

Barriers to Accessing Primary Education in Conflict-Affected Fragile States

Final Report

Sarah Dryden-Peterson
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1 Introduction

“[Education] is like a candle, which helps human beings,” said a schoolgirl in Jawzjan province, Afghanistan. She echoed the thoughts expressed by both in- and out-of-school children as well as their parents in Afghanistan and in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): education is what will lead children to a “bright future.” Children expressed the benefits of education on three levels: to themselves, to their families, and to society. They stated that education would enable them to become teachers, doctors, priests, and presidents, as well as help them to “be good people” and “live a good life.” They described how education would assist them in supporting their families and in being better marriage partners and parents. They articulated that children who are educated can “serve the country,” learning civic responsibilities, good character, and social skills.

Children without access to school, on the other hand, described not being able to share in this dream of what education can help to achieve. Said an out-of-school girl in Nangarhar, Afghanistan, “I’m thinking about my future because I was supposed to be a teacher in the future but I couldn’t reach to my desire. I’m unhappy and concerned about my fate.” An out-of-school boy in Kipese, DRC recounted his distress, being looked down upon as he walked in the community and feeling that “people do not love us.” Children further highlighted how in-school children are able to think about the future, but out-of-school children can only think about the present. Without fail, every child said they would like to go to school.

Despite this immense potential attributed to education by children and their parents, there are severe barriers that limit access to education, specifically in conflict-affected fragile states (CAFS) (see Box 1). In recent years, remarkable progress has been made in many countries toward Education for All (EFA) targets and Millennium Development Goals (MDG), but 77 million children remain out-of-school globally (UNESCO, 2008, p. 60). Over half of these children (53 percent) live in CAFS (Save the Children, 2009a). Two of the countries most affected are Afghanistan and DRC, where estimates suggest that almost two million and more than five million children, respectively, are out-of-school (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2008; UNICEF, 2005).

In Dakar, in 2000, conflict and disasters were explicitly acknowledged as obstacles to the achievement of EFA, and the evidence clearly points in that direction. While much work has been done on access barriers in low-income countries, there is currently no comprehensive body of evidence for the types of barriers to accessing education that exist in CAFS, how they function, and the kinds of policies and programs that might prove useful in promoting increased access to primary education. This study aims to begin filling this gap.

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The study comprised a comprehensive literature review and two field-based case studies (annexed). The literature review involved analysis of a broad range of policy documents, grey literature (including case studies, reports, and evaluations), and theoretical and empirical academic work. The accompanying case studies were field-based, involving data collection by Save the Children staff in three provinces of Afghanistan (Jawzjan, Kandahar, and Nangarhar) and one district of Nord Kivu, DRC (Lubero).^{2,3} Data collection was carried out in September, October, and November 2009. The case studies were designed as a participatory and child-friendly qualitative investigation to understand children's perspectives and experiences of the barriers to accessing primary education. The same six research strategies were used in both countries to collect data. Across the sites, they included: 20 focus groups with in-school children (n=138 children); 18 focus groups with out-of-school children (n=119 children); 14 focus groups with parents (n=107 parents⁴); 30 individual interviews with in-school children; 21 individual interviews with out-of-school children; 133 surveys with in-school children; 109 surveys with out-of-school children; 35 classroom observations; and 9 interviews with education officials and NGO staff.⁵ Research participants were sampled from schools and school catchment areas to vary by gender, ethnicity, language spoken, disability status, and poverty level.

The analysis in this report is descriptive in seeking to explain *what* is happening regarding barriers to accessing education; it is also explanatory in seeking to explain *how* these experiences of barriers to access come about. In triangulating the literature and findings from the case studies of Afghanistan and DRC, it also seeks to identify patterns and possible explanations for *why* certain barriers exist and are understood in particular ways. The findings from the study are not representative but instead aim to build on the understanding of barriers documented in the literature through in-depth and contextualized empirical investigations in Afghanistan and DRC, which may provide insights into more widely applicable barriers. The report is organized as follows:

- Section 2 provides a brief background on education in conflict-affected fragile states, including net enrollment ratios (NER) and primary completion rates (PCR) by country, with particular attention to the case study countries of Afghanistan and DRC.
- Section 3 summarizes the findings from the literature review and case studies, demonstrating that they fall into three categories: under-investment in education; exclusion related to individual- and group-level characteristics; and systemic discrimination in policies and practices. It examines access barriers through the lens of each of these categories and points to ways in which the barriers interact.
- Section 4 presents the conclusions and recommendations of this study, in particular that both supply- and demand-side factors are integral to accessing primary education and that the intersections of multiple barriers in contexts of conflict and fragility contribute to the intractable nature of these barriers.

² Please see the case studies for a more detailed description of the methodology.

³ Published report to include maps of Afghanistan and DRC with research sites marked.

⁴ Plus the number of mothers in focus group from Khoja Do Koh, Afghanistan, number to be supplied by Afghanistan team.

⁵ There were limitations to the data collection in DRC meaning that the vast majority of the data comes from Afghanistan; please see the individual case studies for more details.

2 Background to Education in CAFS

A vast number of children in conflict-affected fragile states do not have the opportunity to go to school. Across CAFS, however, there are marked differences in Net Enrollment Ratios (NER), as evident in Table 1. For example, in Sri Lanka, the countrywide net enrollment ratio is 97 percent, whereas in Somalia/Somaliland, it is 22 percent. There are massive data limitations related to these numbers, with projections simply unavailable for some countries and data often described as “unreliable.” Such is true for Afghanistan and DRC; in this table, the NER are estimates from 2000 and 2001, respectively. More recent data suggest that the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in primary school in DRC is approximately 64 percent (World Bank, 2005, p. 16), with estimates that in Nord Kivu only 34 percent of children have access to basic education (Refugees International, 2009). In Afghanistan, the most recent estimates suggest that 51.7 percent of children aged 7 to 12 are enrolled in primary school (Government of Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, 2008; ICON Institute, 2009, p. 12).

Access to education is not only limited by initial enrolment in school but also by retention. The literature from low-income countries is clear that unenrolled children who have never enrolled represent a small minority of out-of-school children, often by a factor of five or more (Lewin, 2007, p. 24). The principle problem of exclusion is instead one of children who do enroll but subsequently drop out for various reasons (Lewin, 2007, p. 6). The same is likely true in CAFS, where net enrollment ratios often mask major differences in retention and primary school completion. Primary Completion Rates (PCR) are almost always substantially lower than net enrollment ratios in any given country (compare Tables 1 and 2). In DRC, only 49 percent of those beginning primary school complete the primary cycle (UNICEF, 2005), and in Afghanistan, 54 percent of children drop-out during the first four years of school (Mansory, 2007, p. 28).

The differences in enrollment ratios and primary school completion rates across conflict-affected fragile states demonstrate substantial variation across this group of countries. The numbers also conceal vast and much more difficult to measure differences in quality and learning outcomes. Given this diversity, it is clear that there are no blueprints for increasing access and that the context of each country must be carefully considered in determining the barriers to access and course of action to address them. As documented in the following section, however, there are patterns in the barriers to access and in the strategies adopted to improve educational access that emerge from the literature and the empirical case studies.

