotten” how to read and calculate, in large part because they lived in communities where a culture of literacy had yet to be established. With few accessible, affordable reading materials or supports for reading, fragile skills seemed unlikely to be consolidated in any spontaneous way.

And, as in a 2010 analysis, there appeared still to be “no structure to ensure that materials (were) made available to cement gains in the post-literacy period...”⁹⁴; there appeared to be no alternative supports stepping up to fill the UNICEF funding gap. In answer to one question in the evaluation purpose, then: *whether the Literacy Department or partners have the capacity/willingness to continue the project if/in case UNICEF does not continue...*, there were no data to suggest the affirmative, and indeed some data suggesting otherwise.

The risk of lost gains not just in capacity but also in commitment to the effort has been clearly exacerbated in a situation of reduced resources coupled with increasing threats by those opposed to women’s education and their equality in general. While specific exclusionary pressure from the Taliban was still limited to parts of the country, their reach has been increasing as has the influence of traditional thinking about the exclusion of women (as reflected in recent decisions in Parliament).

According to male family members in Zabul <the strength of the literacy centre and programme is that it has the local people’s support. The weakness of the centre / programme has to do with insecurity. If the situation worsens here, people will not be able to attend the classes; ... If the security situation deteriorates or if students are threatened, then I would prevent my daughter from attending the course...>.

Lessons learned

⁹³ See Adam Smith, 2010: 67

⁹⁴ Adam Smith, 2010: 70

It is somewhat tenuous to attempt to derive generalizable lessons from a situation as uniquely fragile as Afghanistan is at this time, and especially to do so on the basis of the particular experience of the vulnerable, marginalized and illiterate rural women living in conditions of significant poverty within the country. That said, persistent underlying themes do emerge that have wider relevance to realizing gender equality in terms of learning in fragile, conflict-affected states.

- Recognizing the *inherent interconnectivity* of all aspects of the situation of vulnerable girls and women and, therefore, the need that all interventions intended to change or reinforce that situation take a *similarly integrated perspective*. It is both development and cost ineffective to use up women's limited margin of personal resources, not just those of the supply system, by targeting them through a project with a single, narrowly-defined focus and ultimately transitory objectives.
- Realizing that all development programmes aimed at increasing the equality of at risk women in traditional, patriarchal cultures and situations of fragility will *inevitably fall first victim to resource shortages and power negotiations* unless – from the outset - there is consistent and rigorous oversight, publicly expressed political commitments and guaranteed long-term budgets to ensure the programme and, especially, the security of the women and their fair-share of the development agenda.
- The importance of *respecting and building within the core resilience and internal coherence* of overall national cultures, and especially of the specific, often fragile, ethnicities and traditions within that, by *proactively localizing decision-making and ownership* over the direction of development and education initiatives; moving these away first from the national centre, and gradually also from the expression of the national system at local level – this especially where the system is heavily hierarchical, male dominated and donor-centric .
- Paying attention to the fact that *out-of-school adolescent girls and women are adults*, who bring particular strengths and constraints of life-experience, responsibilities, capacities and tolerance for risk to the intervention that will add to the quality and influence the dynamics of the change process in unexpected ways. Learner-centred, responsive and iterative designs, methods and provision of “margin for change” are critical, particularly where a surrounding culture does not support, or actively opposes, the fact of their attempting change.
- Balancing resources and action to *simultaneously encourage the ability of beneficiaries-learners* to demand better, more relevant, responsive and adaptable development intervention, while *discouraging the supply side* from creating tightly-defined, user-proof intervention “packages”, delivered through one-off actions within short-term time horizons .

Recommendations

The following recommendations are divided into two distinct, but interrelated, themes: *changing the paradigm* and *changing the project*. The first is addressed to policy-makers and designers of government and development partners, including UNICEF; the second to planners and programmers. The first is proposed for the medium to long-term and is strategic; the second for the near to medium-term and pragmatic. Both are proposed to be initiated immediately. Both are derived directly and indirectly from the data of the evaluation, the first from what appeared to be missing; the second set from what was happening. Stakeholders did not participate directly in the development of these recommendations, but did so indirectly through their responses and comments on specific issues, some of which are indicated in quoted references below.

Changing the paradigm

1. Reframe and advocate for a concept of literacy that is more explicitly cross-sectoral as a catalyst for women's wider development.

- **Put women, gender equality, protection and peace-building at the centre of all literacy programming.**

Emphasize literacy as an entry point and tool for development Literacy should enable learning and action across all aspects of individual empowerment and community advancement. This is especially the case in the context of Afghanistan as it moves into a very uncertain period, particularly for the most marginalized communities and for girls and women in all situations. Literacy should be the OOS paradigm through which UNICEF/Education works toward a more *cross-sectoral rights-based and gender equality* agenda. Within education overall, literacy provides the most compelling vehicle for integrated, empowering intervention for vulnerable children and women.

Put women in the lead of action to advance their rights According to a number of women working in areas of gender equality and human rights, nothing will change for women without a direct, continuous and leading role for women themselves – especially those who are the most marginalized. Change for women and girls will happen only through the development of the capacities for and through learning. Functional, broadly framed, literacy is a major element of this and literacy programming requires working with existing and emergent women's groups as primary channels through which to connect with communities and within gender equality and protection initiatives. Literacy programmes need to build on established women's networks and the groundwork they are building, using literacy skills to facilitate and enable wider socio-economic, legal and security priorities. As in the Sigsgaard analysis, "without sustained, robust capacity" - in this case derived from a comprehensive women-in-development NFE programme -- "any substantial gains in literacy that the programme might make can easily be pushed aside with the next change of government", or in security, donor support or social services (including formal education)⁹⁵.

Make the security of women paramount in the domestic and public sphere According to the RAWA, "the main impediments to female education in Afghanistan and among Afghan refugee populations are related to security and safety"⁹⁶. The reverse is also true; education can be the best impediment to insecurity and violence. Based on an Asia Foundation analysis, changing the situation for women in Afghanistan requires "public awareness programs that reinforce the Islamic notion that all men and women should have access to knowledge in order to mitigate discrimination against women are critical...". So, too, better training for female teachers on a local level,... (and) vocational training... to enhance skills that would increase women's employment opportunities"⁹⁷. All of this is consistent with a literacy programming framework and the government's Literacy Strategy.

2. Reconceptualize literacy (and so the project) within the broader framework of the principles and practices of an emerging Nonformal Education sector

- **Include concepts, delivery modalities and methods of adult and community learning in an expanded preparation of teachers.**

Enable women to access, understand, produce and manipulate information The development and equality of women require their being empowered, not simply informed or provided minimal word-recognition skills. They need to be able to create new knowledge, strengthen their intellectual

⁹⁵ Sigsgaard, Morten. "Road to Resilience: ...": 157

⁹⁶ Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan website

⁹⁷ Ayubi, Najla. "Women's Biggest Problems in Afghanistan". *In Asia*. Asia Foundation. January 27, 2010

and communication capacities and negotiate their socio-economic environment⁹⁸. This involves complex learning that happens over time, through facilitated, interactive and learner-centred practice. In an increasingly uncertain and insecure Afghanistan, with a preponderance of its female population out of school and illiterate, these changes will be realistically addressed only through a sustained systems approach to literacy, within an NFE sector equivalent to that of its formal education counterpart.

Use the Literacy Strategy expressly as a window of opportunity The launch of the Strategy and the initial bringing together of Literacy Managers provide key openings to reaffirm both government and partners' commitment to all actors working under the same broad literacy umbrella and an impetus to more effective use of mechanisms like LIFE to foster greater integration. LIFE is expected, too, to have a major and specific role in coordinating implementation of the Literacy Strategy; UNESCO is reported to be working with the LD and ANAF AE "to update the TOR to make it more relevant and with a specific purpose"⁹⁹. There is also reference in the Literacy Strategy to a *National High Commission for Literacy* to further serve a "coordinating body". Although it has apparently not yet been made operational and may never be, conceptually both it and LIFE are important and logically related, LIFE the active exchange forum attached to the structure of the Commission with data storage, resource management and knowledge building responsibilities.

Strengthen the "three Cs" of delivering as one Coordination, cooperation and collaboration are essential for literacy to achieve reach and sustainability. The variety of Government units, development partners and NGOs now supporting activities aim either at building literacy skills directly or as a collateral benefit of something else needs to come together in a more *systems building* way. Many are working with the same communities, targeting the same types of marginalized women as the LC programme and with a similarly limited conceptual scope only weakly articulated within a wider development agenda. All face an increasingly constrained resource base. The three Cs, as essential criteria of effective development intervention, are most likely to be realized within a comprehensive, coherent and policy-endorsed NFE sector and literacy within that.

Build bridges between literacy and the formal system In the framework of the EFA directives, it is important to promote and initiate the concept of a "seamless education system" through re-entry and equivalency programmes for drop-outs and the never-enrolled, LLE and TVET for low- and mid-level occupations and skills, with particular emphasis on girls and other at risk children/adolescents .

3. Professionalize the teaching of adults as a legitimate and central area of teacher education within the wider Education sector.

