

Meeting EFA: Afghanistan Home-Based Schools

Introduction

Years of conflict and instability have taken a heavy toll on education in Afghanistan. While the government rebuilds its public education system, formal schools fail to reach many of the country's children. Girls remain particularly underserved as a result of the looming effects of the Taliban's sanctions against educating women.

The 2001 overthrow of the Taliban and the resulting period of post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building has led to the re-establishment of formal schooling. Large numbers of refugees who have returned to the country and many children who were denied access under the Taliban have been absorbed into an education system working to rapidly expand capacity. In 2004 alone, 1.3 million girls were enrolled in government primary schools. This is a significant accomplishment considering that the official count was zero as recently as 2001. While impressive, the increased enrollment only accounts for 40 percent of school-age Afghan girls. Moreover, attendance is often erratic and primary school completion is far from certain.

There are three primary reasons why girls' access to education remains limited in Afghanistan. First, the distance from home to school can be a significant barrier. Whereas most parents allow their sons to walk or use public transportation, daughters who live more than a very short distance from the school building are rarely allowed to attend. Second, government schools tend to be dominated by male teachers posted from outside the local community. The presence of unfamiliar or less trustworthy men often makes parents reluctant to send their daughters to school. Third, cultural beliefs tend to undervalue girls' education. Dependence on children's economic roles puts pressure on girls to stay home and marry young.

Several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Afghanistan are promoting community-based or home-based schooling (HBS) as one approach to increasing education access, especially for girls. Community and home-based schools are not a new approach, previously developed as a response to the political and cultural difficulties of providing education under the Taliban and in conservative Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. Most community schools are designed to eventually integrate into the government system once the new Ministry of Education has the capacity to adequately educate greater numbers of students. This case study examines the model and outcomes of the HBS program developed and implemented by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Afghanistan.

Home-Based Schooling

At the time of research, the IRC education program was operating in four provinces: Kabul, Paktia, Logar, and Nangarhar. The program has subsequently expanded to cover certain districts in Herat province, western Afghanistan. The schools—or, perhaps more

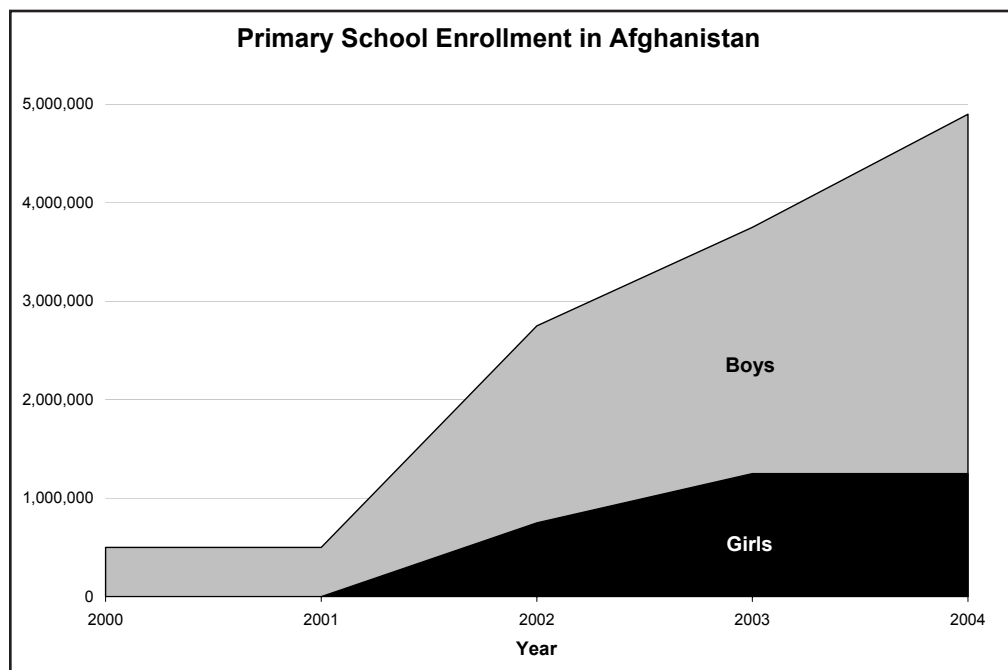


accurately, the home-based classrooms—are either single-sex or mixed and are located in teachers’ homes, compounds, or community spaces such as mosques. Classes last 3.25 hours a day, six days a week. Curriculum is determined by the students’ level of learning—usually grade one—and the teacher and students graduate to the next level each year. If necessary, additional classes are started in subsequent years for new enrollees. Materials and teacher training and supervision are provided by the IRC while the community members commit to supporting the teachers, sometimes with in-kind compensation such as food.