3 Findings: Addressing Access to Primary Education in CAFS

There are multiple barriers preventing the remaining 77 million out-of-school children from accessing primary school. They can be grouped into three categories: under-investment in education, exclusion related to individual- and group-level characteristics, and systemic discrimination in policies and practices. The explanations provided for these barriers by children and parents make clear that access and retention are affected by supply- and demand-side factors, often especially in the ways in which they interact. Further, the issue of quality cuts across all access barriers. Indeed, this study supports conclusions in the literature that physical access to primary school is not meaningful unless it results in sustained enrollment and regular attendance, progression through the cycle at appropriate ages, and meaningful learning that has utility (see, for example, Lewin, 2007, p. 21)

3.1 Under-Investment in Education

Most conflict-affected fragile states have strong budgetary commitments to education (Brannelly & Ndaruhutse, 2008, p. 6). Yet, at the same time, given that their economic growth and tax revenues have been stymied by conflict and/or fragility, CAFS in general have limited national budgets, other competing and under-funded interests, and vast debts. Globally the median allocation of national budgets toward education is 16 to 17 percent (Brannelly & Ndaruhutse, 2008, p. 6), yet CAFS, on average, allocate only 12.7 percent of government expenditure to education (Save the Children, 2009a). At the same time, CAFS have many fewer donors than other low-income countries (Brannelly & Ndaruhutse, 2008, p. 8), and they received only 21 percent of all global aid to education between 2005 and 2007, despite being home to over half of the world's out-of-school children (Save the Children, 2009b, pp. vi, 3).

There is nevertheless evidence that increased investment in education may lead to more rapid progress in achieving universal primary education (UNESCO, 2007, p. 190). Among CAFS, DRC and Afghanistan represent two extremes in terms of both national investment in education and aid, and the effects of this investment can be seen in their experiences with expansion of primary enrollment. A key feature of the education system in DRC is the “almost complete lack of government provision and financing of all levels of education, including the primary level” (2005, p. xiv). Only 8.36 percent of the national budget was spent on education in 2008, and 2009 allocations are for 7.1 percent (Ministère de Plan, n.d.). At the same time, the country receives little aid given its size and poverty level (Greeley, 2007) and donors' efforts have been on short-term projects and infrastructure rather than systems development (AfriMAP & Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2009, p. 7). This lack of investment is reflected in the enrollment ratios remaining unchanged at approximately 50 percent for over a decade (UNICEF, 2001; World Bank, 2005, p. 16). In Afghanistan, on the other hand, there is wide-spread belief that education is the cornerstone of economic development, and it has been funded at relatively high levels, with 20 percent of the core budget allocated to education (all levels) (Giumbert, Miwa, & Nguyen, 2008, p. 426). At the same time, international aid to the country is relatively high, through pooled funding, project and budget support (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 424; Oxfam International, 2006). With this investment, the country has seen dramatic increases in access to education since the Back-to-School Campaign of 2002, with a 570 percent increase in school enrollment between 2000 and 2008, from 900,000 to 6 million children (Wardak & Hirth, 2009, p. 2).

Three examples provide insight into the mechanisms by which under-investment impacts on access to education, especially for the hardest to reach children. First, the literature is clear that investment in free primary education improves access to school, particularly for children from poor, rural families and for girls and the disabled (Colclough, 1996; Colclough & Lewin, 1993; Fredriksen, 2009). In situations where costs of education are reduced, or eliminated, usually with substantial support from donors, enrollment soars (Birdsall, Levine, & Ibrahim, 2005; Fredriksen, 2009). Children and parents in Afghanistan universally comment on the lack of school fees as a symbol of the importance that government attaches to education. In DRC, on the other hand, school fees are prohibitive as a percentage of per capita GDP (PAGE, 2007, pp. 36, 42) and estimates are that between half and 90 percent of salaries are supported by parents (AfriMAP & Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2009, p. 7; UNICEF & World Bank, 2006, p. 17; World Bank, 2005, p. 16). Parents in DRC

expressed the wish that “the government would do its work to make sure to pay the teachers,” and children described the various user fees as the most substantial barrier to access.

Second, under-investment in infrastructure acts as a barrier to access. Especially in CAFS, increasing the availability of schools in rural areas serves to increase enrollment (Burde & Linden, 2009; Lehman, 2003). In Afghanistan, this study supported the literature in finding that distance to school was a major barrier for approximately one third of children. Investment in other forms of infrastructure, including school buildings, desks, chairs, and books also proved important to children, who overwhelmingly described these investments as prerequisite to quality education. Third, a lack of investment in teachers contributes to non-enrollment. The absence of adequate teacher compensation in many countries results in lowered morale, absenteeism, and lack of interest in the profession. In both DRC and Afghanistan, this study found that teachers are often forced to work multiple jobs to support their families, reducing their commitment to teaching. In Afghanistan, where only 22 percent of teachers have completed basic teacher training (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 11; Jones, 2008, p. 281), children who participated in this study noted that the lack of trained teachers impacted their perceptions of school and their desire to attend, underlining the importance of investment in teacher training.

Continued under-investment in education in CAFS negatively impacts on children’s access to a quality education. The evidence is clear that when investment is made in education – specifically in the form of fee abolition, school infrastructure, and training and compensation of teachers – that great gains can be made in expanding access, including for the hardest to reach children. The cases of DRC and Afghanistan demonstrate that this kind of investment requires commitment both of national governments and donors in the form of continued targeted project aid to reach children not currently served by limited national systems as well as long-term development aid focused on systemic reform.

3.2 Exclusion from Education Related to Individual- and Group-Level Characteristics

As described above, there are barriers to accessing primary education that result at the intersections of the socio-political context and macro-level policy and practice. As the supply of schools increases and user-fees are reduced and eliminated, as has happened through much of the world over the past half-century (Fredriksen, 2009), attention to constraints on access to education must address issues of exclusion not rooted at country-levels but based on individual- and group-level characteristics. The mechanisms behind these forms of exclusion are explored below.

3.2.1 Barriers of Poverty

Across the literature and case studies, poverty emerges as the single most important barrier to accessing primary education. It operates, however, in different ways depending on the context. The barrier of cost, not surprisingly, has a disproportionate effect on children living in poverty; globally, 38 percent of children from the poorest quintile are out-of-school compared to 12 percent from the richest quintile (UNESCO, 2005a, p. 35). Poverty acts as a barrier to access when there are direct costs of school involved, such as school fees in DRC. It also acts as a barrier in four other ways. First, even in a place such as Afghanistan where there are no direct costs of school, there are indirect costs for school supplies, clothes (uniforms), transport and food. Parents in this study described how these costs can prove insurmountable for poor families, especially those living subsistence lifestyles without access

to money (see also, Fredriksen, 2009; King & van de Walle, 2007; Lewis & Lockheed, 2006). Second, and related, areas where more poor children live are usually proximate to schools with less resources and often education of an inferior quality than areas where rich children live, serving to decrease demand for initial access and persistence (World Bank, 2004 in Lewis & Lockheed, 2006, p. 71).