Work toward creating a strong, renewable human resource base of adult educators as a necessary condition of sustaining the sector Given Afghanistan's still huge out-of-school and illiterate population and a formal system that will not be able to accommodate all children any time soon, serious attention needs to be accorded development of a cadre of well-trained, professionally committed and permanent adult educators. This should include especially women, since the same "cultural considerations" apply to literacy as to formal school where "girls are segregated from boys

⁹⁸ Not unlike the conceptualization of literacy in the National Literacy Strategy as "the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential, and participate fully in community and wider society" (p8) and shifts it beyond simply word recognition and counting to a much wider and complex idea of lifelong learning/non-formal education.

⁹⁹ Email correspondence from UNESCO advisor

and there is a social and cultural preference for girls to be taught by female teachers..."¹⁰⁰. It is an approach that also offers women who want a professional career a reasonably secure space, socio-culturally, to have one.

Pursue the plan of the Literacy Strategy to assign a "hub" school and sub-set of formal school teachers to the additional role of literacy centres and facilitators In principle, this should strengthen the reliability and quality of the base for literacy teaching and, potentially, to NFE more broadly. There are risks, however; it cannot be assumed that teachers trained to teach children, even in a child-friendly way, will be able easily to make the shift to adults. All such teachers will require a systematic programme of retraining in the andragogy of literacy as something different from teaching children to read, but equally legitimate as a field of expertise.

Consider including a literacy/NFE stream into the TTC mandate and programme Those who want to specialize in adult and nonformal education should be able to do so with a recognized certification. According to one UNESCO advisor, "this is very much the direction that we are hoping to push. I think this is vital for creating a better quality of literacy provision and for increasing the standard, and attractiveness, of literacy programmes, though significant work needs to be done in this area".

4. Increase, stabilize and diversify the resource base of literacy within the wider development-and-equity mandate - including, but not restricted to, education.

Widening the scope, reach and tasks of literacy interventions within an NFE framework will require a similar widening of the base of material resources to support it. This need not, and probably cannot, concern solely an increase in financial support, but instead must look to in-kind and innovative approaches to matching specific requirements of the teachers, learners and monitors with the sources of support able to provide them – including those that can be generated in and by communities themselves.

Recognizing the EFA commitment to creating a seamless basic education system, however, and staying true to the intent of the budget to support EFA and MGD targets, resources now assigned to the formal system could appropriately be shifted to core equity aims of the Nonformal Education sector, enabling a serious and sustained commitment of the government and international community to functional literacy, basic education equivalency and school re-entry.

5. Provide more intensive support and training to the development of M&E theory and practice, toward both a better understanding of the purpose of evidence-based planning and decision-making and a more consistent application of the full triple-A (act-assess-adapt) cycle.

- **Consider in the medium-term introducing use of the RBM framework, through systematic, hands-on training at all levels.**

Several actions need to be initiated immediately, and developed on an incremental basis, to extend the reach and improve the efficiency and ultimately the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation by and in literacy sector:

Undertake community level baseline analyses of the needs, interests, capacities and attitudes of learners through the auspices of the Literacy Manager, focusing on life situations broadly, and more specifically people's understanding of what literacy is, how they want and are able to participate in learning, and how they expect to benefit -- beyond somewhat vague notions of reading signs and confirming shopping bills.

¹⁰⁰ MOE/LD. "National Literacy Action Plan: 2012-2015": 17

- Develop and introduce to the training and mentoring of literacy teachers a clear evidence-based understanding of what might be expected as reading competency outcomes e.g. levels of word recognition, fluency, comprehension; methods of assessing reading levels, capacity gaps and progress; and strategies of continuous assessment, using these analyses to inform their own practice.
- Work with the Literacy Department and communities to address the impediments facing the key overseeing focal points (Literacy Managers, Monitors, DEO) in maintaining their monitoring schedules, especially to distant or hard-to-reach communities e.g. by providing transport, by upgrading the monitoring capacities of shura, by supporting teacher-teacher networks of mutual support, by following up and adapting as needed the LEAF2 monitoring forms.
- Work with the Literacy Department and development partners to create a functioning NFEMIS data base that local Literacy officials and communities can use as to benchmark local literacy baselines and assess the levels and longevity of graduates' literacy outcomes.

Changing the Project

6. Extend the range of content and duration of delivery channels for Literacy Centre teacher training

The need for more comprehensive, consistent and regular training of teachers and Master Trainers is clear. The data are explicit in underscoring the role of teachers as fundamental to making the Literacy Centres “work”. Although not raised frequently in the fieldwork, it was regularly noted:

<... monthly trainings should be held for teachers so that they are better aware of new teaching techniques and up to date with all learning materials> (master trainers: Zabul, Paktya);

<More technical assistance - trainings seminars and workshops -- should be provided to teachers to enhance their capacities further> (monitor: Badghis)

<Additional trainings should be provided to teachers so that they are aware of more effective and efficient teaching methods available out there>; < It would be better if we have trainings or capacity building sessions...> (family: Balkh)

This implies, then, that ***rather than a one-shot initial few days*** of general orientation to class management and adult teaching methods, a longer programme of continuing professional development be created for teachers aimed at ***providing them a “tool box” of approaches*** both to reading instruction, comprehension and critical thinking, and to assessing and responding to the needs and capacities of learners who are adults.

Teachers should be able to work through such materials at their own pace, as they gain mastery over the methods through their engagement with learners in the classroom. This will require more and a greater variety of in-service strategies e.g. practicums, seminars, peer support and using CLC again as teacher resource centres.

7. Allow and enable greater flexibility of programming that is more user-driven and locally managed with respect to options and resources. Three elements are suggested for this:

i. Where feasible, extend the duration of the single course format from 9 to 12 or more months and enable streaming within the period.

A problem frequently raised, especially by learners and teachers, concerned the too-short duration of the programme. It was difficult to accommodate the amount of material in the text; there was no room for any additional knowledge and skills content that learners wanted to acquire. In any Literacy Centre, there will be differences in the specifics of what participants want to learn, how long they need to learn it and the approach that is most likely to realize sustainable learning outcomes. The most frequently proposed solution to resolving the imbalance of time and coverage was to increase the time, chiefly in hours per day, but also in the overall length of the course:

< It would be good if the programme is lengthened to enable the learners to learn more>; (DEO: Badghis);

<... the timing should be increased; two hours is not sufficient to review, study and practice> (teacher: Paktya);

<... the programme should have two parts and a longer duration, with the first part focusing on literacy and the second part on vocational trainings. This way they could become both literate and financially self-sufficient / independent.> (family: Balkh).

<as soon as the younger ones finish the programme, they should be able to study in school; they should have time to learn things that will help them do this...> (shura: Bamyan)

A longer programme period with options for streaming content and skills, would allow support to younger women who want a more comprehensive and stronger range of literacy skills and to test their application; and to older ones looking for more hands-on vocational training. One Literacy Manager opposed to the idea of extending Centre duration, feeling that the Adult Literacy School was a more useful approach, was no doubt right in the ideal. In the immediate term, however, a longer delivery period within the current structure suggests a reasonable mid-way step.

ii. Where numbers allow, divide the programme into various stand-alone courses based on learner goals.

Broadening participation to women 15-45 made sense as a means of using available resources to reach as many as possible. However, such an inclusive approach has also meant in many cases serving the learning interests, priorities and capacities of a non-existent “average learner” and making less likely the ability of most to sustain or extend their learning outcomes. In general, a differentiated course would allow curricula (contents and methods) that were better aligned with different ages and life circumstances.

There was significant support for a programme divided between, on the one hand, those who look to use the basic literacy programme as a lever into further education; and on the other, those seeking to acquire enough literacy and numeracy capacity and general knowledge to negotiate the immediate demands of their environment. For the first, content should emphasize a more academic course curriculum; for the second, the overwhelming consensus from across the stakeholder spectrum was for knowledge about home and family management and a vocational component geared to small-scale income generation and marketing skills.

There were only two substantive reasons for maintaining a joint class, and basically the same: younger women could benefit from the experience and wisdom of older ones and the younger in turn would

help those older women who struggle or lack confidence. Other reasons were logistical and consistent with those of the Department: there are too few students to make running two programmes viable.

Rationales in support of the division were slightly more varied and typically substantive:

<Younger women tend to be quick learners in comparison to older ones> (teacher: Zabul).

<... needs are different and so are their learning capacity and speed> (teacher: Badghis).

<every learner would have the chance to sit and learn with peers of her age group>; <younger girls have different opinions and ideas in comparison to older women and they can freely discuss it if they are with learners of their own age > (teacher, learner: Paktya);

iii. Provide a modular textbook format and training teachers in development and use of locally-made teaching-learning materials.

Making the LC project more expressly inclusive of the several dimensions identified in the NLAP¹⁰¹ will be important in terms of moving away from the idea of literacy as an end in itself, to understanding its functionality toward other development objectives. Reading for its own sake, for the pleasure of stories, of learning about history or culture, is probably not a feasible objective at this point, but may become so as skills are used and grown through use -- in employment (equivalency), further education (late entry), or community development (skills in problem-solving, conflict resolution, governance).