HBS’s success derives from its simple approach. The schools establish learning opportunities in communities using community education committees (CECs) to nominate trusted local teachers. Locally appointed teachers can provide appropriate instruction and an acceptable learning environment. Women are encouraged to become teachers, especially as they are often able to attract girls from more conservative families. In some communities, families allow their daughters to be taught by men from the community if they are known and trusted. Experience has shown that parents of older girls even allow their daughters to attend coed home-based classes if the boys in the class are from the same community. Because HBS only operates for a half day and students do not have to spend much time traveling to school, most children are still available to work and help support their families. This also allows teachers time during the day to tend to their other responsibilities.

IRC-supported schools comply with Ministry of Education policies and curricula. While HBS enrolls children who would not otherwise have access to education, the end goal is to absorb the students into government schools when the Ministry has the capacity to effectively educate more children in their local communities. However, at present, the home-based schools are still very much needed because the Ministry of Education lacks the capacity and infrastructure to educate all the students in the regions where IRC works. By framing HBS within the government’s policy parameters and objectives, the IRC program helps strengthen the government system as opposed to competing against it. Thus, these schools promote the government education system at the community level, which in turn, increases demand for public schools.

In a 2005 study, The World Bank pointed out that these kinds of interim arrangements and transitional mechanisms are the key to successful post-conflict reconstruction. Creating equitable access to services, especially to education, is a critical peace-building strategy for post-conflict governments. Ensuring that otherwise marginalized populations are served is one way to address social and economic divisions that could easily rekindle violence. It is critical to the government that rural and remote areas are reached with services sooner rather than later in the critical post-conflict period. HBS has not only contributed to the re-establishment of formal schooling, especially for girls, but has also promoted genuine learning, fostered student well-being, and encouraged a sense of optimism within communities. All these factors are critical to creating a stable and peaceful society in a country as conflict-torn as Afghanistan.

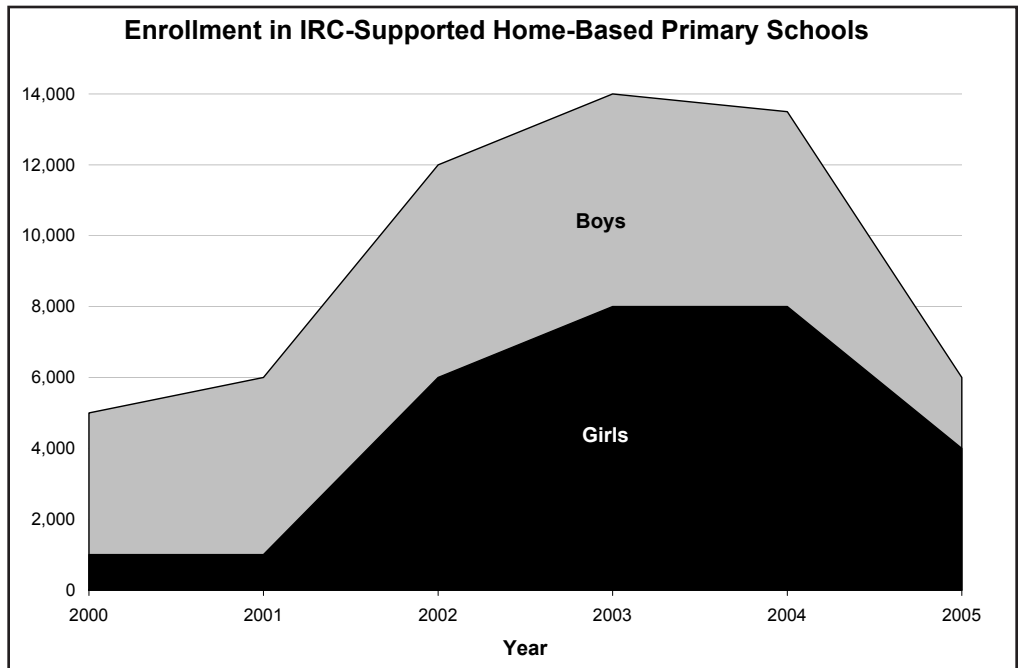


Program Outcomes

Access

The fall of the Taliban, the subsequent installation of a new government, the massive March 2002 Ministry of Education Back to School Campaign (BSC), and the support of various domestic and international agencies and NGOs have all led to a substantial increase in primary school enrollment rates. Public school enrollment reached almost 5 million children in 2004. This was a significant achievement considering that there were only 500,000 students attending primary schools just four years earlier. Still, while enrollments continue to rise, huge portions of the population still have no access to public school.

According to a 2003 United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) assessment, approximately 40 percent of all primary school children were receiving education through alternative learning environments such as home-based schools, community schools, and alternative education programs. The success of IRC-supported home-based schools in providing access can be seen in the rapid growth of enrollments over a fairly short period of time. From 2000 to its peak in 2003, the program enrolled over 14,000 students, 58 percent of whom were girls. Because students have been able to transfer into public schools starting in 2004, enrollment in home-based schools has dropped, especially among boys. As a result, in 2005, home-based schools enrolled 5,800 students, 70 percent of whom were girls.