Third, the opportunity cost of school acts as a barrier to accessing primary school. In our survey of children in Afghanistan, for example, 70 percent of children cited the need to work as an access barrier. An out-of-school boy in Nangarhar province explained simply that “[A child] can go to school if he has time for schooling.” Families make choices about whether they will send their children to school or use their children’s time for household chores or outside labor. Children described how the entire family is often involved in these decision-making processes, and they recounted the disagreements that resulted. Specifically, they wanted to plan for their futures and that going to school was the best way to do that; they found it difficult to reconcile their parents’ thinking, which was centered in the present economic situation of the family (see also Hunte, 2005, pp. for more about household decision-making). Fourth, poverty intersects with other factors to make poor children multiply excluded. For example, while several studies find poverty to be a more important determinant of enrollment in school than gender (Education Policy and Data Center, 2007; Lewin, 2007, p. 17), girls living in poverty are doubly vulnerable to exclusion (Lewis & Lockheed, 2006). Living in a rural area and being poor interact in a similar way in serving as a barrier to accessing education, such lack of access to money in rural areas contributes to school admission rates in DRC that are 71.6 percent in urban areas and 43.6 percent in rural areas (IMF, 2007, p. 38). Indeed, some of the hardest to reach children are, in these ways, multiply excluded.

Children in Afghanistan proposed several solutions to mitigate the effects of poverty on access to education. They advocated that the government invest more in poor students, supplying them with notebooks, pens, uniforms, and school bags. In addition, they described the importance of conditional cash transfer programs, which have proven effective in many settings in enrolling and retaining the poor children they target (De Janvry & Sadoulet, 2006; Morley & Coady, 2003; Schultz, 2004, p. 213). Children in Afghanistan also recommended that schools be structured differently to accommodate their need to work, perhaps holding late afternoon or evening classes so that they could go to school after work.

3.2.2 Barriers of Region and Urban/Rural Residence

Globally, four out of five children who are out-of-school live in rural areas (UNESCO, 2008, p. 60). The literature describes two reasons for which region and rural residence may act as a barrier to accessing school: the distance that children must travel to school in terms of geography, time, and culture (Lehman, 2003) and the increased opportunity costs of school attendance in rural areas (Fredriksen, 2009). UNESCO demonstrates that place of residence is only significant for a limited number of countries once other socio-economic and demographic variables, such as poverty and mother’s education, are considered (2005a, pp. 39, 49). Yet it is the intersections with these other variables that create the critical barriers to access in rural areas.

In the case of Afghanistan, children in this study described how region and rural residence interact with other barriers, in particular, poverty, insecurity, gender, and quality. First, fathers in Jawzjan described how the poverty and remoteness of the region led to their neglect

by the central government, which “pay very little attention to our problems.” Second, in the survey, the average distance to the closest school did not differ substantially between provinces, ranging from 20 minutes walking in Nangarhar to 28 minutes walking in Kandahar. Yet children were clear that distance became a greater barrier in areas where insecurity was great. Children in Kandahar, particularly girls and younger children, were “afraid of the long way” and concluded that “people will send their children to school if there is a school in the village.” In Jawzjan, parents recalled recent incidents of kidnapping of children on the way to school and described the need for transport to ensure safe passage. Third, children expressed the idea that girls were treated differently depending on where they lived. “People living in the cities let their girls go to school” said an out-of-school girl in Kandahar who lives in a village without a school. Finally, children in Kandahar described the lack of qualified teachers in their schools and attributed this lack to their rural residence.

3.2.3 Barriers of Gender

The progress in expanding access to education since 1990 has been most apparent among girls. Indeed, girls are beginning to catch up to boys in both primary and secondary enrollment (Lewis & Lockheed, 2006, Chapter 1). Yet the access barrier of gender continues to persist in CAFS more so than in other countries. While 53 percent of the out-of-school population globally are girls (UNESCO, 2005a), 56 percent of the out-of-school children in CAFS are girls (Save the Children, 2009a). In DRC, large inequalities in access remain such that in the 2001-2002 school year, the GER for girls was 56 and for boys was 72 (World Bank, 2005, p. 16). And, in Afghanistan, while the focus on girls’ education since the fall of the Taliban has resulted in unprecedented strides in increasing access among girls from virtually zero to 42 percent of girls enrolled (Government of Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, 2008), more than one third of children in this study noted in the survey that “girls are unwelcome in schools.”

Three particular gender dynamics of society and education systems help to explain the persistent gender barrier in accessing education in CAFS, including opportunity costs associated with girls’ school attendance; girl-unfriendly structures, cultures, and environments; and sexual and gender-based violence. The case of Afghanistan suggests two strategies to address these causes: first, involvement of families and religious leaders in education systems to begin changing attitudes about girls’ education and, second, the recruitment and training of more female teachers. Of the children surveyed for this study, more than 80 percent believed that more girls would complete primary school if they had more female teachers. Critical to the success of any intervention is how gender interacts with other barriers, as gender often acts as an “intensifier” of other barriers and means that girls are “doubly disadvantaged” (Lewis & Lockheed, 2006). Indeed, nearly three-quarters of girls who are not in school globally come from excluded groups such as nondominant tribes, scheduled casts, rural populations, ethnic minorities, and indigenous peoples, and yet these groups represent only about 20 percent of the population of the developing world (Lewis & Lockheed, 2006, pp. 5, 8).

Further, while the access barrier of gender has usually been defined to focus on girls, the children in this study in DRC and in Afghanistan also identified that there are immense barriers for boys, especially as they relate to the interaction of gender and poverty. Despite the fact that gender parity has not been achieved and there remains work to be done in terms of increasing access for girls, more research into the particular barriers that boys face will help to move toward universal access to education for all.

3.2.4 *Barriers of Disability*

The World Health Organization estimates that 10 percent of the world's population experiences some form of disability or impairment (2006). And yet one third of out-of-school children are disabled (UNESCO, 2006). The first multi-country analysis of disability and education finds that youth with disabilities are substantially less likely to enroll in school, with the degree to which disability affects school enrollment often greater than other barriers such as gender, rural residence, or poverty (Filmer, 2005, pp. 9, 15). In Afghanistan, physically disabled children are 14 percent less likely and mentally disabled children are 20 percent less likely to attend school than all children (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 428). Indeed, more than 75 percent have never accessed school and, of those who do begin school, 75 percent drop out before completing primary school (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 30).

Children with disabilities are some of the most marginalized from education, yet data are extremely limited and the relationship between disability and educational access remains little understood. The primary explanation for lack of access for this population is that persons with disabilities are “invisible” (Bines, 2007, p. 12; Fast Track Initiative Secretariat, 2009, p. 5). The case studies from DRC and Afghanistan support this idea. One father in DRC, for example, stated: “how would you wish for a disabled child to go to school when, ever since we were born, we have never seen a disabled person among church leaders, political administrators, teachers. Where would disabled people work? It is therefore useless to have them study.” When asked about children with disabilities accessing school, one child in Afghanistan said, “in our area the majority of children, even healthy, do not go to school.” Children in Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, supported the idea forwarded by the literature that teachers play a major role in setting the tone for inclusion of disabled children (Bines, 2007, p. 32; Birbeck, Chomba, Atadzhanov, Mbewe, & Haworth, 2006; Fast Track Initiative Secretariat, 2008, p. 17; UNESCO, 2005b, p. 22).

