

New Skills for Afghanistan

A Contribution to Individual Empowerment, Community and Civil Society Development and Stability in Afghanistan

During the first few years of our engagement, in particular, income-generating activities were conducted in cooperation with women's groups. Refugee women and war widows learned technical skills, attended basic literacy courses and acquired new orientation and knowledge. Civic Education Programmes for women's groups from different communities were conducted in cooperation with the Afghan Women's Network. In addition, 3-month courses for the acquisition of basic manual and vocational skills were offered for men and women in the provinces of Wardak, Khost, Logar and Ghazni.

Together with its partner ANAFAE, *dvv international* fosters initial and in-service training for facilitators, teachers, practitioners and multipliers, teaching adult groups in informal settings.

Increased Needs – Skills Development Can Contribute to Economic Growth and Stability

Afghanistan is now at the threshold of transition and is heading towards 2014, when foreign presence in the country will be reduced.



Vocational Training

Source: Wolfgang Schur

The economy has recovered from decades of conflict, and improved significantly since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, largely because of international assistance and the recovery of the agricultural sector. This sector plays a major role in the country's economy, as nearly 80% of the labour force work in this sector.¹ About 31% of the country's GDP comes from agriculture, but 43% from the dynamic growing service sector (transport, retail, telecommunications, finance and insurance). The industrial sector contributes 26% to the GDP of the country.²

Unemployment and poverty manifestations are high and relate to the low levels of literacy and vocational skills. Only 2.7% of the working male population in urban areas (aged 25-54) has completed training in a vocational training centre. The figure for the working female population is only 2.5%. More than 95% of the working population acquire their professional skills informally "*on the job*." Many of them are illiterate.³

Great hope is attached to the development of the mining sector. But this sector is capital-intensive and will only generate a limited number of jobs and is unlikely to bring relief to the poor and vulnerable population.⁴

Despite the progress of the past few years, the Afghan manufacturers' market and the small scale industries are still backward. For example, in the food produc-

1 Economy Watch.

2 World Factbook.

3 MoLSAMD Labour Market Information and Analysis Unit, An Urban Area Primary Source Study of Supply and Demand in the Labour Market, 2008.

4 Growth in Afghanistan World Bank, Afghanistan's Recent Economic Performance, 2010.

ing sector, new cooling, preserving and wrapping techniques and international standards must be introduced in order to compete with the neighbouring markets. This calls for workers with new knowledge and skills.

45% of Afghanistan's ordinary budget is still funded by the international community. Afghanistan remains one of the world's poorest countries, highly dependent on foreign aid, agriculture, and trade with neighbouring countries.

A large part of the population continues to suffer from shortages of housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs, criminality, insecurity, and the Afghan Government's inability to extend rule of law to all parts of the country.

Large portions of the population remain excluded from development strategies because they lack the basic skills for active involvement and participation in social and economic life.

Although the international community, committed to Afghanistan's development, has pledged over \$67 billion at four donors' conferences since 2002, Afghanistan's living standards and the literacy rate among Afghans are among the lowest in the world.

In many rural areas, only 8.1 % of women can read and write. This is one of the lowest literacy rates among the female population worldwide. Widespread female illiteracy has direct impact on health in the families and well-being, on the education of children, on civil society and community development, as well as on productivity, economic development and the destabilisation of the country.

Literacy class

Source: Wolfgang Schur



The high population growth rate, child and maternal mortality, non-enrolment of children in formal schooling, especially of girls, and large average family sizes are related to illiteracy and low levels of knowledge and skills in one way or another.

Many Afghan women carry the responsibility of providing for the entire family as a result of either having been widowed or living with husbands disabled as a result of on-going conflict.

Due to illiteracy and lack of various skills, these women have problems to enter formal employment as well as to find productive self-employment.