The pattern of enrollment growth and decline was consistent across all four of the provinces in which the IRC program operated. However, girls’ participation varied across provinces. In Nangarhar and Logar, girls accounted for over 80 percent of enrollment, while in Paktia and Kabul, girls only made up 55 percent of enrollment.

Home-based schools are small, local initiatives that, even at their peak, operate on a relatively small scale. However, although small, they can have significant impact in rural areas and especially among girls. In Logar and Paktia in 2003, the HBS served between 4 and 6 percent of the school-age population.

	School Age Girls	Public School Girls	HBS Girls	Rate of Girls Enrolled in HBS
Tatang (Nangarhar)	32	0	30	94%
Qala Bawar (Kabul)	105	0	85	81%

Home-based schools’ capacity to absorb demand left unmet by public schools varies. As shown in the table, one to three home-based classes can accommodate the vast majority of school-age girls in relatively small villages such as Tatang and Qala Bawar. In both these villages, girls do not attend the closest available public schools, which are 2.5 km away in Tatang and 5.5 km away in Qala Bawar. In larger villages such as Khair Abad, where the closest public school is 6 km away, seven home-based schools enrolled 214 girls, which accounts for only 21 percent of the female school-age population. Still, even though participation rates vary and additional schools are needed, HBS succeeds across the board in providing improved access to primary education.

Completion

While the Afghan government has made impressive progress at providing access to new students, it has been much less successful at increasing primary school persistence and completion rates. The 2002 European Commission Assessment Report estimates that only 37 percent of students who enroll in first grade persist to fifth grade in public schools, including 26 percent for girls and 44 percent for boys. The best available estimates, collected by the World Food Program, indicate that dropout occurs throughout the primary cycle. Dropout rates for boys are estimated to be fairly consistent at 10 to 12 percent each year. For girls, dropout rates increase from approximately 10 percent in first grade to as high as 18 to 20 percent in third grade. Dropout rates for girls return to about 10 percent after third grade. While these figures may not be entirely accurate, they are consistent with the numbers illustrating that few students reach the end of the primary cycle.

Statistics from the IRC program show that dropout is generally not an issue in home-based schools. Attendance is high, and students tend to persist with impressive levels of commitment and enthusiasm. According to IRC staff, most HBS dropouts are a result of families relocating to another village, where they may attempt to re-enroll their children as students.

Available data make it possible to estimate student survival rates only up to fourth grade in home-based schools. However, because of the deliberate attempt to promote integration, school closing and families moving from one area to another, these statistics are systematically underestimated. Using 2001 as a base year, data are available on the initial enrollment in schools in three regions. All 2001 enrollments can be assumed to be for first grade, as almost all schools starting that year began at this level. Data from 2004 show enrollments in fourth grade. These students are assumed to be surviving members of the 2001 cohort. While data are also available from 2005, too much integration has occurred to estimate general survival rates.

Grade Four Survival Rates in Afghanistan

	Boys	Girls	TOTAL
Kabul	78%	77%	78%
Logar	39%	63%	50%
Paktia	25%	14%	24%
TOTAL	41%	56%	45%

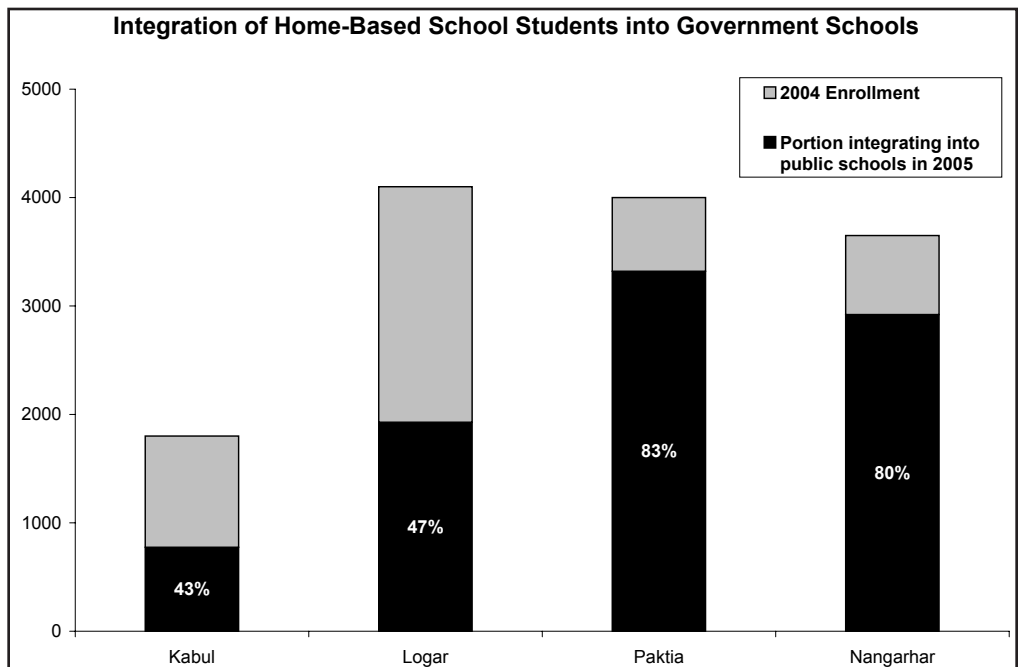
Kabul and Logar have estimated survival rates above those of formal public schools, especially for girls. Paktia's survival rates are very low. However, low survival rates in the home-based schools were expected because this is the region where integration has been most successful. No data are currently available on student performance in public schools.