3.2.5 *Barriers of Ethnicity and Language*

Sixty-eight percent of all out-of-school children live in countries that are highly linguistically fractured (UNESCO, 2004 in Lewis & Lockheed, 2006, p. 52), and almost all CAFS have both high linguistic and ethnic fractionalization (data from Alesina et al., in Lewis & Lockheed, 2006, pp. 52-53). There is evidence that ethnic and linguistic minorities access school at lower rates because they live at greater distances to primary schools and, when they do enroll, attend schools that are less well-resourced (King & van de Walle, 2007); there are also well-documented instances of overt discrimination against certain minority groups resulting in lowered attendance (Clavería & Alonso, 2003); and language barriers deter enrollment and retention due to lack of ability to access learning in schools (Brock-Utne, 2001).

In this study, most participants did not perceive ethnicity and language as major access barriers. However, children from minority backgrounds told of different experiences. One Uzbek child in Afghanistan wished for books in Uzbeki and was delighted when the teacher responded to his questions in his own language. A Turkmen student said that “as my father is a Turkmen, my classmates bothered me a lot. They were saying that I am Turkmen. I told my teacher and he punished them and honored me.” A similar tension was evident among the majority population of Nangarhar province and the Kuchi population, with instances of

fighting breaking out when they were collecting firewood and sometimes continuing at school. National statistics indicate that, in Afghanistan, ethnic and linguistic minorities indeed face increased barriers to accessing education. For example, Pashtu speakers are 10 percent less likely to be enrolled than other language groups (Giumbert, et al., 2008, pp. 428-429), and enrollment rates for Kuchis are only 6.6 percent for boys and 1.8 percent for girls (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 30). Studies that include more comprehensive research among ethnic and language minority communities in CAFS are urgently needed.

3.2.6 Barriers of Age

There are many reasons for which children do not begin school at the scheduled age, especially for poor and rural children. These barriers include cost, in particular in years of difficult harvest (Fredriksen, 2009; World Bank & UNICEF, 2009), distance to school for small children (Bommier & Lambert, 2000), and inefficiencies that lead to repetition and overage children crowding early primary classes (Lewin, 2007). In CAFS, on-going conflict, displacement, and recruitment into armed forces further interrupt schooling for many children, often for many years (Sommers, 2004; Wessells, 2006). In DRC, delayed or interrupted schooling affected more than 16 percent of boys and 12 percent of girls in 2001 (IMF, 2007, p. 38). In this study, there was wide discrepancy in the perception of age as a barrier to accessing school. While children in DRC were clear that overage children were not admitted to school, children in Afghanistan agreed that there were no school-level restrictions on access. Even without restrictions, however, overage children in Afghanistan faced barriers of social stigma as well as greater opportunity costs of their labor. In both DRC and Afghanistan, as well as elsewhere, literacy classes and accelerated learning programs have been effective at increasing access for overage children (Charlick, 2005; Lubamba-Panda, 2008). Despite the success of these programs, there remain several key challenges to reaching the many overage out-of-school children in CAFS including continued marginalization of ALP programs due to donor's focus on formal systems, difficulties in providing accreditation and certification, and lack of links to formal education (Echessa, n.d.).

3.2.7 Barriers of Displacement

Globally, 42 million people were forcibly displaced at the end of 2008, including 15.2 million across international borders as refugees, 26 million within national border as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and 827,000 asylum-seekers. CAFS and their neighboring countries are home to the vast majority of refugees and IDPs worldwide, making displacement a particularly important issue when examining barriers to accessing education in CAFS. DRC and Afghanistan present two different displacement situations, both common in CAFS. In DRC, where 1.1 million people are currently displaced in Nord Kivu (IDMC, 2009, p. 5), displacement is a primary reason for non-enrollment in school. Children and parents explained that often there are no schools in the areas to which they have been displaced due to lack of infrastructure and/or discontinued schooling due to conflict. In Afghanistan, the situation is one of returned refugees, with five million people having returned to the country since 2002 (UNHCR, 2009). Children in Afghanistan described accessing higher quality education while in exile and being frustrated upon return to Afghanistan that there was a lack of schools. In both situations, children described their families facing loss of livelihoods and exacerbated poverty, which negatively impacted their access to school. One out-of-school boy in DRC explained that "we fled the war with my family and, up to the present, my parents have no money to speak of. I cannot go to school."

UNESCO argues, in its approach to inclusion, that children “have the right to receive the kind of education that does not discriminate on grounds of disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, capabilities, and so on” (UNESCO, 2003). The Education for All framework, recognizing the limitations of this right in current practice, suggests a special focus on those children who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion (UNESCO, 2003, p. 4), and the more recent Oslo Declaration calls for policies that “focus on reducing disparities based on gender, wealth, rural/urban and other differences” (High-Level Group on Education for All, 2008, p. 3). These initiatives are especially urgent in CAFS, as countries with overall lower enrollment rates show the largest disparities in enrollment as a result of exclusion by poverty, gender, region, and urban/rural residence (Educational Policy and Data Center, 2007). Further, during times of crisis, those children already marginalized are even more likely to be excluded (Nicolai, 2007). Evidence from the literature and the two case studies demonstrates that this focus on excluded groups is essential. Further, the experiences of children in DRC and Afghanistan suggest that many children are excluded in multiple ways – as a result of poverty, gender, and rural residence, for example – and that these intersections of exclusions may well be the most pernicious.

3.3 *Systemic Discrimination in Policies and Practices*

Policies and practices within education systems and within individual schools can act as barriers to children accessing primary education. This study reveals that systemic discrimination or inequalities in quality, particularly related to curriculum and pedagogy, can have significant impacts on enrollment, attendance, and access to learning. Overlaying this barrier in CAFS is the pervasive nature of conflict and violence. These barriers are explored below.

3.3.1 *Quality: Curriculum and Pedagogy*

The critical challenge of poor quality education acts as a barrier to educational access in CAFS. Globally, too, the main obstacles to achieving universal access to primary education are both related to initial admission *and* to reducing dropouts and improving the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills, the latter which depends critically on the quality of the learning in schools (Fredriksen, 2009, p. 13; Lewin, 2007, p. 10). Nearly half of children globally who are out-of-school have never enrolled in school, yet a further 24 percent of out-of-school children entered school but subsequently dropped out; the remainder may enroll as late entrants (UNESCO, 2008, p. 63). Predictors of dropping out include repetition, low achievement, overage enrollment, poor teaching, degraded facilities, and very large classes (Lewin, 2009, p. 157), in other words lack of access to quality education. In settings of conflict and fragility, there has been under-investment in infrastructure, teacher training and compensation and a focus on restoring “normality” rather than fostering learning (Davies & Talbot, 2008, p. 513). Quality education in this context is an enormous challenge.

Children who participated in this study confirmed what is beginning to be documented in the literature: quality matters greatly to their decision-making about whether to enroll and persist in school. They focus specifically on the quality of *what* they learn, the curriculum, and the quality of *how* they learn, the pedagogy. The literature focuses on the ways in which politicized curriculum can act as a deterrent to school enrollment and attendance, especially in a country like Afghanistan where school curriculum is a focal point in Taliban resistance to

the current government (Amnesty International, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 2006). Afghan children and parents in this study, however, focused on two different aspects of curriculum when discussing how it can serve as a barrier to access. First, many out-of-school children expressed the desire that schools focus on skills useful “to make money.” In particular, they hoped that schools could adopt vocational curriculum that would lead children into professions where they might readily access jobs. Second, parents and children expressed specific expectations that schools provide both a social and religious curriculum as well as an academic one. Children perceived the benefits of education for both boys and girls to include civic responsibility and values, critical thinking skills, and discipline and respect for authority. Parents would feel better about schools, they said, if they were “to teach them morality and good ethics,” “to inform them about both the religious and world affairs,” “to inform themselves about their own and others’ situations,” and to “teach them religious and scientific issues.” Children focused on the important role of schools in inter-personal learning: “when children do not go to school, they fight with each other and afterwards they went to school they learned how to be polite and respect their elders and parents. They have learned social skills.” These aspects of curriculum, according to parents and children in Afghanistan, are essential to retaining children in school.