Moreover, illiterates, especially women, are traditionally excluded from making decisions, economic and otherwise. They are not able to participate as full citizens of the country, with the result that many Afghan women have lost confidence and faith that their condition will one day improve. It is a necessity that women's sense of self-esteem and realisation of their potential are revived through substantial efforts towards an increase of female literacy skills.

Illiteracy, low level of skills and poverty go together: higher concentrations of poverty are seen in rural areas, among marginalised groups.

Increased Attention – Skill Development, an Important Factor at National Policy Level

Skill development on a broader scale and in various fields is an important key for the development of the country and has become a higher priority.

In July 2010, the Government and the international community renewed their commitment within the framework of the *"Afghanistan National Development Strategy"* (ANDS) to improve governance, social and economic development, and security, to empower all citizens, government and non-governmental institutions to contribute to improved service delivery, job creation, economic growth and citizens' rights.⁵

In line with the ANDS, the education sector plays a main role to develop a productive workforce with relevant skills and knowledge that contributes to the long-term economic growth of the country. A main focus of the *"National Education Strategic Plan"* (NESP II and the Interim Plan), in line with the overall ANDS, is also on effective skills development to enhance the employability of adults and improve the relevance of vocational training. These are important starting points towards poverty reduction and improvement of living conditions.

5 Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS), Kabul, July 20, 2010.



Vocational Training

Source: Wolfgang Schur

The strategic importance of literacy and Lifelong Learning in reaching national and global Education for All (EFA) targets, Literacy and Non-Formal Education, has been identified as a core component of the National Education Strategic Plan.

In line with the Afghanistan MDG vision and NESP goals, the “*National Literacy Action Plan*” (NLAP) will contribute significantly to achieving the following results:

- Provide illiterate youth and adults across all 34 provinces with access to basic literacy and Lifelong Learning
- Enable at least 3.6 million Afghan adults by 2014 to attain functional literacy
- Provide opportunities for comprehensive literacy education integrating vocational skills, skills to develop own economic initiatives, agriculture and health components
- Provision of vocational and productive skill training at least to 360,000 adults (10% of learners of literacy education)
- Ensure that females, language minority groups, isolated communities, Kuchis and people with disabilities are targeted and prioritised
- Reduce the number of existing illiterates nationwide by at least 55% before 2020⁶

6 National Literacy Action Plan, 2009.

The NLAP has been formulated according to Afghanistan's particular needs, priorities, and national capacities. The visions for sustainable development of Afghanistan of the ANDS, Afghanistan MDG targets, the Education Law (2008) and NESP are guiding the NLAP.

The NLAP is developed specifically to achieve literacy goals set in NESP and MDG Goal 2 (achieve Universal Primary Education) and Goal 3 (Promote Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women). The effects of improved literacy are also projected to help in achieving the MDG Goal 1 (Eradicate Poverty and Hunger), Goal 4 (Reduce Child Mortality), Goal 5 (Improve Maternal Health) Goals 6 (Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, Tuberculosis and other Diseases) and Goal 7 (Ensure Environmental Sustainability).

The NESP has taken systematic steps to meet the EFA goals. The NLAP includes projections for needed increases in adult literacy programmes, in order to ensure continued progress towards the national EFA Goal 4.

Unfortunately the national EFA Goal 3 is not related to the wide range of skill developments that take place in the context of literacy programmes and incorporate components like civic, health education, development of own economic initiatives etc. EFA Goal 3 does not reflect the broad learning and life skills programmes, of out-of-school, non-formal and informal skill and competence development programmes for young adults.

The national EFA Goal 3 (Youth and Adult Learning Needs) only focuses on the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), curricula development, training of TVET teachers, enrolment, and on opportunities for skills-building through practicum and internships in partnership with the private sector.

No attention is given to informal/traditional apprenticeship training. Soft skills, such as literacy skills, life skills, productive skills, problem solving and creative thinking skills are not mentioned.