Integration

IRC-supported home-based schools are designed to be temporary. The schools will continue to provide education only until the Ministry of Education is able to extend access to formal public schools. Therefore, IRC staff actively seek to integrate the students and teachers from nearby home-based schools into newly constructed, reopened, or expanded public schools. In fact, provincial education officials often choose to open new public schools in areas where home-based schools are already operating. The presence of a home-based school indicates demand for and commitment to education in that community. The fact that home-based students transfer to and integrate into formal public schools is a positive outcome for the IRC program. Unfortunately, statistics showing how many students continue through to sixth grade after integration are not available.

The integration of home-based students into the formal education system has been occurring in two ways. In one scenario, the students and teachers often remain in place while the home-based school simply changes status to become an officially recognized and government-supported public school. Alternatively, home-based schools close, and the students and, when possible, the teachers, transfer to new public schools. Public schools are typically larger and can integrate more than one home-based school and admit new underserved students. IRC enthusiastically advocates for the establishment of new public schools in areas where there is a high concentration of home-based schools within close proximity of each other. In all cases, integration means that the government must take on the responsibility of paying the teachers' salaries and providing supplies to the school. IRC continues to provide training and professional support for the teachers.



Between 2004 and 2005, almost 9,000 home-based students were integrated into public schools, including 88 percent of the boys and 51 percent of the girls in IRC-supported schools. It is safe to assume, given the ways in which integration occurs, that integration is occurring at all grade levels. However, detailed data do not exist to determine at which point students are transferring from home-based schools to public schools. According to research, the greatest barrier to integration remains availability of schools and the distance from small villages to formal public schools.

The previous graph demonstrates that 80 percent or more of the students in home-based schools in Nangarhar and Paktia provinces in 2004 integrated into public schools in 2005. The percentage of integrated students is much lower in Kabul and Logar provinces.

Learning

Home-based schools follow Ministry of Education student assessment policies. All students in each grade are assessed every three months using tests developed, administered, and graded by their teachers. Home-based teachers receive training on how to design assessments in seminars provided by IRC. When possible, teacher trainers provide guidance and feedback to teachers on the drafts of tests. They may also provide teachers with a set of general example questions in each subject.

The IRC program collects and collates student grades for each province to determine overall pass rates. The data available indicate between 90 and 99 percent of students receive satisfactory grades in all provinces each year. For example, in December 2003, 98.5 percent of HBS students passed year-end exams. Passing rates are difficult to compare across different regions because exams are not standardized. However, because teachers receive the same training and practice test questions, it is safe to assume that most students who receive a passing grade in home-based schools adequately understand most grade-appropriate material.

Qualitative evaluations of student performance in home-based schools support the high pass rates students are obtaining on the in-class assessments. Teachers in home-based schools report that their students are learning and performing to a standard they would expect for their grade levels. IRC staff report that graduates from home-based schools are able to pass the entrance exams to enter higher grades in public schools. Research finds that teachers in public schools that have integrated home-based students are also impressed with the abilities of those students.

Student-teacher ratios also correlate well with HBS learning. While home-based schools vary across provinces, average student-teacher ratios are always dramatically less than in public schools.

Average Number of Students per Teacher

	Home-Based Schools	Public Schools
Kabul	36	68
Logar	29	51
Paktia	42	82
Nangarhar	18	80
TOTAL	30	72

Student Well-Being

Since many Afghan teachers and students have experienced violent conflict, IRC findings assert that primary schools should go beyond literacy and numeracy instruction to provide students with comfortable environments conducive to developing self-confidence, understanding the attitudes, and learning the skills necessary to live peacefully. In addition to academic assessment, school evaluations should also include how effectively they protect children's well-being, foster learning opportunities, and nurture the social and emotional development of students affected by conflict.

IRC's HBS support, including teacher training, emphasizes the psychosocial well-being of students and teachers. Because student-teacher ratios are relatively low and teachers know students and families well, home-based schools are comfortable, enjoyable, and stimulating places for children. As a result, home-based schools make a significant contribution to student well-being and child protection.

Costs and Cost-Effectiveness

To measure cost and cost-effectiveness, costs associated with program development, annual operations, and the total number of students served by the program must be considered.