Some of this the Literacy Centre textbook is doing now, but could be developed further toward enabling a more diverse provision, based explicitly on addressing the broad range of beneficiary motivations for learning and less simply on supply-driven materials with topics determined *a priori* as important for women as homemakers and mothers. In many cases, this would still mean attracting age-specific groups, but factors such as rural/urban living and working, mobility, capacities and interests, socio-cultural and life style characteristics would also count in deciding programme options.

While teachers in Badghis suggested a decrease in the scope of the curriculum, to *<reduce the volume of the book so that we have ample time to go through materials and practice them>*, a more constructive alternative would be to increase the flexibility of using the textbook by adopting a modular format. Because it is comprehensive in covering the content of the curriculum, the current textbook is large, for some imposing. Teachers tend to go through it as a set piece; one Bamyan shura reported monitoring the class specifically to make sure it was *<on the right page>*. The earlier recommendation by NLAP¹⁰² for a “more flexible approach” encouraging and training teachers “to develop and produce low-cost teaching materials relevant to the lives of participants” is a sound one in this respect, allowing individualization of coverage, timing and sequencing.

8. Support capacity building for outreach by and among local stakeholders.

Advocacy as a formal outreach activity did not appear to be a major component of the project, although there is a reasonably large annual budget allocated to mobilization. Only one person, a Shura in Balkh, raised the need for *<an increased focus on further publicizing the literacy programme so that*

¹⁰¹ “National Literacy Action Plan: 2012-2015” p26-7 lists these as “pertaining” to literacy, but does not conceptually or programmatically integrate them.

¹⁰² “National Literacy Action Plan: 2012-2015”: 24

more people are informed about it, its benefits and also the impact that it has on people's mentality / perspective towards life in general and women's literacy in particular>.

Who should do this publicizing was not specified, but what was frequently noted in other Centres was the extensive informal communication among learners, shura and Literacy officials encouraging both girls/women to participate and families and religious leaders to allow them to do so. These are natural networks and relationships and a Nonformal Education sector as a whole, with literacy within it, needs to support them, through information about the policies, programmes and resource opportunities available; providing training, materials and new media for awareness raising and outreach; supporting teachers and former learners to mentor potential participants about the value of literacy in expanding their immediate and longer-term horizons.

In this respect, there needs also to be a stronger and more tailored emphasis on a whole-family approach to advocacy, not just one targeting women. As was clear from the data, it is invariably families that influence female literacy and in multiple ways.

On the positive side, one father reported maintaining a household with *< many books (and) encouraging my family members to read>*; a learner benefited from being *<respected more within the family>* because she was becoming literate; a DEO recognized that *<when a woman is educated, it impacts the entire family, especially the children, because she is the primary care taker>*.

Reflecting the negatives, the main cause in Zabul *<of student absenteeism is family responsibilities or commitments>*. Engaging with families could mitigate the pressure and might open the door: *<my family was a little bit opposed to the course initially, but when they talked to other families and learned more about the program, they decided to enrol me>*.

Equally, the willingness of families to engage can enable action:

< My family supported my enrolment in the programme because they are all illiterate and thought that there should be at least one literate individual in the family who could solve their problems>;

< Families consult with the shura, who then consults the Mullah and then collectively decide who should attend the literacy course>;

< My family encouraged me to become a teacher and to serve those who have been deprived of literacy >;

< My family has been my pillar of strength....>

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Bamyan Mission: Piloting Approach and Tools

Tuesday Dec 10 (Bamyan Town) Mr.Aman Kayhan, Education Officer, Save the Children [0796331992]

Wednesday Dec 11 (Bamyan Town) Mr.Ebrahimi, Provincial Master Trainer, Literacy Directorate
Mr.Akbori, District Monitor, Literacy Directorate

*Rek Shad Literacy Centre – Teacher-specific interview; Students (8) FGD, 4- each under and over 25
Rek Shad Women Development Shura – FGD with 5 members

Thursday Dec 12 (Yakawlang District) Mr. Sayed Jowhar Amal, DOE Director
Mr.Esmattulah, District Literacy Manager

*Tapa Wahdad Literacy Centre (in town) – Teacher: untrained replacement; in-class questions, not interview. Students (25-30): full-class questions, no FGD possible in context (no place to hold it)
Tapa Wahdad Development Shura – FGD with 10 women of a mixed membership Shura

* Khushk Dara Literacy Centre (1 hour from DEO, not possible to access in snow) – Teacher: untrained replacement; in-class questions, not interview. Students (25-30): full-class questions, no FGD possible in context (no place Khushk Dara Shura: FGD with 2 female (Gr 9 & 10 girls) and 8 male members

Saturday Dec 14

* Surkhder Village Literacy Centre - Meeting with graduates
Mr. Habibullah, Provincial Literacy Manager

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Annex 3 Sample Selection: decisions, processes and rationales

Table 7- Sample selection

Zone	Potential Provinces (#1)	5 Selected Provinces (#2)	Districts with Literacy Centres	Selected Districts (#3)
Southern	Kandahar	Zabul (C&C)	Qalat	Qalat
	Helmand			
	Urozgan			
	Zabul			
	Nimroz			
Northern	Balkh	Balkh (C)	Mazar City	Mazar City
	Sari Pul		Keshenda	Chemtal
	Samangan		Chemtal	Dawlatabad
	Jawzjan		Shortepa	
			Kaldar	
			Dawlatabad	
Eastern	Laghman	Laghman (C)	Mehtarlam	Mehtarlam
	Nangarhar		Dawlat Shah	Ali Shing
	Nuristan		Ali Shing	Qarghaee
	Kunar		Ali Negar	
			Qarghaee	
Central	Bamyan	Paktya (C&C)	Gardez	Gardez
	Daikundi		Ahmad Khel	Sayed Karam
	Paktya		Sayed Karam	Chamkani
	Paktika		Ahmad Aba	
	Ghor		Chamkani	
	Khost			
Western	Badghis	Badghis (C&C)	Muqar	Qala-e-Naw
	Farah		Jawand	Abkamari
	Herat		Murghab	Qadis
			Abkamari	
			Qadis	
			Qala-e-Naw	

Notes

#1. These are all provinces in which there are or have been UNICEF-supported Literacy Centres

#2. One province per zone was drawn at random, resulting in 3 with both completed and current centres (C&C); 2 with only completed (C). All provinces provide a mix of ethnic groups, in varying positions of majority and minority status; allow for both Pashto and Dari linguistic groups; have a range of poverty levels (though, as UNICEF focus provinces, all are considered disadvantaged); and within and across their districts, different levels of insecurity (though none are considered in principle 'no-go' by the National Team or UNICEF).

#3. Where appropriate, districts were selected purposively on the basis of availability of current and/or completed centres and the list sent to security for review. Security is a continuing factor and while UNICEF and the National Team have agreed on risk-reducing strategies, the final selection of districts to be included – from the list of those eligible based on the above criteria - is based on security.

#4. Four current Centres were selected per province, decided with the guidance of the Literacy managers in each Province and ensuring approximately 4 with selection purposive on the basis of accessibility to DEO support i.e. allowing a mix of remote and nearby (this latter will include provincial centres). In the 2 “C” only provinces, selection is by district, the data collectors having the responsibility to identify through the Provincial Literacy Manager where former Centres were (based on preliminary discussion Dec 9/13, all have records) and within these areas, DEO, Shura and former teachers and students. The Literacy Manager, Master Trainer and Monitors will also be interviewed. In current Centres: teachers, 8-10 learners (selected randomly for FGD), dropouts (as identifiable by teachers, learners, DEO records), supervisors, LM, DEO and Shura. In completed Centres: former teachers, graduate learners (5-8 as identifiable by teachers, DEO records), supervisors, LD, DEO and Shura

Annex 4 Work plan

Inception Phase Execution Phase Delivery Phase

Weeks	1 -2 Home-based		3 - 5 Mission to Afghanistan			6 -11 Home-based				
Dates	24-31.10	1-6.11	1-7.12	8-14.12	15-20.12	23-29.12	30.12-5.01	13-19.01	20-27.01	28-01 / 28-02
	Desk review: NLP/S, LP structure, curriculum			Piloting of data collection tools (Bamyan) & training of enumerators						
	Preliminary draft & submission of Inception report & tools		Revise Inception report based on UNICEF feedback & on-site data	Revision of tools based on exchanges with UNICEF, MOE, DP, National Team & provincial piloting						
					Oversee/manage data collection from 5 provinces: current & completed Centres; collect Kabul-based data.					
							Progressively support and finalize data analysis in coordination with National Team.			
							Draft/submit preliminary report, present findings to LD, UNICEF and key partners via Skype		Solicit LD & UNICEF (national & zonal); finalize report.	