The NLAP was developed as an operational framework to effectively increase literacy rates and thereby contribute to improved livelihoods to foster positive change in the quality of the life of all Afghan people. The overall goal of NLAP is to build a productive, peaceful, secure and literate nation, through empowerment of the illiterate population of society with special focus on women and out of school girls and their families.⁷

The *"Afghanistan Skills Development Project"* (ASDP) under the *"National Skills Development Programme"* (NSDP) of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) addresses the skills gap by enhancing the employability

7 National Literacy Action Plan, 2009.

of Afghan youth and young adults and identifying market-demanded skills. The NSDP supports productive skill training, technical and vocational education in partnership with the private sector.⁸

The development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) started in 2009. The important task here is to redefine training skills, to build a system of reference for acquired skills and competency-based training standards. The development of the NQF is coordinated by the NSDP and will encompass all areas of education.

The validation and recognition of literacy skills programmes, of out-of-school, non-formal and informal skills and competence development of adults in the context of the National Qualification Framework are particularly important concerns of the Adult Education Sector, which *dvv international* and its partner, the Afghan National Association for Adult Education ANAFAE, have supported actively up to now.

8 National Skill Development Programme.

Literacy class

Source: Wolfgang Schur



Constraints and Challenges

The present process to develop the NQF design in Afghanistan shows great opportunities, especially in the combination of literacy skills, non-formal skill training, employment and career-oriented education programmes. But large gaps are also present. The transition to the formal education system is very problematic. Problem areas are the definitions and the recognition of skills acquired outside the formal system.

Most adults have acquired their skills and qualifications in informal contexts. An important question is the recognition of the acquired skills in educational practice, for learners of the literacy programmes and in many non-formal skill training programmes, as for those who improve their skills in their existing job or want to attend training to improve their employability.

Other gaps are related to the recognition of certificates from private educational institutions, the linkage and permeability between different training programmes and education sectors, as well as the mechanisms for quality control.

In practice, there are major conflicts with the implementation of the National Literacy Action Plan and the formal education system, since on the one hand 10% of the adults in literacy programmes are supposed to attain active usable productive and vocational skills and, on the other hand, their acquired skills are not recognised in such a way that they can enter the formal TVET system, in order to continue their vocational training. Adults with new literacy skills achieve literacy and numeracy competency equivalent to the third grade of formal schooling, they can join class 4 of the formal system but in practice, there are not classes for adults.

New Developments and Alternatives

The present revision of the National Literacy Curriculum, which includes literacy skills and skill development in various other fields, must take these constraints into consideration and should develop alternative means, by which out-of-school youth and adults may earn an educational qualification not only comparable to that of the formal elementary but also to the secondary school system.

The revision process of the present National Literacy Curriculum should include new definitions of skills and competences at different levels and should come up with a new system for assessing the levels of literacy and non-formal education learning achievement. This should be based on new National Literacy Standards and a Non-formal Education Accreditation and Equivalency Curriculum Framework in line with the National Qualification Framework.



Literacy class

Source: Wolfgang Schur

This approach would be a new chance to better monitor the wide field of skill development. It will increase the value and the importance of literacy skills in combination with non-formal skill training. At the same time, it will allow to bridge different strands of literacy approaches and skill development programmes, like LCEP II, the curriculum for women, the National Curriculum, police and military based literacy and skill development programmes, and other programmes.

Literacy Skills Training

*"Literacy is no longer exclusively understood as an individual transformation, but as a contextual and societal one."*⁹ Literacy and basic education include elements such as promoting health or environmental education, entrepreneurship training, preventive education, cultural skills and values for peace, tolerance, citizenship and human rights.

The literacy skills training programmes that we provide in cooperation with ANAFAE always incorporate additional components, like health, awareness and prevention, childcare, care for the sick, nutrition and sanitation; civic, human rights, gender relations, domestic violence, conflicts and resolution, development of own

⁹ UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2006.

economic initiatives, productive skills etc., to properly address the learners needs and to improve the relevance and values, as well as the motivation of the learners to continue participating in the programme. This approach creates a lot of synergies in the skill development process.