HBS Program Costs (2004)

	Cost in Dollars	Percentage of Total Budget
IRC staff salaries and benefits	\$92,177	36%
Travel and transportation	\$9,727	4%
Student materials and supplies	\$80,828	32%
Teacher materials and supplies	\$7,800	3%
Training and supervision	\$19,963	8%
Overhead and administration	\$18,945	7%
Additional expenses	\$23,976	10%
TOTAL	\$253,416	100%

The IRC program's total recurrent cost is approximately \$253,000 per year. These recurrent expenditures include staff salaries, materials and supplies, training and supervision, and travel and transportation, as well as management and overhead expenses. In addition to the annual costs, the IRC program spent approximately

\$16,213 on start-up activities, which included technical assistance, materials, and research and design. IRC also spent \$22,489 on investment costs such as infrastructure and school furnishings.

The Ministry of Education recurrent budget for 2004-2005 was approximately \$154 million. Recurrent costs included curriculum and materials, teacher development, capacity building, and equipment. Total costs for the Ministry of Education budget include an additional one-time \$10.5 million for education policy and reform and \$194.6 million for education infrastructure.

The annual recurrent costs per student enrolled in the IRC-supported home-based schools in 2004 was approximately \$18, compared to \$31 in Afghan public schools.

	Recurrent Annual Budget	Recurrent Cost Per Student	Grade 5 Completion Rate	Cost per Graduate	Cost per Learning Outcome
HBS	\$230,377	\$18	68%	\$132	\$134
Public Schools	\$154,053,000	\$31	32%	\$495	NA

The cost-effectiveness of HBS can be evaluated in terms of its average cost to produce a primary school graduate. Completion rates for the home-based schools were approximately 68 percent in 2004, compared to 32 percent for public schools in 2003. Taking into account unit cost per year of enrollment, years in the primary cycle, and completion rates, the cost per graduate is estimated at \$132 for IRC-supported home-based schools and \$495 for government-funded formal public schools.

In December 2003, approximately 99 percent of home-based school students passed year-end exams. With such a high pass rate, the cost per learning outcome for a primary completer is \$134. Exam data for public school students are not available. Although the learning outcome cost for public school graduates cannot be calculated, the cost per graduate is undoubtedly much higher in government-funded schools than in home-based schools in Afghanistan.

Critical Features of Home-Based Schools

Like most community-based education programs, the IRC program uses locally recruited teachers who are supported by the community within a well-structured system of ongoing training, professional support, governance, and management. This structure effectively provides organized learning opportunities for underserved children.

School Organization and Management

The CECs required by the IRC in the start-up phase of HBS help communities organize and prioritize education. When integration occurs, CECs often form the basis of the Ministry of Education-required parent-teacher associations (PTAs). The role of both the CECs and PTAs is to work with schools to solve student education problems, promote guidance and counseling, support student associations and extracurricular activities, and promote active participation from the community. PTAs have no official authority in



major decision-making processes at the school. Neither budgets nor teacher recruitment is handled at the school level.

Unlike PTAs, CECs have considerable decision-making power. When a new home-based school is formed, self-organized the CEC reaches a formal agreement with IRC stating that it will find an appropriate space for the school, identify a suitable teacher, and mobilize the community to send local children to school, especially girls. For its part, IRC agrees to provide basic classroom materials, basic teaching and learning materials for students and teachers, and regular teacher training, monitoring, and supervision. Classes start shortly after the commitments are in place. IRC trainers provide as much guidance as possible to the new teachers and ensure that training workshops are quickly organized in the district for the new teachers.

Home-based schools follow the Ministry of Education policies concerning subject areas but differ from public schools regarding school days and class hours, operating 3.25 hours per day for six days each week from March to December. This schedule allows families who depend on their children's contributions to the family business or farm freedom to send their children to school. Because the HBS schedule includes shorter holidays, longer school weeks, and shorter class days, the total number of classroom hours works out to the same as in public schools.

Additionally, home-based schools follow the assessment policies mandated by the Ministry of Education. Students are graded according to a breakdown of 80 percent from their cumulative scores on year-end exams in seven subjects on which they must score at least a passing grade of 60 percent, 10 percent from homework, and 10 percent from classroom participation. Students who fail one or two subjects are permitted to retake exams while those who fail three or more subjects must repeat the school year.

On a day-to-day basis, there is no formal process for making decisions at the individual school level. The teacher, in informal consultation with members of the CEC, may decide whether to cancel classes for the day, for example, if there has been a death in the village. Other issues, such as the relocation of a class from one place to another, are decided between the teacher and CEC. IRC staff only become involved with these types of issues when their support is requested.

Accountability for school and student performance happens at the community level. Teachers report to IRC on a regular basis about student attendance and exam performance, but IRC does not set specific performance standards for the schools. Judgments about the success of the school and the quality of the teaching and learning are made by parents and CEC members. If parents are not satisfied with the quality of education in the home-based school, they may remove their children from HBS. However, this rarely occurs because teachers know the community's cultural norms and strive to meet expectations. Local understanding and relationships between home-based schools and the communities they serve create a strong accountability mechanism for both teachers and students.