Pedagogy may be the most important aspect of quality (Alexander, 2008, p. 1), and this study provides evidence that certain aspects of pedagogy may act as barriers to enrollment, attendance, and learning in CAFS. In both DRC and Afghanistan, children expressed a clear image of what a good teacher would be like. For example, more than 80 percent of children in all sites emphasized the importance of teachers asking children questions in class. What children described experiencing in school and what researchers observed to occur in classes in both DRC and Afghanistan, however, often did not live up to children’s expectations of good teaching. In Afghanistan, children made a clear link between the poor quality of teaching and non-enrollment: “they do not want to go to school because there are not good teachers in the schools to teach them properly,” said an in-school child. Further, almost all children in both countries described incidents of corporal punishment, including being hit with a stick, carrying rocks on their heads, and standing on one foot under the sun. Many children and parents in DRC and Afghanistan mentioned fear of this kind of “bad behavior” from teachers as a reason for non-attendance.

Educational development in CAFS includes large efforts to shift the focus of teaching from a transmission model to child-centered pedagogy (for example, Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2004; UNESCO, 2004). Yet the world over, the process of transforming teacher practice is a slow one (Cuban, 1993). While children are clear about the kind of participatory teaching and learning they seek, facilitating group work, encouraging real discussion, and teaching critical thinking are new and difficult skills to learn (Brodie, Lelliot, & Davis, 2002; Clarke, 2003; O’Sullivan, 2002), especially in CAFS when teachers have had few experiences in which they have been participants in this kind of learning.

3.3.2 Conflict and Violence

As has been outlined in previous sections, the effects of conflict and violence on access to education in CAFS are indisputable: poverty is compounded, discrimination is enhanced, curriculum is politicized, and quality and pedagogy become secondary to restoring normality. In addition, the physical destruction of educational infrastructure and the pervasive nature of violence and insecurity for children act as systemic barriers to accessing primary education in CAFS. First, conflict often destroys the education infrastructure in a country, including both

physical structures and human resource capacity. In DRC, children described how fighting forces often burn benches and other school furniture for firewood. Years of conflict in DRC and Afghanistan have resulted in lack of training for new teachers as well as lack of access to education for parents, which children in Afghanistan explained leads parents not to know the value of education nor to encourage their children in school. Second, the “permanent insecurity” that pervades life in CAFS has daily impacts on the lives of children and families, including their access to education. In DRC, children are often on the front lines of conflict, either fighting in armed forces or vulnerable to the possibility of recruitment. In this situation, they described being “afraid to go to school.” In Afghanistan, there is nine percent less enrollment in households that have mentioned a “security incident” in the previous year (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 430). In this study as well, the constant fear for safety was the explanation many families gave against school enrollment. An in-school boy expressed the thoughts of many, “whenever there is the danger of being killed, we can’t study.”

In CAFS, there are systemic barriers to accessing education that result from the quality of curriculum and pedagogy and the pervasive nature of conflict and violence. These barriers serve to exclude individuals and groups both from physical access to schools and to learning once they are in the classroom. Curriculum and pedagogy, and their quality, are often embedded in the social and political context in which conflicts have their genesis. They embody discrimination, intolerance, and even violence, which all serve to exclude from school certain children. The evidence from the literature and the case studies suggests that these systemic barriers pervade national education systems and local institutions in CAFS, impacting all other aspects of access to education.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations: Intersections of Multiple Barriers to Accessing Primary Education and a New Framework for Expanding Access in CAFS

This study demonstrates that there are many reasons for which children in CAFS are marginalized and experience limited access to primary school. These barriers include under-investment in education, specifically for the hardest to reach children; exclusion based on poverty, region and rural/urban residence, gender, ethnicity and language, disability, age, and displacement; and systemic policies and practices related to the quality of curriculum and pedagogy and pervasive conflict and violence. Critical to understanding access barriers in CAFS is that children living in these countries already face a barrier to accessing education by virtue of where they live. They live in states affected by conflict and/or fragility that lack the capacity or the will to provide primary education or to support the necessary strategies to expand access to the most marginalized children. Indeed, the situation of CAFS means that the macro-level barrier of conflict and fragility overlays all other barriers to accessing education. Whether they are poor, rural, girls, disabled, ethnic or linguistic minorities, overage, or displaced, children in CAFS are vulnerable to exclusion from education before analysis on other barriers to access begins.

It is within the context of this macro-level barrier that children in CAFS experience other barriers to accessing primary education. One of the central findings of the study is that it is at the intersections of barriers that some of the most intractable barriers to expanding education to all children are found. Each of the individual barriers and the ways in which the barriers intersect have been summarized in this report and are analyzed in depth in the annexed literature review and case studies. The overlaps are further outlined in Table 3. In DRC, for

example, conflict and poverty act in synchrony to create insurmountable barriers to accessing primary education. Children and parents acknowledge that conflict is the basis for the poverty they experience and the resulting economic problems that prevent access to education. Yet it is not only an end to conflict they suggest, but a complete remaking of the system of education in DRC based on the abolition of school fees and the fair and timely compensation of teachers. In Afghanistan, conflict and insecurity have, for example, limited possible investment in necessary infrastructure and teacher training. At the same time, this volatile context exacerbates poverty that forces children of all backgrounds to work rather than attend school; reinforces, through fear, families' traditional hesitations in sending their daughters to school, particularly in rural areas; and further marginalizes rural regions and ethnic and linguistic minorities.

The finding of multiple exclusions and intersecting barriers leads to several recommendations for policy and practice with the aim of expanding access to the 41 million children remaining out-of-school in CAFS. First, the interplay of supply- and demand-side barriers in the examples from DRC and Afghanistan, and in many others summarized in Table 3, is of particular importance. Approaches to understanding barriers to access have often focused on seeing either the child as a problem or seeing the educational system as the problem (Fast Track Initiative Secretariat, 2009, pp. iv-v). This study, however, provides evidence that for each remaining out-of-school child in a conflict-affected fragile state, the barriers to access cannot be easily classified as originating from a lack of adequate supply or a lack of adequate demand. In most cases, this study suggests, the intersections of barriers mean that understanding access barriers requires a synthesis of both supply- and demand-side thinking. Indeed, access ultimately depends on decisions that children and households make about the benefits of enrollment and persistence in school in the context of the decisions that are available for them to make.