Annex 5 Evaluation Matrix

Table 7- Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Questions	Measure or indicator	Data collection methods	Data source	Sample
Effectiveness					
	Has the programme achieved its objective of providing literacy skills to 280,000 women of age 14-24 year?	Measured against CPD & CPAP 2010-13 IR objectives; and LD, BEGE and stakeholder interpretation of these	Interview and FGD, document review	Documents, informed LD, DP, UNICEF, teacher and learner respondents	Mixed sampling: Purposive selection of regions, districts & literacy centres; random selection of provinces, learners.
	To what extent have literacy centres implemented the 9-month literacy course specified by CPD & CPAP 2010-13 IR objectives?	Measured against CPD & CPAP 2010-13 IR objectives; and LD, BEGE and stakeholder interpretation of these	Interview and FGD, document review	Documents, informed LD, DP, UNICEF, teacher and learner respondents	Mixed sampling: Purposive selection of regions, districts & literacy centres; random selection of provinces, learners.
	To what extent have results expected and unexpected been achieved	Measured against CPD & CPAP 2010-13 IR objectives; and LD, BEGE and stakeholder interpretation of these	Interview and FGD, document review	Documents, informed LD, DP, UNICEF, teacher and learner respondents	As above
	To what extent has the programme been effective in regard to women's empowerment?	Measured against women's (teachers and learners) expectations of change in their status.	Interview and FGD	Teacher and learner respondents	As above
	To what extent has the literacy curriculum matched abilities of the learners	Measured against CPD & CPAP, teacher & learner response to materials, lessons, learning outcomes	Interview and FGD; class observations	Informed LD, DP, UNICEF, teacher and learner respondents	As above
	To what extent has the duration of the course been sufficient to cover the entire curriculum in an effective manner	Measured against teacher & learner response to materials, lessons, learning outcomes	Interview and FGD; class observations	Teacher and learner respondents	Random selection of learners.
	Are human and material resources suited to needs? Are they effectively used?	LD, UNICEF, partner opinions	All stakeholders, including learners, reports	Interview/FGD, documents	Random selection of learners; as per selected district at local level.
Relevance	Evaluation Questions	Measure or indicator	Data collection methods	Data source	Sample

	Have UNICEF & the LD properly assessed risks and planned mitigation & monitoring actions?	Measured against initial situation	Interview/FGD, documents	UNICEF, LD, partners, Centres, Shura, reports	Purposive at national level
	Is the Literacy Programme design consistent with LD priorities, policies and guidelines?	Measured against mobilizing / policy documents	Interview/FGD, documents	UNICEF, LD, PED, DEO	Purposive at national level
	Was the gender analysis at the design stage sufficiently robust?	Measured against initial situation	Interview/FGD, documents	All stakeholders, including learners, planning documents	n.a.
	Does the Literacy Programme use new & innovative approaches?	Policy statements, LD, partner opinions	Interview/FGD, documents	All stakeholders, including learners	Purposive at national level; per selected district at local level
	To what extent are stakeholders at each level satisfied with the results to date: has it met their interests, needs?	Measured against teacher & learner response to materials, lessons; learning outcomes	Interview & FGD; class observation	Informed LD, DP, UNICEF, teacher and learner respondents	Mixed sampling: Purposive selection of regions, districts & literacy centres; random selection of provinces, learners.
	How appropriate have the teaching and learning processes been?	Measured against teacher & learner response to materials, lessons; learning outcomes	Interview & FGD; class observation	Informed LD, DP, UNICEF, teacher and learner respondents	Mixed sampling: Purposive selection of regions, districts & literacy centres; random selection of provinces, learners.
	How well matched are texts, learning materials to the needs & interests of learners from different contexts, backgrounds; which aspects are most useful?	Measured against teacher & learner response to materials, lessons; learning outcomes	Interview & FGD; class observation	Teacher and learner respondents	As above
	How well does the mode of delivery (time, class setting, and teacher approach) align with teacher & learner needs, expectation, capacity?	Measured against teacher & learner response to materials, lesson delivery & schedule, class environment	Interview & FGD; class observation	Teacher and learner respondents	As above
	Does the way in which the Literacy Programme has been implemented reflect the needs and priorities of learners:	Measured against expectations	UNICEF, Centre staff, Shura, families, learners, documents	Interview/FGD, documents	As above

	the Literacy Centres, learners, communities?				
	Does the Government of Afghanistan (GOA) have ownership of the Literacy Programme (National, Provincial and local levels)?	Measured against initial actions	UNICEF, LD/Kabul, LD/PEO and DEO, Shura, documents	Interview/FGD, documents	Purposive sample at national level; sample as per selected district at local level
Efficiency	Evaluation Questions	Measure or indicator	Data collection methods	Data source	Sample
	What have been key bottlenecks in planning, implementation, management & quality of teaching and learning in UNICEF-supported literacy centres?	Measured against CPD, CPAP, and teacher & learner experience from their respective supply & demand perspectives.	Interview and FGD; document review.	Informed LD, DP, UNICEF, teacher and learner respondents	As above
	What have been the key challenges faced at all levels to plan, budget, implement and monitor the programme?	Measured against supply & demand side response to centre delivery experience	Interview and FGD; document review.	Informed LD, DP, UNICEF, teacher and learner respondents	As above
	Have teachers been adequately prepared to deliver lessons using adult teaching methods?	Measured against supply & demand side response to centre delivery experience; learning outcomes.	Interview and FGD; class observation; document review.	Informed LD, DP, UNICEF, teacher and learner respondents	As above
	Have UNICEF & the LD properly assessed risks and planned mitigation & monitoring actions?	Measured against initial situation	Interview/FGD, documents	UNICEF, LD, partners, Centres, Shura, reports	As above
	Is the Literacy Programme design consistent with LD priorities, policies and guidelines?	Measured against mobilizing / policy documents	Interview/FGD, documents	UNICEF, LD, PED, DEO	As above
	Was the gender analysis at the design stage sufficiently robust?	Measured against initial situation	Interview/FGD, documents	All stakeholders, including learners, reports	As above

	Does the Literacy Programme use new & innovative approaches?	Policy statements, LD, partner opinions	Interview/FGD, documents	All stakeholders, including learners	As above
	What is the total and unit cost, including national & Provincial District levels, to establish & operate the complete 9-month literacy course?	Measured by actual budget allocations (excluding in-kind)	Budget documents as available	LD, PEO/DEO, UNICEF	n.a.
	To what extent was the literacy programme budget spent during 2010-2012 to directly benefit learners?	Measured by actual budget allocations divided by management and application (teaching and learning activity)	Budget documents as available	LD, PEO/DEO, UNICEF	n.a.
Sustainability	Evaluation Questions	Measure or indicator	Data collection methods	Data source	Sample
	What is the LD commitment & capacity to continue literacy programming for women?	Measured against supply & demand side response to centre delivery experience through responsibility levels; learning outcomes.	Interview and FGD; document review.	Informed LD, DP, UNICEF, teacher and learner respondents	As above
	What activities has the literacy programme provided to help the literacy course graduates to maintain their literacy skills?	Measured against supply & demand side response to centre delivery experience; learning outcomes.	Interview and FGD; document review.	Informed LD, DP, UNICEF, teacher and learner respondents	As above
	To what extent could the literacy programme strategy be replicated in other provinces?	Measured against assessment of conditions and challenges of current programming & LD capacities	Interview and FGD	Informed LD, DP, UNICEF, PEO, DEO, teacher and learners	As above
	To what extent has UNICEF facilitated the programme's coordination & collaboration with other partners?	Measured against initial & expected reach of the programme	Interview/FGD, documents	LD, PED, DP, UNICEF, teachers, documents	As above
	How has collaboration & coordination improved the Programme's sustainability?	Measured against initial actions	Interview/FGD, documents	UNICEF, partners, LD, teachers, documents	As above
	What have the LD, Centres & Shura learned /	Measured against initial practices of the Centres	Interview/FGD, documents	All stakeholders, including learners	As above

	incorporated that has improved practices to enrol & keep women in the Programme to completion? What might help further enhance this learning?				
	Where UNICEF funding has ended, what impact has it had on the Literacy Programme, the community, learners?	Measured against initial (baseline) status of community, women	Interview/FGD, documents	PED, DEO, Shura/CDC, families, former learners	
Impact	Evaluation Questions	Measure or indicator	Data collection methods	Data source	Sample
	To what extent has the project affected girls and women from different socio-economic, geographic, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds?	Measured against different starting situations of the varying sample groups	Interview/FGD, documents	PED, DEO, Shura/CDC, families, current & especially former learners	As above
	To what extent are graduated women applying their knowledge and reading and writing skills to improve their daily lives?	Measured against potential for application in contexts of personal, domestic, community or income development	Interview and FGD	Informed district leaders, development agencies, teachers and learners	As above

Annex 6 Interview questions/observation protocol

Interviews with DPs and NGOs were conducted by the Team Leader with a broadly-framed protocol focused on the following points, but open-ended. Not all questions were asked in each case.

1. The nature of DP experience with, concerns about and activities in literacy;
2. Perspectives on the status of literacy in terms of Government, DP and NGO policy, commitment and potential future direction; and
3. Knowledge and perceptions of the UNICEF-supported Literacy Centre programme: implementation experience, outcomes, status within the overall literacy domain.

Interviews/FGD in the field: Tools provided to the field team, with training in their use by the National Coordinator (in Dari and Pashto)

Tool 1 *used by Team Leader*

Tools 2-6 *used by National Evaluator fieldwork team (translated into Pashto and Dari)*

Tool 1: Interviews with LD officers PEO and DEO

In what ways does your Office support the Literacy Centre?

How often do you visit each Centre?

Is this on a regular schedule or on request? When there are problems?

What are most important tasks you do there e.g. administrative oversight, policy guidance, technical support? (ask for details)

What kind of information is the Centre expected to provide on a regular basis?