Teachers

All teachers in the IRC program are members of the local communities in which they teach. They have either volunteered to teach or have been invited by the CEC. While most teachers have at least a tenth grade education, many of them do not possess the required twelfth grade education to become public school teachers. While this suggests that home-based teachers are technically less qualified than public school teachers, more than half of all public school teachers in Afghanistan also fail to meet this requirement. In some cases, the mullah, a community religious leader, serves as the teacher and is often the most educated person in the community.

IRC promotes women teachers in home-based schools. Women-only training seminars are provided to support professional development. Some of the home-based teachers have experience as teachers of clandestine classes for girls during the Taliban regime. The vast majority, however, only started teaching after 2001.

Overall, women make up 24 percent of home-based school teachers and 17 percent of public school teachers in the provinces where IRC operates. However, these rates are not consistent across regions. Paktia has especially low rates while Kabul and Logar have considerably higher rates. Public school figures mask a large disparity of female teachers between urban and rural schools. More women teach in urban public schools, whereas all home-based schools are situated in rural villages. In 2001, at the height of the Taliban regime, there were very few women teachers in IRC-supported schools. Efforts since the fall of the Taliban have paid off, and the percentage of women teachers in home-based schools in the four provinces has increased significantly.

Percentage of Female Teachers (2004)

	Home-Based Schools	Public Schools
Kabul	26%	15%
Logar	43%	23%
Paktia	7%	8%
Nangarhar	13%	17%
TOTAL	24%	17%

Each community is responsible for supporting and compensating HBS teachers. In the program's first year, teachers were paid a small stipend of 400 Afghanis each month. For a short time after the fall of the Taliban, large amounts of donor funding allowed IRC to pay teachers a monthly incentive equivalent to \$30 during the eight-month academic year. However, since March 2003, when it became clear that home-based schools were needed over the long term, IRC ceased compensating teachers in order to focus mobilizing more sustainable community support. Not all families can afford to pay regular teacher salary fees. Therefore, informal, in-kind teacher compensation (e.g., food), is occasionally accepted. Public school teachers, on the other hand, are paid according to a pay scale defined by the Ministry of Education, ranging from the equivalent of \$53 per month to \$90 per month.



Although home-based teachers would appreciate a larger and more regular salary, other motivations like respect and status encourage them to continue teaching in the absence of a competitive salary. For many women, being a teacher in their own home is one of the few ways to be active and make positive change in their communities.

Teachers in the home-based schools are not formally recognized by the public education system. As a result, home-based school teachers' previous HBS experience is not acknowledged when they are occasionally absorbed into government-funded schools, and they must enter at the bottom rank for their grade level. If they are not a high school graduate, they are hired as a contract teacher. If they continue their own education and graduate from high school, they can then become a certified public school teacher. In some rural areas where Ministry of Education standards are not strictly enforced, home-based teachers that transfer to public schools are often more qualified than their counterparts as a result of HBS training.

Regular, high-quality training for teachers is a critical component of the HBS program. IRC provides each teacher three trainings equivalent to approximately 13 total days every year. Most of the men and women who accept home-based teaching positions have little or no experience and are products of traditional rote learning. A basic pedagogy course is a first priority for prospective teachers. The course provides instruction in planning lessons, organizing the classroom, writing exams, and grading. Individual lessons are designed to cover concrete skills in six pedagogical strategies: group work, question and answer, role playing, storytelling, brainstorming, and competition. The course emphasizes and demonstrates the importance of active learning and the full participation of every student. Teachers also receive training in the core subjects of language and math, as well as a seminar on materials development. The latter involves making a variety of charts, games, and other teacher aids to be used in the classroom. Psychosocial awareness and attention to the needs of students are also components of the IRC training package for teachers. A 14-day seminar focuses on children's emotional needs and the ways in which teachers can most effectively communicate with their students. In accordance with the cultural norms of the community, teacher training is often provided in single-sex groups—male teachers work with male trainers, and female teachers work with female trainers.

One recommendation made during the May 2004 IRC Healing Classrooms Initiative, a global action-research project focused on teacher development to support student well-being in crisis and post-crisis transition contexts, was to bring home-based school teachers together on a regular basis for professional interaction. Since many home-based teachers are often isolated and do not have regular opportunities to share ideas or concerns with colleagues, IRC initiated monthly teachers meetings in January 2005 as part of the regular school supervision program.

An intensive program of teacher supervision and support is one foundation of the IRC HBS model. Certain IRC staff are wholly responsible for teacher supervision in every province. Outside trainings, supervisors spend most of their days in the field. They

visit each teacher at least once a month and provide teachers with immediate feedback on instruction and classroom management. This regular contact with known and trusted staff provides teachers with both technical and moral support. In accordance with cultural norms, women supervisors usually visit only women teachers, and male supervisors visit only male teachers.