Second, the possibility of multiple exclusions should foster a rethinking of the idea of tailoring approaches to "specific marginalized groups," which the FTI recommends (Fast Track Initiative Secretariat, 2009, pp. iv-v). In order to capture the most marginalized children, those seeking to expand access will need to expand their lens beyond traditional and well-defined marginalized groups to include those marginalized at the intersection of characteristics. Existing practices can supply the building blocks for these strategies, and they have been outlined in detail in the annexed literature review and case studies; they are summarized in Table 4. Many of these promising interventions do address multiple exclusions and the intersection of supply- and demand-side factors, yet such thinking should be made routine and explicit in the design and implementation of programs. Multiple and simultaneous interventions will be needed to address the root causes of intersecting access barriers as none of the promising initiatives summarized in Table 4, on its own, enough to reach the 41 million currently out-of-school children in conflict-affected fragile states.

Third, and related, is the need to consider the context of each situation in which children are out-of-school. The determination of viable solutions to expand primary school access depends on who the out-of-school children are and the underlying causes of their marginalization. The case studies demonstrate that intersecting barriers differ from country to country, and often at regional or local levels, and interventions will be received and will be effective in different ways depending on the context.

Fourth, actors working on education issues in CAFS must address the systemic nature of conflict and violence through their work. Goodhand categorizes agencies by those that work

“around” conflict, avoiding conflict areas; “in” conflict by taking operational measures to stay active despite security risks; and “on” conflict in addressing the root causes of conflict in their work (in Sigsgaard, 2009, p. 17). This study supports the findings of Save the Children’s recent Global Evaluation, which demonstrates that education can be a key space in which to work “on” conflict. In Afghanistan, for example, encouraging community involvement in schools, particularly by religious leaders, has been a key strategy to make schools – and communities – safer by countering the misconception that girls’ education is anti-Islamic (Save the Children, 2008, p. 17). This type of work “on” conflict will be critical to decreasing the salience of the macro-level barrier of conflict and violence that impedes access to primary education in CAFS.

Fifth, continued research is necessary to understand the multiple barriers to accessing education in each conflict-affected fragile context. Data on both in-school and out-of-school populations needs to be consistently collected by schools and Ministries of Education. Data on excluded groups, often missing from national datasets, is critical. In addition, all international donors and implementing agencies should undertake quality monitoring and evaluation of their programming related to educational access initiatives, including documentation of innovative solutions and good practice, and disseminate findings widely. Finally, in-depth and longitudinal academic inquiries into access barriers may prove essential in untangling the pernicious barriers to access in CAFS, which continue to prove elusive.

Table 1. Net Enrollment Ratios (NER), CAFS

Country	NER
Myanmar (Burma)	100
Sri Lanka	97
Indonesia	96
Cambodia	90
Guatemala	94
Iraq	89
Colombia	88
Zimbabwe	88
Uganda	82
Nepal	79
Rwanda	79
Burundi	75
Guinea	72
Ethiopia	71
Sierra Leone	69
Timor Leste	68
Pakistan	66
Nigeria	63
Chad	60
Angola	58
Rep. of Congo	55
Cote d'Ivoire	55
D.R. Congo	52
Haiti	50
Eritrea	47
Central African Rep.	46
Afghanistan	41
Sudan	41
Liberia	39
Somalia/Somaliland	22
South East Europe*	-

*Data not available for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro; NER for Serbia is 99.

- signifies data not available

Sources: (Save the Children, 2009c; Save the Children Guatemala, 2006, p. 17; for Indonesia, UNESCO, 2008, p. 303)

Table 2. Primary Completion Rates (PCR), CAFS

Country	PCR	Year
Zimbabwe	113	1997
Sri Lanka	111	2001
Indonesia	91	2000
Colombia	85	2000
Cambodia	70	2001
Nigeria	67	2000
Uganda	65	2001
Nepal	65	2000
Pakistan	59	2000
Iraq	57	1995
Timor Leste	54	2001
Guatemala	52	2000
D.R. Congo	49	2005
Rep. of Congo	44	2000
Burundi	43	1998
Afghanistan	42	2001
Cote d'Ivoire	40	1999
Haiti	40	1997
Eritrea	35	1999
Sudan	35	1996
Guinea	34	2000
Sierra Leone	32	2000
Rwanda	28	2000
Ethiopia	24	1999
Chad	19	2000
Central African Rep.	19	2000
Angola	-	-
Liberia	-	-
Myanmar (Burma)	-	-
South East Europe*	-	-
Somalia/Somaliland	-	-

* Data not available for Kosovo; PCR (year) for Bosnia and Herzegovina is 88 (1999); Montenegro is 96 (2000); and Serbia is 96 (2000).

- signifies data not available

NB: While these data are the most up-to-date, reliable data available, many of them are a decade old and do not reflect recent realities.

Source: (Bruns, Mingat, & Rakotomalala, 2003, pp. 46, 47, 49, 51, 52, 55, 56, 174, 176); for Afghanistan, (Mansory, 2007) and for DRC, (UNICEF, 2005).

Table 3. The Intersections of Multiple Barriers to Accessing Primary Education in CAFS

	Poverty	Region/Rural	Gender	Disability	Ethnicity/ Language	Age	Displacement	Curriculum	Quality	Pedagogy
Poverty	Direct and indirect costs associated with school attendance Opportunity costs of labor									
Region/Rural	Parents pay teachers Lack of access to money	Insecurity in traveling distances to school								
Gender	Opportunity costs of girls' labor Early marriage Lack of adequate sanitation facilities at school	Opportunity costs of girls' labor Insecurity traveling distances to school Early marriage Lack of adequate sanitation facilities at school	Sexual violence amid culture of violence Less protection mechanisms in place							
Disability				Conflict increases number of disabled						
Ethnicity/Language		Physical and cultural distance between closest school and home village			High ethnic and linguistic fractionalization Discrimination					
Age	Prohibitive costs delay entry Opportunity cost of labor	Distances are great for young children				Education disrupted for many years Child soldiers				

Macro-level barriers of conflict/ fragility and under-investment in education overlay all other barriers and are described in the grey boxes

	Poverty	Region/Rural	Gender	Disability	Ethnicity/ Language	Age	Displacement	Curriculum	Quality	Pedagogy
Displacement	Loss of livelihoods	Most neglected regions of a country	Sexual violence amid culture of violence Less protection mechanisms	Disrupted community support Less protection mechanisms	Disputes with host society Instruction in unfamiliar language	Increased number of overage learners Child soldiers	Uncertainty about the future Disputes with host society			
Curriculum	Instruction in an unfamiliar language Not geared to making money in existing economy	Instruction in an unfamiliar language	Inflexible to domestic duties Culturally inappropriate Instruction in an unfamiliar language		Discrimination Lack of knowledge of culture Instruction in an unfamiliar language Alienating content	Not age-appropriate	Uncertainty over curriculum to use Instruction in unfamiliar language Disputes with host society	Promotes alienation from learning Intolerant and discriminatory		
Quality	Fewer basic inputs	Fewer basic inputs Teacher absenteeism	Lack of female teachers	Instruction without adaptation	Fewer basic inputs Teachers with less training Instruction in an unfamiliar language	Overage learners repeat classes	Focus on normality rather than quality		Lack of investment in quality post-fee abolition Families' low expected returns to education Lack of trained teachers Focus on normality rather than quality	
Pedagogy				Lack of inclusive approaches			Relationships between teachers and learners defined in culture of violence		Lack of learner-centered approaches Teacher-centered pedagogy contributes to authoritarian environment Class size limits pedagogy	Teacher-centered pedagogy conflicts with roles children play in conflict Teacher-centered pedagogy contributes to authoritarian environment Pervasiveness of corporal punishment