How do you use the information you collect?

Do you have the right kind and amount of resources to perform your oversight role?

Do you feel you have the right skills to perform your oversight role?

What do you need, what needs to change to make your work more effective?

Why was the decision made to open a Literacy Centre in this community?

Was the community consulted about what the Programme would do, or when and how it would happen? Did they express preferences or raise concerns?

What have been the main strengths or benefits of having it here?

What have been the main challenges? Are the challenges being well handled?

Who in the community are the most supportive of the Programme? Is anyone opposing it?

Is it difficult to recruit female teachers who have the right capacities?

How do you find them?

What are the main challenges?

Are there options for who is selected to teach? For example, if there are no graduates, can you use young women with Grade 6 and train them?

Are teachers trained – by you or others?

How else do you support teachers?

What should be changed to make the recruitment, training and support more effective?

Is it difficult to mobilize and enrol female learners?

How do you find them? What do you do to mobilize them?

What are the main challenges?

Who is most supportive of girls/women enrolling; and why?

Who is the most opposed to girls/women enrolling; and why?

What changes would make mobilizing and enrolling them more effective?

Are there any difficulties keeping learners involved: coming regularly on time, every day?

How are you handling those who are not coming regularly?

What are the main challenges?

What are the main causes of absenteeism or dropping out? How are these being addressed?

What changes would make it easier for learners to come regularly?

Is the budget of the Programme enough and with the right items to meet the needs of the teachers and learners?

Are the costs within the planned budget?

What items have been increased; have there been new items added?

What items cost the most; what cost the least?

Could any of the costs be paid "in-kind" by the community? What costs are the community supporting now?

Is the Programme giving learners the kind of information and skills they want/need in ways that work for them?

Are the contents, the topics, of the Programme relevant?

Are teachers presenting the ideas and the lessons in a way that help them learn?

Are families able to support learners with lessons?

Is the Programme long enough: enough days and enough hours for learners

What changes would you want to make the Programme?

From your own experience, have literacy or numeracy skills been useful to female learners?

In what ways has this been evident?

Is this application mostly during the Programme period or after?

Have you seen evidence of graduates continuing to develop literacy, numeracy or other capacities on the basis of what they learned in the Programme?

Tool 2: Interview/FGD guide for teachers

Why did you decide to become a literacy teacher?

Did you want to be a school teacher first?

Who are the most supportive of you being a teacher – family, community?

Was anyone opposed? How did you make them more supportive?

What training have you received?

Where were you trained and when?

Did you receive support from the Literacy Department: funding or materials?

How often do you have a monitoring or supervisory visit: from whom? How do these visits help you?

What kind of support do you receive in your work from other teachers?

What teaching and learning materials do you use in the class?

How effective are they for you in teaching women how to read, write, do mathematics?

Can you give examples of where they effective and not effective?

What should be changed to make the materials more effective?

Is the classroom infrastructure helpful or a problem for teaching and learning?

Have any problems been addressed?

What other aspects of the infrastructure could be improved?

How well are learners progressing in developing reading, math, thinking skills?

What are the main strengths they bring to their learning?

What are the main challenges they face?

In what ways are these skills useful for them?

How do you assess your students?

Based on what criteria? How often?

Is the assessment useful to you to improve your teaching, or to them to learn better?
What should be changed in the assessment to make it more useful?

How regular are the classes?

Are classes ever cancelled? What were the reasons?
How were the problems resolved?
How were you able to make up the lost time?

How regular is learners' attendance?

What are the main reasons for missing class?
How much of a problem is absenteeism for you as a teacher?
How much is it interfering with learning?
What could be done to reduce the absenteeism?
Are there many learners who have dropped out? Do you know why?
What can you or the Centre do to bring them back?

Do learners participate and learn in different ways in the class?

What activities do learners enjoy the most?
Do some prefer to learn by themselves and some in groups? Do some like to talk about their ideas and some like to read?
Do these differences give you any problems in managing the lesson?
What ways do you prefer to teach reading and arithmetic? For example, through asking learners to tell stories? Reading from the textbook? Asking and answering questions?
What do you find the most difficult?

How do you assess learners' progress?

Do you use tests? _____ observation? _____ workbook reviews? _____ asking them questions? _____
Which one is the most accurate? Which is the most useful for you and the learners?
How do you use this information?

(For female teachers) Do you feel safe in the Centre?

In what ways could you feel more secure?
Do learners feel that they are secure? Have there ever been any problems of violence?
Does insecurity cause problems with attendance and completion for female learners or others who may be especially vulnerable?
Do you include problem-solving and negotiating skills in the lessons, as a way for women to better protect themselves, for example?
Is there a "peer-support" system of some kind, especially for going to and from home?

What benefits and challenges do you have in working as a teacher in this community?

Does the community support or threaten you in any way?
Would you choose to stay as a literacy teacher or prefer to move to the formal school? Why?
What changes would you like to see in the Programme from a teachers' point of view?

What have been the main benefits and challenges for learners in terms of literacy, numeracy and thinking skills?

What have been the main changes for women, in themselves? In relation to their families? In the community? For work? Have these been both positive and negative?
What changes would you like to see in the Programme from a students' point of view: contents, methods, scheduling? selection criteria for participants?

Tool 3: FGD with learners [both past and current; tailor questions as appropriate]

For those currently in the Programme:

What is your age? _____
Are you married: _____ Do you have children _____
How long have you been coming to the literacy class? Less than 1 session ___ 1 session ___
2+ _____

Have you had other types of education? No___ Yes___ If yes/describe: _____
How long do you expect to continue: less than 9 months___ the full 9 months
If you expect to leave early, why?
How many learners are in your class?
What are their ages?
Are they the same ethnic group, language?
How often do you come to the class? Regularly___ sometimes___ not often.
(As appropriate) What stops you from coming more regularly?

For those who completed the Programme:

What is your age? _____
Are you married: _____ Do you have children _____
When did you finished the Programme?
How long did you study: less than 9 months___ the full 9 months___ more than 9___
If you left early, why did you stop?
If you studied more than 9 months, where did you study e.g. in another programme? In the same one?
Why did you continue?
How many learners were in your class?
What were their ages?
Were they the same ethnic group, language?
Were there any with disabilities in your class? Were there any Kuchis?

Why did you decide to enrol in the Programme?

How much education did you have before you enrolled?
Did some or all of your family support you to enrol? Why - what did they want you to learn?
Did some or all of your family oppose your coming to the Programme? Why?
How did you convince them you should come? Did they change their opinion?

What difference has the Literacy Programme made to you as a person, as a mother, as a wife?

Do you feel different in some way since participating in the class?
What do you think have been the most useful parts of the Programme helping you learn?
- For example: sharing ideas with other learners? answering questions? practicing letters and numbers? reading material on your own? making up your own stories?
What do you think have been the least useful in helping you learn? Why?
Would you send your daughter or neighbour to this Programme if they could not go to formal school?
Why or why not?

How has your family reacted to your participating in the Literacy Programme?

Have they helped you in different ways?
Have they noticed any changes in you and are they pleased or upset about these?
Did they ever suggest you should not participate?
Have they changed their mind about the value of the classes?

What makes you feel most comfortable in the Centre? Most uncomfortable?

Do you feel safe walking to/from the Centre? What kinds of problems have you had?
Have you asked anyone for help in feeling more comfortable or taken action yourself? Is there anything that makes you miss lessons?
Are there good water and sanitation facilities in the school? Are they well maintained? Who is responsible for them?
Do you ever have difficulty seeing, hearing or speaking out in class? Do you tell the teacher? Has the problem been fixed?

Do you feel you are making progress in developing literacy, numeracy or other skills?

In what ways are you assessed: tests? Informal questions? Do you assess yourself?
In what ways have you been able to apply reading skills? Numeracy skills? others?
Do you use them mostly in class or at home, in the community?
Have you seen past learners continuing to develop literacy, numeracy or other skills?

Is the Programme giving you the kind of information and skills that you wanted when you enrolled?

Are the contents, the topics, of the Programme interesting? Are they clear?

What do you enjoy the most? What do you enjoy the least?

Is the teacher presenting the ideas and the lessons in a way that helps you learn them?

- For example, is she clear? Does she go too quickly? Is there enough time to practice the new lessons? Is she easy to talk to?

Are the materials clear? Do you have enough time to work with them?

How do you usually participate in the class? For example:

how often do you talk with the teacher: often___ sometimes___ never___

how often do you share ideas with other learners: often___ sometimes___ never___

how often do you make presentations to the class: often___ sometimes___ never___

What could be done to make the Programme more interesting and useful to you?

Is your family able to help you with your lessons?

Can you take materials home to review? Do you have books or magazines at home to read?

Is the Programme long enough: enough days and enough hours for you to learn what you want to?

Is there a difference in what you did in the first 6-months and the last 3-months?

What changes would you want to make the Programme help you more as a learner?

How many girls and women aged 15-24 in the community are participating now or have participated in the Programme?

Who are not coming and why?

Do some learners participate differently than others e.g. more or less often? some prefer to work by themselves? some are quicker?

Do these differences cause difficulties, discomfort in the class?