IRC's supervisors have recently introduced self-evaluation to the home-based teachers. This tool permits trainers and supervisors to work with teachers in a more supportive and less judgmental manner than traditional evaluation. Self-evaluations help teachers identify their own strengths and weaknesses. This process encourages teachers to be more proactive in their own professional growth. Since the summer of 2004, IRC has recorded and maintained files on individual teachers' performance to support professional development. This is a promising innovation that still requires additional practice to ensure full understanding and effective implementation.

Oversight of teacher performance and behavior is largely left to the CECs that select teachers and found each school. IRC supervisors communicate with each school's CEC and visit more often than once a month if necessary. They also recommend additional training or provide teachers with direct advice and support.

Learning Environment, Curriculum, and Instruction

HBS learning environments are diverse; home-based classes are held in teachers' homes, outdoors under a tree, on a raised terrace area in a garden, in unenclosed structures, in a partitioned-off gateway, in the main prayer room of a mosque.

IRC provides classes with a blackboard and other basic supplies such as carpet, water container and bucket, trash can, chalk and erasers, attendance sheets, and grade books. IRC-supplied learning materials are consistent with the materials provided to public primary schools, which are primarily donated by UNICEF. Each student receives basic materials such as pens, pencils, rulers, pencil sharpeners, erasers, and slate boards. The Ministry of Education provides textbooks in the core subjects. Teachers receive a yearly package of supplies, including a ring file, paper, pens, pencils, a ruler, a pencil sharpener, erasers, and a basket. Additional supplies such as markers and flip charts are provided if available.

Home-based schools follow the government curriculum. The same subjects are studied by all students, and teachers must allocate the same number of hours per subject per week as designated by the Ministry of Education. Depending on the location, one of Afghanistan's two primary languages, Dari and Pashtu, is the official language of instruction. In areas where the population is mixed, the CEC decides the language of instruction. Second language instruction begins in both public and home-based schools in the fourth grade.

As subject time allocations are tightly fitted into a short school day, there are no additional, locally prescribed curricular elements formally included in home-based



schools. However, teachers are encouraged to add lessons on landmine awareness through games and posters.

IRC teacher training and supervision encourages teachers to involve students as much as possible in classroom activities. As a result, teachers employ various child-centered approaches such as frequent group brainstorming activities. However, much of the teaching remains fairly traditional—teachers still write content on the blackboard or read from a textbook most of the time. Teachers' previous education experiences are the most significant barrier to child-centered teaching.

Teachers receive specific training in creating nurturing environments that promote students' psychosocial well-being. The social connections between teachers, students, and families within a community contribute to an environment of trust and camaraderie conducive to learning. In contrast, emerging research indicates that public school teachers use harsh and discriminatory methods, including corporal punishment. Teachers often target children from certain ethnic and linguistic groups whose families are assumed to have different political affiliations than the teacher or class majority. Public school teachers often travel a great distance to school each day and have only limited interaction with students and parents outside school hours. Public schools generally have more crowded classrooms, resulting in less individual attention for students.

Policy and Institutional Context

Taliban Regime

Afghanistan has undergone—and continues to undergo—significant transition during the time IRC has been implementing its HBS program. The first home-based schools were established in Afghanistan by staff from the IRC Pakistan/Afghanistan program in 1997. Girls' education was illegal at that time. Education, other than Koran studies, was a very low priority for boys, as well, during the Taliban regime. Public schools were quite dysfunctional, teachers were often absent, and the national curriculum excluded all science studies.

In an environment hostile to education, IRC staff had to negotiate with Taliban authorities in order to provide education for communities requesting assistance. In some districts, local Taliban officials were more sympathetic to the wishes of the communities if the local mullah supported the requests. In 2000, one district in Gardez gained permission from local Taliban authorities to host an IRC-supported class of over 120 girls in a government school building. However, the permission was granted under the assumption that the schools would be teaching religious studies.

At the national level, IRC sought a general operating protocol not with the Education Offices, but with the Hajj Ministry Offices. The Hajj Ministry was supportive of religious education and, therefore, supported IRC's home-based classes for boys and girls. The program generally avoided dealing with the more restrictive education authorities.

Even with local permission, however, IRC-supported schools were constantly in danger. Girls had to stagger the times at which they arrived at class, and classes were often forced to move location to avoid unwanted attention from the authorities. IRC protected female teachers by registering them under their husband's name. IRC staff members were questioned by the authorities on more than one occasion, and the IRC education coordinator was even detained.

Transitional Government

The transitional government formed after the fall of the Taliban in 2001 has taken tremendous strides towards re-establishing public education. Through partnerships with the international community, especially UNICEF, the massive BSC was a huge step towards full access to primary school public education. The campaign saw over 3 million students braving extreme weather to attend classes held outdoors, in tents, and in other makeshift spaces.