Table 4. Promising Interventions and the Multiple Barriers on which they Work

	Poverty	Region/ Rural	Gender	Dis- ability	Ethni- city/ Lang- uage	Age	Displace- ment	Curric- ulum	Quality	Ped- agogy
Reducing physical, time, and cultural distance to schools by (re)building more schools, preferably within each village		✓	✓	✓	✓					
Develop models of schools with multi-grade options and one-room schoolhouses in low density areas and train teachers for these positions		✓								
Supporting community schools that operate within the government system		✓	✓				✓		✓	
Abolishing direct and indirect costs to realize fee-free schooling, with attention to the issues of possible quality declines from rapid expansion in primary enrollment after fee abolition	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Investing in teachers through adequate compensation to ensure their longevity and commitment to the profession									✓	
Developing the Education for All—Fast Track Initiative Education Transition Fund to attract the necessary donor support for the financing needs of conflict-affected fragile states										
Supporting conditional cash transfer programs, especially in situations where the opportunity cost of children's labor is high such as for poor, female, rural, and overage children	✓	✓	✓			✓				
Providing school feeding programs that are managed by the community and do not use teacher or child labor, especially in situations where opportunity costs of sending children to school are high such as for poor, female, displaced, and rural students	✓	✓	✓				✓			
Creating scholarships for school attendance that target families for which the benefits of education may seem small or unknown, such as poor, rural, female, disabled, and ethnolinguistic minority families	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Developing targeted programs to increase educational inputs and teaching and learning quality in schools serving ethnolinguistic minorities and disabled learners in poor, rural areas	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓
Supporting more extensive and wide-spread teacher training that expands the number of female teachers and that involves learning about and practicing approaches to education that are inclusive in their design to meet the individual needs of each learner	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Poverty	Region/ Rural	Gender	Dis- ability	Ethni- city/ Lang- uage	Age	Displace- ment	Curric- ulum	Quality	Ped- agogy
Creating bilingual education programs in areas where the mother tongue is not the language of instruction in schools, specifically for indigenous and ethnic minority children					✓				✓	
Supporting catch-up, accelerated learning, or alternative education programs that allow overage students, specifically displaced learners, girls and ethnolinguistic minorities, to build the necessary competencies to transfer to the formal school system			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Fostering environments in which child-centered pedagogy can flourish.									✓	✓
Coordination between donors and national governments on funding and programming approaches	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collecting more reliable and comprehensive data on out-of-school populations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Funding and coordinating of research and evaluation on out-of-school children, including documentation of best practices	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supporting literacy classes or accelerated learning programs that allow children who need to work to simultaneously participate in educational activities	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			
Creating livelihood programs geared toward raising the income of families in order to offset the opportunity costs of child labor lost to school time	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			
Developing codes of conduct for teachers that respect child rights and help to make schools child-friendly places			✓						✓	✓
Facilitating the decentralization of education to provincial and local levels to assist in local accountability and decision-making		✓			✓			✓	✓	✓
Addressing issues of insecurity and violence in and around schools through community involvement, guards, perimeter walls, and transportation		✓				✓			✓	✓
Supporting advocacy programs geared toward raising awareness of the value of education particularly for parents who have not had the opportunity to go to school	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				

Box 1. Conflict-Affected Fragile States (CAFS)

Conflict-affected fragile states (CAFS) are countries that are impacted by conflict, income disparity, weak governance, and/or inequality in resource allocation. These situations are brought about by conflict- or natural disaster-induced emergencies, chronic political crises and instability, post-conflict or disaster reconstruction periods, and/or on-going state fragility. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development — Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) emphasizes the role in state fragility of both limited *capacity* and limited *will* on the part of the state to perform key functions for the population, such as providing basic services in security, health, and education (OECD, 2008).

There is no agreement on a list of countries classified as “conflict-affected fragile states.” The following list, on which this study is based, includes the countries identified as CAFS by Save the Children in the *Last in Line*, *Last in School* reports (2007, 2008, 2009). As specified in these reports, countries are classified as “conflict-affected” if they are included on the Project Ploughshare list of states that experienced at least one armed conflict between 1995 and 2004, or if they are classed as “critical” on the *Foreign Policy* 2006 Failed States Index. Countries are categorized as “fragile” if they are classified as either “Core” or “Severe” on the World Bank 2006 Low Income Countries Under Stress list. In this way, countries on this list may be conflict-affected or fragile but not necessarily both. The countries include: Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, Iraq, Liberia, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia/Somaliland, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Timor Leste, Uganda, Zimbabwe.

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Barriers to Accessing Primary Education in Conflict-Affected Fragile States

CASE STUDY
Afghanistan

By Sarah Dryden-Peterson



Photo by Mats Lingell



Save the Children

CASE STUDY Afghanistan

1 Introduction

Lack of access to education stands in the way of human rights and development promises. It is a stumbling block to reaching the global Education for All (EFA) targets and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015. In recent years, there has been remarkable progress in many countries toward these targets. Yet 77 million children are still out-of-school globally (UNESCO, 2008, p. 60). Over half of these children (53 percent) live in conflict-affected fragile states (CAFS) (Save the Children, 2009).¹

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world with more than half of the population living in poverty (UN News Centre, 2007). Significant conflicts since the 1970s have had tremendous impact on quality of life in the country, including access to education. Estimates suggest that almost two million children are out-of-school (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2008). There have been major investments and substantial gains in enrollment since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, education as a right and requirement of all Afghans is now enshrined in the Constitution (Articles 43 and 44), and education is provided free in government schools. However, Afghanistan remains far from meeting EFA and MDG targets by 2020,² with analyses suggesting that if Afghanistan follows the patterns observed in other countries, it will be several decades before these goals are met (see Figure 1b in Giumbert, Miwa, & Nguyen, 2008, p. 420). While data are limited, the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) household survey in 2007-8 concluded that only 51.7 percent of children aged 7 to 12 are enrolled in primary school, 60.4 percent among boys and 42.1 percent among girls (Government of Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, 2008; ICON Institute, 2009, p. 12), with a recent study indicating that 54 percent of children drop-out during the first four years of school (Mansory, 2007, p. 28).³

Much work has been done in recent years to identify the barriers that prevent children in Afghanistan from accessing primary education. This case study is unique in exploring the barriers from the perspective of in-school and out-of-school children. Based on field research in Jawzjan, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces, the study analyzes the experiences of children in the context of government policies and school practices. It reveals the extent to

¹ There is no agreement on a list of countries classified as “conflict-affected fragile states.” The following list, on which this number is based, includes the countries identified as CAFS by Save the Children in the *Last in Line*, *Last in School* reports (2007, 2008, 2009). As specified in these reports, countries are classified as “conflict-affected” if they are included on the Project Ploughshare list of states that experienced at least one armed conflict between 1995 and 2004, or if they are classed as “critical” on the *Foreign Policy* 2006 Failed States Index. Countries are categorized as “fragile” if they are classified as either “Core” or “Severe” on the World Bank 2006 Low Income Countries Under Stress list. In this way, countries on this list may be conflict-affected or fragile but not necessarily both. The countries include: Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, Iraq, Liberia, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia/Somaliland, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Timor Leste, Uganda, Zimbabwe.