Does the teacher interact in different ways with different learners?

Tool 4: FGD with Shura

What is the membership of Shura?

Do members share the same ethnic & language as most of the community?

Are members more educated than most of the community?

Are there both men and women Shura, in the same or separate groups?

What are the priority tasks of the Shura in the Literacy Centre?

How often do you visit the Centre and what do you look for?

Have you had specific training to do this work?

Have you had any problems collecting the information you want?

Do you monitor teaching and learner progress?

What do you do with the results of your monitoring?

Do the Shura help identify Centre human and budget resources?

Are these what you expected when you became a Literacy Shura member?

What do you feel are the most important benefits & challenges of your role?

Why do you think literacy and numeracy are important for women?

Who should attend Literacy Programme: all women who missed formal school?

Is it the goal in this community that all girls to go to formal school or to have some only attend the Literacy Programme?

What are the most serious problems facing female learners?

Are there specific barriers in this community for girls or women attending the Literacy programme and completing it?

Has the Shura taken any steps has over the past year to help women participate and complete; and have these been successful?

Do you work with the Centre to set and monitor gender equality targets?

What are the main problems or weaknesses of the Literacy programme? What are the main strengths?

What are the main strengths of teachers; and the main challenges they are facing?

Are they coming every day, on time and completing the lessons?

Are learners attending regularly?

What percentage of them complete the programme?

Are there specific procedures to identify and take action on teachers or learners who are not performing well, who are at risk of dropping out ?

Are there any signs of bias or abusive behaviour by or against learners or teachers?

Have you seen them using their reading and calculation skills in the community?

Have there been any problems with security or threats to the Centre or against learners, especially females?

Has the Centre ever had to close because of security concerns?

What actions can or has the Shura taken to resolve these matters?

What have been the most significant changes or achievements in the Literacy Centre programme over the past 1-2 years?

What has influenced these?

Have functions in the Centre changed in positive or negative ways?

Does the Shura set targets for activities you want the Literacy Centre/programme to achieve?

Do you set targets for increasing enrolment or completion rates?

Do you set funding targets for things like physical upgrades to the Centre?

How do you work with the Centre, LD or funding agency to set and monitor targets?

How many / what targets have you achieved in working with the Centre over the past 2-3 years?

What changes in the Literacy programme and your role would you like to see?

Do you think the Literacy Centre should continue in your area?

What would be the main benefits of keeping it? What conditions would be necessary to make it possible for the community? Would it have to change in some way?

What would be the main risks and costs? How could these be managed?

Would you support the continuation of the Centres?

Would anyone in the community oppose it?

Tool 5: Interviews with families, especially male members

Who made the decision that your family member (wife, sister, daughter) would attend the literacy class?

Was there any conflict in the family about the decision?

Does your family make adjustments to allow members, especially girls/women, to attend class?

Is it important for all members of a family to be literate? To what level?

Is everyone in your family literate? Where did they learn? Are there reading materials in your home?

How does the Centre communicate with families about literacy plans and activities?

Do you feel you know enough about what the Centre is doing?

What do you need to have more information about?

Do teachers keep the family and the learner informed about learning progress?

Do you consider yourself a "partner" with the Centre?

What do you think are the most important strengths and challenges of the Literacy Centre and the Programme?

Do you think the Centre is "safe" for learners?

Do you think there is enough respect for learners as women? For their language or ethnic group?

Has the Centre had any particular problems or successes during the last 2-3 years?

Do you & other family members work with the Shura on improving the Programme?

What are your main hopes for the future of the Centre?

What is the security situation of the Centre?

Have there been any threats or attacks over the past 2-3 years; has the Centre been closed?

What action have families taken with the Centre to prevent or resolve conflicts?

Do you think gender is the problem or literacy itself?

What would make your daughter/wife decide to drop out of the programme or for the family to take her out?

What have been the most significant changes, positive or negative, in the Programme during the past 1-2 years?

Have these been mostly in the way the Programme is managed? in the teaching?
 Have these changes affected your wife or daughter in her participation or learning?
 What has caused these changes?
 What further changes in the Centre or Programme do you want to see?

What is the most important change in your daughter/wife since she attended the literacy programme?

Do you approve of these changes?
 What further changes in her would you like to see?
 Would you encourage other families to send their daughters/wives?

Tool 6: Centre headstone data

→ Ask if there have been any significant changes in these statistics during the past 2-3 years? are they positive or negative? what caused them?

Environment

population: city/urban___ town___ village/rural___
 security risks: high___ medium___ low___
 physical environment: harsh___ moderate___ easy___
 poverty/food insecurity levels: high___ medium___ low___
 community education patterns: % illiterate males___ females___
 % children girls___ and boys___ enrolled in school

Literacy Centre

physical structure quality: good___ moderate___ poor___
 size: 1-2 rooms___ 3-4 rooms___ 5+___
 infrastructure/supplies: good___ moderate___ poor___
 years in the community: 1-2 years___ 3-4 years___ 5+ years___
 distance to LD district/provincial office: needs vehicle___ long walk___ easy walk___
 distance to community: needs vehicle___ long walk___ easy walk___
 donor/technical partners: name/s___

Staff

manager: m___ f___ trained in literacy___
 teachers: learner/teacher ratio___ %
 female teachers___ Mullah___
 % female teachers with Gr 12___, TTC/university___ literacy-training___
 attendance rates good___ moderate___ poor___

Learners

total enrolled: ___
 below 15:___ 15-18:___ 19-25:___ above 25___
 languages: Dari___ Pashtu___ Uzbek___ Other:___
 ethnic groups: Pashtu___ Tajik___ Uzbek___ Hazara___
 Other___
 number completed/year (since Centre opened):___
 attendance rate:___ drop-out rate:___

What you see:	Yes, this is happening (give detail if possible)	This is not happening (explain if possible)
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Learners are seated appropriately for the culture, their age, participate equally in learning activities e.g. access to the teacher, materials, chalk board		
Learners appear eager/not afraid to express ideas, raise questions; do not appear bored or tired.		
Learners talk easily with the teacher, share with each other, appear to feel secure that their contributions are valued.		
Learners are encouraged to express ideas & opinions; teacher asks open-ended questions, not “yes” or “no”; learners reluctant to answer are given extra time.		
Learners make presentations and display their learning		
Learners work on their own & in groups depending on lesson content/purpose; are encouraged to choose their own learning approach & to help peers who might be struggling		
Teacher gives examples related to learner interests & experiences; asks for feedback on materials and lessons, encourages questions		
There is a positive, easy relationship among learners and the teacher; everyone seems relaxed, secure.		
The room is safe, clean and welcoming of all learners, including those with disabilities		
Learning materials are gender-sensitive, free of bias & stereotype		
Teacher encourages learners in skills of self-expression, analysis, problem solving; learners are encouraged to take leadership roles, talk about social issues in the community		

Annex 7 National Evaluator/Fieldwork Team

The team was comprised of Afghan female and male consultants, qualified and experienced as researchers and M&E specialists. With a collective experience of over 30 years, a sound understanding of the situation in Afghanistan and the ability to adapt their work to meet the unique challenges encountered there, including those relating to security, gender, cultural restrictions, illiteracy. All of this has allowed confidence both in the validity and thoroughness of the data and in the ability of team to maintain sound ethical standards and safeguard the physical and psychological integrity of respondents.

Nadima Sahar – Field Coordinator - has an undergraduate degree in Political Science, Business Administration and Philosophy from Roger Williams University and a Master's degree in Public Policy and Administration from University of Massachusetts, USA. Nadima has over ten years of extensive experience in research and monitoring and evaluation. Prior to SPS, Nadima was working for Harakat where she was providing monitoring and evaluation services for a wide range of multimillion dollar projects. A qualitative specialist, Nadima's main areas of expertise lies in the management of qualitative research projects and her primary interests are in social, health and government policy research.

Abdul Qader: With over fifteen years of experience in research, has assisted SPS in the design, management and implementation of qualitative and quantitative research studies and is familiar with questionnaire design and sampling techniques. He has extensive experience in administering research questions in a neutral manner without influencing the respondent and in mitigating response bias.

Shaperai: has over eighteen years of experience in social research and in data collection and processing. She has previously assisted entities such as US Army Corps of Engineers, Democracy International, European Commission, Integrity Watch International, the World Bank, Silk Route Consultancy Services, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and others in their various research projects. Her main area of expertise is in the management and implementation of qualitative and quantitative research.

Allah Mohammad – With dual degrees in nursing and engineering, Allah Mohammad has worked with entities such as AHDS, UNAMA, SRTRO, Democracy International and various other local and international organizations in their research projects. His interest lies in education, social and policy research.

Mohammad Baig: A graduate of Kabul University majoring in Social Science, Mohammad Baig has provided qualitative and quantitative expertise to national and international clients including the Afghan government. He has over five years of experience in qualitative and quantitative research and has extensive data collection experience in provinces such as Badghis, Ghor, Farah, Herat and others.

Shafiqullah has assisted SPS and organizations such as the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Democracy International, Integrity Watch International, Handicap International in their implementation of qualitative, quantitative and mix method researches studies. Shafiqullah is an expert in response maximization techniques and enhanced data quality. His areas of expertise include education, poverty and vulnerability, education and others.