Local assessments are conducted. The programmes are well prepared, both with the learners and with local authorities, as well as with the respective district literacy departments.

The literacy programmes depend on the support from community. All communities have to provide free rooms for the literacy classes.

Our literacy courses are well adapted to the interests and conditions of the participants. We use the standard literacy material, based on the national curriculum. In addition, we have developed our own teaching material and books for the learners related to civic issues, health, own economic initiatives and teaching manuals for the facilitators.

Role-plays, learning games, dialogue, group work and other participatory elements and innovative methods are used; practical activities, like some hours of voluntary works for the community, support the learning processes. The facilitators are encouraged to use real-life and relevant examples during the teaching and learning processes. Learners are encouraged to discuss issues of relevance from personal life or to their respective communities. The discussions are important to improve speaking, writing, reading, comprehension and word recognition skills.

The literacy facilitators are from among the communities. They take part in a 21-day training. This includes an initial training before the start of the literacy classes, follow-up trainings during the full nine month cycle, special trainings on civic and health issues and to support the development of own economic initiatives of the learners, and a training for the post literacy part.

In a section of Kabul which is heavily populated by refugees, training in the manufacture of soap, cookies and noodle products was given to refugee women. Most were members of the Hazara ethnic minority, many of them widows. They sold the products they produced in their neighbourhoods, in order to improve their families' income. During training, the participants also acquired literacy, health and civic skills.

The literacy programme in the northern province of Balkh is accompanied by supplementary measures that offer chances to all 2700 learners to develop their own economic initiative, to learn about self-employment and new productive skills and improve their qualifications.

Participants are encouraged to organise in small groups and develop their own ideas for income-generating; they find out about market opportunities and improve

their skills to run their own small projects. ANAFAE assists the groups in the realisation of the projects. Considering that many of the participants are women from very traditional families, these projects offer a rare, albeit limited, chance for them to break out of their domestic isolation.

Our literacy skill trainings and incorporated components are an important basis for the development and improvement of personal capabilities, skills, key qualifications and new competences. They open up livelihood possibilities and create conditions for lasting economic and social development, and this, in turn, contributes to the stability and the civil development of the country. Literacy levels among learners have improved and, as a result, they are now able to conduct their everyday activities more independently.

The learners who completed our literacy courses tend to be more confident and more willing to take initiatives, to start an own small business. They are motivated to continue learning. Their cognitive skills, personality, self-esteem, attitudes, are improved. They seem more responsible for the education of their own children and encourage their family members to obtain an education.

Adult Learning Centres

More and more Afghans are discouraged with their situation. Many young adults are searching for employment. They need new skills and qualifications in order to find a job. If they succeed in finding work, they need to improve their qualifications to be able to keep up with the demands of their workplace. There is a huge demand for continuing education.

Young people are the asset of the country. But they require opportunities of learning and development to unleash their potential in an effective manner. Only skilled and trained young people can take the country ahead at a much quicker pace.



Training of the trainers

Source:

Wolfgang Schur

But normal training standards in Afghanistan are low. That is why ANAF AE, with the support of *dvv international*, has established 15 Adult Learning Centres (ALCs) during the last few years that provide open access to learning for young adults from the neighbouring urban districts. They operate under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.

The education programmes of the ALCs are focused very deliberately on the target group of young adults, because education and skills are an important key to their future and have a direct impact on the development of their families, on communities, on society, politics and business.

Qualifying measures and further training are organised to serve specific focus groups and strengthen the personal initiative and employability of the learners. The provision of these centres is primarily designed for young adults aged 15 to 35. The response and demand for additional qualifications among young adults is enormous.