BSC reinvigorated the Ministry of Education and helped build capacity for managing the education system in Afghanistan. However, was happening at the same time as the Ministry of Education was preoccupied with establishing its own authority and legitimacy. Thus, the Ministry of Education was not very open to dialogue concerning complimentary models of public education. While the Ministry of Education struggled to assert its ownership of education content and processes, it lacked the financial and technical resources to be successful, according to Spink in "Education and Politics in Afghanistan" from the September 2005 Journal of Peace Education. As a result, the Ministry of Education wanted to be the principle beneficiary of the sudden influx of donor funding instead of allowing those resources to be dispersed among various NGOs. These organizations, in the opinion of the Ministry of Education, were operating without regard for national norms and standards. The Ministry of Education was focused on the establishment of a national education system and was concerned that it lacked control over nongovernmental programs. Therefore, the Ministry of Education created various regulations that made it hard for NGOs to manage the programs they had planned to implement.

IRC had always sought collaboration with the Ministry of Education. After the Taliban's fall, IRC revamped home-based schools to function as a transitional and complementary model rather than a parallel model of education, connecting to the re-establishment of formal education. The Ministry of Education registered and approved existing IRC home-based schools. Although IRC secured a protocol recognizing home-based schools, the overall education policy environment under the transitional government was not conducive to government-NGO collaboration.

Reconstruction and Peace Building

More recently, as Afghanistan has entered a phase of reconstruction and peace building, the Ministry of Education has been more supportive of NGOs. The Ministry of Education now acknowledges NGO activities as important contributions to education development and has sought more collaborative relationships. This is partly due to an



increase in available resources, greater awareness of the effectiveness of NGO schools and education programs, and a growing acceptance of the need for collaboration and flexibility in setting education norms and standards.

This dramatic shift can be seen in the 2004 policy document entitled *Securing Afghanistan's Future*:

The Ministry of Education has evolved during the past 18 months with regard to its views on the role of the ministry. At the beginning of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA) the Ministry of Education emphasized its role as the sole producer of services and educational inputs. However, Ministry of Education has begun to stress more the role of the NGOs and the private sector in service delivery. It has begun to emphasize its role as one of policy making, regulating and monitoring service delivery, facilitating the roles of others and contracting for services. This needs to be further reinforced together with appropriate shifts at the Provincial and District Education level to support schools as the key service delivery points.

This declaration and the subsequent Ministry of Education actions illustrate a positive shift in policy towards NGO provision of schooling. Discussions with individuals in different Ministry of Education departments indicate a growing awareness of and interest in community schooling in Afghanistan. For example, the Teacher Training Department has agreed to include home-based and community-based teachers in its recently launched large-scale national Teacher Education Program (TEP). The Ministry of Education is attempting to make teacher manuals available to home-based teachers and to ensure that teacher resource centers are open to home-based teachers in each district. NGO staff, including IRC personnel, have been very involved in the design and implementation of TEP.

The Ministry of Education is currently establishing large-scale and long-term national initiatives, including school construction, curriculum reform, and teacher training reform. The newfound stability and authority the Ministry of Education has begun to receive as a result of these efforts have made it less reluctant to engage and collaborate with NGOs. If this trend continues, a more candid dialogue can take place on the state's role in serving thousands of children who are receiving education outside public schools or not at all.

While the policy context at the national level has just begun to evolve towards a more mutually supportive relationship between the Afghan government and NGOs, IRC's HBS program has successfully established this kind of relationship at the local level for several years. For example, negotiations that enable the integration of home-based students and teachers into public schools have taken place and continue to take place at the provincial level. Provincial education directors have seen the IRC training of public school and home-based teachers first hand and often visit home-based schools. As a result, provincial directors are more aware of the mutual benefits of close cooperation than their national Ministry of Education colleagues.

At the provincial level, education authorities are also able to control the pace of school integration in order to match the province's capacity to absorb new teachers and students into the government system. Furthermore, provincial directors can make specific local accommodations to respond to the evolving local context. For example, in Nangarhar, IRC and the Provincial Education Office have agreed that existing home-based schools will become satellite schools in areas furthest from public schools, where integration is not a viable alternative. Satellite schools are managed as semi-autonomous units but are technically under the auspices of the closest public school. This allows the home-based teachers to officially be put on the Ministry of Education payroll and allows the students to integrate into Ministry of Education coverage, while local CECs still maintain authority over important decisions such as teacher selection.

Recent progress in establishing a more supportive environment for home-based and community-based schools is encouraging. Yet there is clearly a great distance to go before the full potential of NGO and government collaboration can be reached and necessary government resources are made available to support home-based schooling. This could involve:

- The Ministry of Education providing instructional resources to home-based teachers;
- The Ministry of Education committing support to home-based schools by including them in teacher and school supervision activities; and/or
- The Ministry of Education recognizing the experience and commitment of home-based teachers by putting them on the government payroll.



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