Freshta has provided consulting services and qualitative expertise to international clients such as ASMED, USACE, European Commission, in various areas of market and social research. Freshta has been instrumental in leading SPS's team of research professionals to provide unmatched and quality field work in provinces such as Laghman, Badghis, Helmand, Kabul, Sar e Pul etc.

Yousuf has a reputation for effectively leading and managing large-scale, resource intensive, research projects to industry-best standards. He has a rich past experience in social research and is an expert in large-scale survey management, complex multi-methodology projects and the development and execution of quality operational processes.

Baser has four years of experience in qualitative and quantitative research. Using a range of methods including interviewing, observation and ethnography, focus group discussions and survey, he has conducted research in the areas of education, poverty, food, and others for various national and international entities.

Mir Afzon - With over ten years of experience in survey and research methods, Mir Afzon has assisted SPS in the implementation of a number of its research projects. She has worked on the design and implementation of complex and multi-methodology SPS surveys and is familiar with questionnaire design and sampling techniques, and has years of experience with response maximization techniques and mitigating response bias.

Mohammad Raqeeb has over thirty five years of experience in social research, previously having worked for the Central Statistics Office, SRTRO, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Integrity Watch International, the World Bank, Handicap International and others. His areas of expertise include large scale survey design and management.

Afshaan had a degree in literature and is highly regarded for her outstanding consultative approach and the ability to fully understand client needs. She has previously conducted a wide range of qualitative, quantitative and mix method researches and evaluations for national and international organizations.

Najib has twenty five years of experience in qualitative and quantitative research. He has previously provided research services to entities such as SRTRO, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Integrity Watch International and others. His interest lies in education, social policy, electoral process and civic education and others.

Zakira has a degree in nursing and around five years of experience in research. She has mostly worked in health, poverty and social policy research projects.

Annex 8 Terms of Reference

UNICEF AFGHANISTAN
REQUEST FOR A CONTRACT FOR SERVICES (INDIVIDUAL)

PURPOSE OF ASSIGNMENT:			
Purpose of the evaluation: The purpose of the evaluation is to assess whether the UNICEF assisted literacy project effectively responds to the literacy needs of women in Afghanistan and any impact it had on the lives of women. The evaluation will also explore whether the project is sustainable i.e. whether the Literacy Department (LD) or partners have the capacity/ willingness to continue the project if/ in case UNICEF does not continue the same level of engagement (financial and technical). The evaluation results will inform UNICEF and MoE literacy department the course of action for improving the current literacy project. The evaluation is also meant to inform UNICEF's next Programme of Cooperation.			
DUTY STATION:	Kabul with travels to provinces		
SUPERVISOR	Chief of Education Section		
OTHER CONTACT POINTS IN OFFICE:	Arzhang Yusefi, Education Officer (Female Literacy) Panji Chamdimba		
UNICEF SUPPORT REQD <i>(Excl travel and accommodation)</i>	Facilitate in access to EMIS data; facilitate the field information collection in the central and zonal offices where UNICEF has a presence. SEP committee will oversee the overall evaluation process and will provide feedback on each step.	TRAVEL REQUIRED	Yes
PROPOSED DURATION	60 Days spread over 4 months	ACCOMMODATION	UNOCA Compound
PROPOSED START DATE:	September 2013	Total consultancy is USD 43,214 Consultancy fees @ USD560 X 60 days = 33600 DSA for 28 days @ USD147:.....= 4116 Return Air ticket (economy)= 3000 Terminal costs (US\$38x2 + Kabul pick up US\$11x2):.....= 98 Local travel to provinces = 2,400 Total:..... = 43,214 Insurance (in case of evacuation) @ 137.53/month for 4 months:= 550.12	
PROPOSED END DATE:	December 2013		
WBS	0060/AO/0/013/003/002		
GRANT	SC-109901		
INCLUDED IN SUPPLY PLAN	YES		

FULL TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT
Evaluation of Female Literacy Project
BACKGROUND
<p>The Ministry of Education’s literacy programme is designed to achieve the goals set out in the MOE’s strategic plan to keep the education system on track towards achieving the Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals for 1399 (2020). UNICEF is contributing to this effort as part of the several initiatives by the Islamic Republic of the Government of Afghanistan and International organizations aimed at both improving the country’s education system, and ensuring basic literacy and numeracy skills and primary education for all since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. On-going political instability, the dire economic situation and the lack of educational opportunities had resulted in the emergence of an illiterate and non-professional generation. Currently, only 15 per cent of women and 43 per cent of men are literate (NESP 2010). This illiteracy rate, places Afghans, as having one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. This is not solely attributed to poverty, but is due to myriad of social and economic factors which include a shortage of qualified teachers, especially females; insufficient learning space, insufficient teaching and learning materials; poor institutional capacity to plan and manage education programmes; political and cultural conservatism; and traditional family structures (where a woman’s role is restricted to staying home with children and looking after the family’s domestic needs.</p> <p>The Ministry of Education with technical and financial support from the UNICEF Afghanistan Country Office has been advancing the literacy components of NESP 1 and 2. The aim of the UNICEF assisted Literacy Project under the Basic Education and Gender Equality Programme (BEGE) for 2006-2009 was to have 306,000 females enrolled on literacy training courses, and to ensure that these learners complete the nine-month literacy course, hence contributing to the empowerment of women in the country. In order to consolidate the gains of the four-year Country Plan of Action (CPAP) for 2010-2013, the aim of the Literacy component is: to contribute a 50% increase in literacy rates among females between ages of 15-24. The overall objective is to contribute to the national efforts to reduce illiteracy as well as to pave the way to a better life for both women and children. The specific objective of the programme cycle of 2010-2013 is to provide literacy for 280,000 females of age 15-24 in 34 provinces.</p> <p>The Literacy Department, with support from UNICEF conducted an assessment of the literacy project in 2010. The purpose was; to assess, evaluate and verify the impacts of the UNICEF assisted activities in the literacy projects and to determine the actual implementation status of the activities at field level and provide feedback for corrective measures. This assessment provided information on the management and implementation of literacy projects in general. In 2010, UNICEF facilitated the Mid-Term Review (MTR) for the performance of the current Programme of Cooperation. The MTR findings provided results and achievements and highlighted the strengths and shortcomings across the whole country programme. The MTR indicated that the BEGE project; “Female Literacy for women empowerment” is a powerful part of the Education programme. However, there is a concern that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teachers who teach the Literacy Training would have insufficient adult teaching skills as such the quality of teaching would not be up to standard. • The current course of nine month literacy classes focusses on reading and writing, with no enough emphasis on life skills/functional literacy which is the key for women’s empowerment. It is also questionable whether the nine-month duration of the literacy course would be adequate for the intended improvement in literacy in the planned literacy project. • It was revealed that the literacy project ran alone and has limited or no linkages with other sections and projects such as Health and Nutrition, Mother groups, income generation or ECD. <p>The MTR process proposed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The age group of the UNICEF assisted literacy project be aligned to the Government literacy age bracket of Female learners of age 15-45 years. • The literacy project is focused on helping women to retain and enhance their literacy skills and build up on information that will help them improve their wellbeing through functional literacy and use of post-literacy materials for those who complete the 9-month literacy project. • UNICEF should work with other partners to improve what is already in place.

In conclusion, it was recommended that UNICEF and the Literacy Department use the remaining two year of the Country Programme to conduct a detailed and an in-depth evaluation of the female literacy project that will lead to a well-defined strategic direction and action in the next Country Programme when the current cycle ends in 2014.

This evaluation will be primarily used by UNICEF and Literacy Department of Ministry of education to formulate a future direction in the area of women's literacy. The findings of the evaluation will also provide other literacy actors with up to date evidence based lessons learnt that can inform decision in the area of literacy training.

OBJECTIVES

Effectiveness

- Assess the extent to which the literacy centres implement the 9-month literacy course as specified by the CPD and CPAP 2010-13 IR objectives
- Determine the extent to which results expected and unexpected have been achieved.
- To what extent the literacy curriculum was matched with the abilities of the learners.
- To what extent was the duration of the course sufficient to cover the entire curriculum in an effective manner.

Relevance

- Determine the relevance of the literacy project content to the needs of beneficiaries.
- Determine the relevance of text books and learning materials to the needs of female learners from different background.
- Determine the relevance of mode of delivery (time, learning environment..etc)

Efficiency

- Identify the key bottlenecks in planning, implementation arrangement, management, quality of teaching and learning in the UNICEF supported literacy centres.
- To what extent were the teachers adequately prepared for the delivery of the curriculum using adult teaching methods.

Sustainability

- Assess the capacity of the Literacy Department to continue the literacy project for women.
- Assess the extent to which women who have completed the project apply their knowledge.

Impact

- Determine the extent to which the project affected girls and women from different background in socio-economic, geography, ethnicity and language.

Recommendations and lessons learnt

- Distil lessons learnt from the UNICEF assisted female literacy interventions to provide recommendations including those that will allow management to decide whether UNICEF should continue, exit or transfer the literacy programme to the Government of Afghanistan or to another partner.