- About 37.5% of the learners in the ALCs are 8th to 12th grade pupils. They want to finish the 10th or 12th grade and need additional support in different subjects. Many schools are overwhelmed and not able to perform effectively. Classes are held in shifts; large classes and insufficiently qualified teachers are only part of the problem. The existing schools cannot fulfil their important function for the transition to employment or to university education. The pressure on the education system is high. Many pupils after grade 12 do not pass the selection process to study at the universities. They are also among this group and now look for alternatives or want to improve their employability because higher education programmes are limited.
- A further 14.5% of learners in our ALCs are university students. Many of them have a “job” and are trying to qualify themselves beyond university to get opportunities for advancement or to get more skilled jobs with better pay.
- Another group of about 15% are employees/staff in state administration entities, from the finance sector, from small industries or from NGOs and also school teachers. Their ambition is to continue to qualify themselves for their position, because work processes and tools are changing rapidly. They can easily become “functionally illiterate” in their field and thus no longer needed. To prevent this, in particular they require computer skills, better language skills (Dari, Pashto) and skills in office management in addition to knowledge of English.
- Another group, of about 12%, is made up of people in small businesses. Computer abilities, bookkeeping and marketing skills are especially important to safeguard their newly established businesses.

- The group of unemployed, who attend the courses in our ALCs, is also at 12%. They are trying to improve their employability in order to get a job. This is an important starting point toward the improvement of living conditions.
- Young adults without any qualifications and school drop-outs make up a further group of about 9%. They find an opportunity here to develop further in order to improve their earning power.

Each month around 7400 learners take part in the courses of the ALCs. They play an important bridging role in the transition from school and university education to employment, as well as in related areas such as school drop-outs and vocational training.

In addition, six of our ALCs also provide literacy courses combined with health and civic education to the local communities for 1500 learners. They are in their most productive years, between the ages of 15 and 35, especially women.

Vocational training

Source: Wolfgang Schur



The programmes aim to enhance the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the learners, to strengthen their abilities, in order to successfully finalise their school education, to accompany them during their transition from school to work or university and to increase their work place effectiveness and efficiency.

The centres provide qualification programmes for the unemployed and the employed, with the aim of strengthening their employability, their career prospects and increase their usable skills for employment. They qualify young adults to get a job, and give young adults who already have a job the ability to perform their work in a qualified way as well as to get opportunities for advancement in their job with better pay.

The education programs are also aimed at young adults without any school certificate qualifications. Two vocational training groups headed by two master craftsmen have been established. Here young people without employment acquire basic vocational skills in painting, plastering, woodwork and other occupations. The vocational groups are responsible for repairs and construction works to be done in our Adult Learning Centres.

Work-related courses are offered in bookkeeping, computer operation, and software applications. Participants can improve their language skills in Dari and Pashto or learn English as a foreign language. The practical learning is giving them a much broader knowledge and skill set.

Some of the ALCs in Kabul, Herat and Mazar offer four-month basic courses in office management, to give young women qualified access to the labour market.

The Adult Learning Centres in Kabul also conduct qualification courses for the employees of the National Literacy Centre or the First Micro Finance Bank. Staff members are trained in computer skills, software applications, management and English.

As another important focus, the ACLs offer courses to develop social and civic competences or Art courses.

Moreover, instructors and teachers of the ALCs are regularly trained a how to support the learning processes.

The training programmes and qualifying measures supported by *dvv international* provide people with opportunities to increase their knowledge and learn important skills in various contexts. They open new chances for the future and improve prospects for a sustainable development of civil society.

Starting from a health care facility in the neglected area around the capital, Buenos Aires, the organisation Centro Ecumenico de Educación Popular (CEDEPO), developed an integrated program in which small farmers in the region acquire and apply the necessary skills for ecologically responsible agriculture, independent seed production, cooperative organisation, direct marketing, the protection of community politics and contact with national networks. Besides the skills for sustainable but also profitable business and work, they learn to identify their own interests and represent them politically. Alicia González is a founding member of the CEDEPO and has designed the described processes from the start.