Scope and focus:

This scope of work includes the following activities also outlined in section nine below:

- The evaluation will be conducted in selected Literacy centres that have been operating during 2010- 2012 on a sampling basis in all the Zones (Central, Western, Eastern, Southern and Northern region) where UNICEF has zonal offices.
- Overall strengths, weaknesses, gaps and shortfalls of the UNICEF Women's empowerment project in regard to planning and implementation.
- Efficiency and effectiveness of the UNICEF financial management and the Literacy Department (LD) financial control procedures/management, especially with regards to the channeling of funds for the literacy project.
- Level of the support from the LD staff at central, provincial, and district levels.
- Level of collaboration and cooperation between the LD staff at central, provincial, and district levels.
- The quality of teaching and learning at UNICEF assisted project and Joint Collaboration with other partners e.g.

<p>WFP literacy classes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The evaluation will reflect the results of the project planning and implementation during the period of 2010-2012 in selected provinces and districts of intervention. <p>Further valuation questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Has the project achieved its objective of providing literacy skills to 280,000 women of age 14-24 year? (Effectiveness) 2- Does the overall objective of the project contribute to the priority areas of UNICEF? (Effectiveness) 3- To what extent has the project been effective in regard to women’s empowerment? (Effectiveness) 4- How appropriate have the teaching and learning processes been? (Relevance) 5- Have women applied their acquired reading and writing skills to improve their daily lives? (Impact) 6- Has the literacy curriculum (nine month course) responded to the learners needs? (Relevance) 7- What are the topics in the learning materials that learners found most useful for their daily lives? (Relevance) 8- To what extent could the literacy project strategy be replicated in other provinces? (Sustainability) 9- What activities has the literacy project provided to help the literacy course graduates to maintain their literacy skills? (Sustainability) 10- What are the key challenges faced in terms of planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring of female literacy project at all levels? (Efficiency) 11- What is the total and unit cost, including national and Provincial/District levels, in establishment and operation to complete the 9-month literacy course? (Efficiency) 12- To what extent was the literacy project budget spent during 2010-2012 to directly benefit learners? (Efficiency)
<p>EVALUATION TEAM:</p> <p>The evaluation will be carried out by a team, comprised of an international senior consultant (P5-level) who will be the lead consultant and an Afghanistan institutional consultant to support with data collection in the field.</p>
<p>ACTIVITIES, TASKS, DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINES FOR THE LEAD CONSULTANT</p> <p>Methodology:</p> <p>The evaluation will be done in consultation with the Literacy Department and entail both quantitative and qualitative methods. The evaluation will rely on primary (data collected from the field) and secondary (desk review of published materials and studies) sources. The primary data collection will be carried out in 5 zones through quantitative data collection tools including questionnaires, tests and structured interviews and qualitative data collection methods including Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), observations and other participatory methods. A classroom observation checklist will be used to assess the lesson delivery by the teachers. This will ensure triangulation of the data. . Interviewees will include: teachers, learners (both those that have completed the nine-month literacy course and the ones that are currently learning), MoE officials from the literacy department, and community shura members. For quantitative data both EMIS and data collected from provincial Literacy Department stored at National Literacy Department will be used. Some test items will be given to participants to assess their literacy skills. As the data reliability is an issue of concern in Afghanistan, MoE data will be cross-checked with the one recorded by UNICEF Zonal offices. In regard to sampling, a purposive sampling method will be used to ensure that women and adolescent girls from different socio-economic and geographic background are represented in the evaluation.</p> <p>SCOPE OF WORK:</p> <p>In relation to the evaluation of the female literacy the International Consultant will be required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the literature on female literacy and project documents related to the female literacy. • Develop a research design, including the methodology and the necessary tools for the evaluation in collaboration with UNICEF and the Literacy department

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead the orientation and training of the national research assistants and relevant staff on the instruments developed for data collection. • Facilitate the pre-testing and finalization of the tools • Plan the data collection with support from UNICEF and Ministry of Education, • Provide guidance to identified national institution and relevant staff • Analyze quantitative data collected by the identified national institution • Complete in depth case studies in each of five provinces supported by national data collectors • Compile a first draft and review the findings with the UNICEF Education team and the Monitoring and Evaluation team, and any other partners deemed necessary by UNICEF • Prepare a final report incorporating comments provided in the draft report • Present the findings of the evaluation to UNICEF and any invited Education Sector Partners by teleconference to finalize report 		
Tasks	Deliverables	Timeline
Inception phase		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review of the National Literacy Policy and Strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This will entail a review of all the existing information on the UNICEF assisted literacy programs in Afghanistan. - Assessment of the structure of the program: National, Provincial, District and the Village level and detailed methodology - Preliminary Review of the curriculum framework to assess whether it is addressing the needs of the learners. - Drafting an inception report and present to UNICEF and Literacy Department for consultation and finalization. 	<p>Draft inception report with major below components:</p> <p>1-INTRODUCTION Objective of the evaluation Background and context Scope of the evaluation</p> <p>2- METHODOLOGY Evaluation criteria and questions Conceptual framework Evaluability Data collection methods Risks and potential shortcomings</p> <p>3- Work plan Phases of work Management and logistic support Calendar of work</p> <p>4- ANNEXES 1. Evaluation matrix 2. Stakeholder map 3. Tentative outline of the main report 4. Interview checklists/protocols 5. Lesson observation checklist 6. literacy tests 7. Reference documents 8. Project mapping 9. Detailed work plan</p> <p><i>(Allow a minimum of 10 days for to and from feedback by Unicef to finalize inception)</i></p>	16 days
Execution Phase		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of enumerators and piloting of data collection tools • Manage collection of data and information on the outcome of the literacy classes on the female learners. • Analyze data • Draft a preliminary report and present findings to MoE, UNICEF and key partners 	<p>Draft report Draft report delineating main findings from the field and primary data collection.</p>	24 days

via teleconference.		
Delivery Phase		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solicit feedback and comments from UNICEF (national and zonal offices) and MoE Finalize the report. 	<p>Final report available in hard and soft copies.</p> <p>The outline of the Evaluation report should follow UNEG Evaluation Standards. The report will follow UNICEF's reporting standards that are coherent among other sections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive summary Methodology Description of the finding Analysis of the findings Conclusions (Content, strategy for delivery of the female literacy and the relevance of the curriculum) Recommendations Lessons learned <p><i>(Allow a minimum of 15 days for to and from feedback by Unicef to finalize the report)</i></p>	20 days
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total number of days 		60 days
Tasks	Deliverables for the national Institutional consultant	Timeline
1. identify 10 research assistants (2 per province)	10 research assistants identified (2 per zone)	2 days
2. participate in training of research assistants	Training report	2 days
3. participate in piloting of research tools	Pilot report	2 days
4. translate research tools into Dari and Pashto	Translated research tools	1 day
5. collect data	Raw data in Dari/Pashto	8 days
6. translate collected data into English	Raw Data in English version	10 days
Total days		25 days
Management and implementation arrangements:		
<p>The international consultant is the overall manager of this evaluation who will report to the Chief of Education Section and supported by Education Officer for Literacy mainly in the facilitation of the logistics for the evaluation process, but to ensure neutrality they will not be involved in data collection and analysis. Deputy Minister for Literacy will also oversee the process and will provide constant advice and feedback. LIFE partners as wider stakeholders will be kept informed of the progress in the process of the evaluation and they will be approached for consultation and as key informants. The consultancy process will be overseen by the UNICEF Studies and Evaluation committee to ensure that the UNEG standards for evaluation are adhered to.</p> <p>The consultant will be provided with a translator in her visits both in Kabul and provinces as required and will be supported with the translation of the evaluation tools and final evaluation report.</p>		
BUDGET AND REMUNERATION		

The budget for this evaluation will be covered from PBA # SC-9901. The consultancy is at a senior professional level equivalent to a P5 level with vast experience in evaluation of education programmes. The payment modality is described below:

Deliverables and Installment payments:

Payment for the international consultant is expected to be processed in 3 installments as per the offered condition below:

- **First installment:** USD xxx upon submission of approved Inception report
- **Second installment:** USD xxx upon submission of first draft evaluation report complete with data analysis, findings lessons learnt and recommendations.
- **Third installment:** USD xxx upon submission of approved final evaluation report

QUALIFICATIONS, SPECIALIZED EXPERIENCE AND ADDITIONAL COMPETENCIES

The evaluation consultant should have expertise on the following

- At least Master’s Degree in education, social sciences or relevant areas.
- Minimum 10 years of experience in conducting evaluations for basic education is an advantage
- Fluent in the English language - speaking, writing and understanding.
- Knowledge of Dari/Farsi or Pashtu is an advantage
- Experience in implementing or managing evaluation studies in Afghanistan
- Ability to produce quality evaluation reports.
- Experience working with United Nations organisations.
- Ability to collect data in participatory manner and in difficult geographical locations

CONDITIONS OF WORK

The consultant will be provided office space while in Kabul and in provinces which will include office stationaries, printing and photocopying. However, the consultant is expected to use her/his own computer and mobile phone. Transport and travel to and within Kabul and provinces will be arranged by UNICEF respective offices and any travel of the consultant will only be authorized if in line with security measures.

ⁱ HRDB. “Education Joint Sector Review: Youth and Adult Literacy”. May 2012: 9