² This is the target set by the Afghanistan Compact of London (2005) for meeting universal primary education (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007; Wardak & Hirth, 2009).

³ The Report of the ED Rapid Reaction Mechanism Assessment Mission of April 2002 concluded that 56% of boys and 74% of girls drop out by grade 5 (in Anastacio & Stallard, 2004).

which barriers of poverty (especially the opportunity costs of school), and on-going insecurity, and poor quality teaching and learning negatively impact children's access to school; it also highlights the intersections of multiple barriers in these overall contexts, particularly region of residence, gender, and ethnicity, in shaping the most pernicious access barriers. The report concludes by offering recommendations to government, donors, and NGOs on actions that could be taken to improve access to quality primary education in Afghanistan.

The case study of Afghanistan is part of a larger Save the Children Alliance research project on barriers to accessing primary education in conflict-affected fragile states. The overall project includes a comprehensive literature review, two field-based case studies,⁴ and a synthetic final report. The project aims to identify evidence for the types of barriers to accessing education that exist in CAFS, how they function, and the kinds of policies and programs that might prove useful in promoting increased access to primary education. Findings from the literature indicate that these barriers fall into three broad categories: under-investment in education; exclusion related to individual- and group-level characteristics; and systemic discrimination in policies and practices. These categories have guided the design of the case study of Afghanistan and the presentation of findings in this report.

2 Background

2.1 Education and Conflict in Afghanistan⁵

Prior to the 1979 Soviet invasion, Afghanistan had a relatively well-functioning education system such that studies predicted universal primary education would be achieved in Afghanistan by the end of the 20th century. Indeed, between 1950 and 1978, enrollment in education at all levels increased more than ten-fold and became available outside of large urban centers (Samady, 2001, p. 600). However, the wars and invasions that engulfed the country during the last two decades of the century, and the resulting technical and economic constraints, rendered these estimates "painfully unrealistic" (Samady, 2001, p. 593). By 1999, school enrollment was 29.4 percent, 52.6 percent for boys and 4.5 percent for girls (Samady, 2001, p. 600). Symptom of this recent history of a non-functional education system, only 17 percent of the population aged 25 years and over has attended any type of formal education, and the corresponding figure for women is as low as 6 percent (ICON Institute, 2009, p. 12).

Beginning with the 2002 Back-to-School Campaign, there have been dramatic increases in access to education in Afghanistan. There was a 570 percent increase in school enrollment between 2000 and 2008, from 900,000 to 6 million children. Over this time, the proportion of girls enrolled in school went from practically zero to 35 percent (Wardak & Hirth, 2009, p. 2). The number of teachers in the country has risen seven-fold over the same time period (Sigsgaard, 2009), and approximately 4,000 schools have been reconstructed or built since 2003 (Wardak & Hirth, 2009, p. 2). Despite these achievements, the situation in Afghanistan remains fragile. Two aspects of this fragility are particularly salient for education. First is the on-going insecurity around schools including, for example, a documented 204 attacks on schools, teachers, and students in an 18-month period between January 2005 and June 2006

⁴ Afghanistan and Democratic Republic of Congo.

⁵ A thorough review of the history of conflict in Afghanistan and its effects on education is beyond the scope of this case study. For more on this topic, see, for example (IDMC, 2008; Jackson, 2009; Samady, 2001; Sigsgaard, 2009).

(Human Rights Watch, 2006) and 75 learners and teachers killed in such attacks in 2005 and 2006 (Amnesty International, 2007). Second is the challenge of reintegrating almost five million Afghans who have returned to the country since 2002 (UNHCR, 2009a), with various types of educational experiences while in exile.

In these situations of hope and challenge, there is consensus that both supply- and demand-side factors are critical reasons for non-enrollment in school. Initially, focus was on the supply side, particularly the lack of buildings, overcrowded classes, and untrained and under-compensated teachers (Samady, 2001, p. 600). Data from the 2003 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) indicated that supply-side factors are indeed critical barriers. In order of importance to households, they include: distance to school, inadequate facilities, lack of separate schools for boys and girls, the teachers' gender, and inadequate sanitation. Demand-side factors, however, may be equally important. Data from the same survey indicates that households see the following issues impeding access to school: the need to engage children in domestic work, belief that schooling is not necessary, the opportunity cost of school in terms of household income, the expenses associated with school, and the feeling of shame when sending children to school (see Table 1 in Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 421). Qualitative work with households identifies a similar combination of supply- and demand-side reasons for non-enrollment in school (see Tables 1 and 2 in Hunte, 2005, pp. 20, 21; see Table 7 in Mansory, 2007, p. 22). This study examines the experiences of children and their explanations for lack of access to and retention in primary school. It demonstrates that, from children's perspectives, both supply- and demand-side factors remain important, often especially in the ways in which they interact.

2.2 *Methodology*

This study was designed as a qualitative investigation seeking to understand children's perspectives and experiences of the barriers to accessing primary education in Afghanistan. A participatory and child-friendly approach guided the development of six research instruments to collect data from in-school and out-of-school children and to triangulate it with a limited amount of data from parents, schools, education officials, and NGO staff.⁶ The instruments included:

- Focus group guide for in-school and out-of-school children, which involved photos of in-school and out-of-school children and objects used at school (notebook and pencil) to act as prompts for conversation about barriers to access.
- Interview guide for individual interviews with in-school and out-of-school children, which involved engaging the child in constructing a timeline of his/her life using local materials and marking the times where school has been important to promote conversation about barriers to access.
- Survey for in-school and out-of-school children, which gathered basic demographic data such as gender, age, location of residence, and parents' educational levels as well as educational data such as school fees paid, experience in school (eg. years, grade levels, type of school), reasons for attendance/non-attendance, and perceptions of quality and benefits of schooling.
- Focus group guide for parents, which involved photos of in-school and out-of-school children to act as prompts for conversation about barriers to access for their children.

⁶ The same research instruments were used in Afghanistan and DRC in order to facilitate comparison across the cases in the final synthetic report.

- Observation guide for participant observation in classrooms, aimed at understanding the educational experiences of children with respect to discrimination, inequalities, curriculum, quality, and pedagogy.
- Interview guide for individual interviews with education officials and NGO staff, which involved open-ended questions and prompts to generate broad thinking on possible access barriers and to elicit their personal experiences with promoting access.

Thirteen Save the Children staff members from provincial offices in Jawzjan, Kandahar, and Nangarhar participated in a four-day workshop in Kabul designed to build capacity in qualitative research theory and practice as well as in the implementation of the particular instruments for this research.⁷ During the training, the interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires were piloted with children and parents at Save the Children partner NGOs in Kabul.⁸ The instruments were reviewed and adapted based on this piloting and translated and back-translated to ensure accuracy.

Data was collected in three provinces of Afghanistan: Jawzjan, Kandahar, and Nangarhar (see Figure 1).⁹ UNICEF ranks these provinces 18th, 4th, and 3rd among all 32 provinces of Afghanistan in terms of indicators of children's quality of life (UNICEF, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). These areas were chosen to represent the range of educational experiences in Afghanistan as well as places with large numbers of out-of-school children. While Jawzjan and Nangarhar have net enrollment ratios similar to the national ratio, Kandahar lags far behind at 14.4 percent enrollment (20.5 percent among boys and 8.1 percent among girls). On indicators of poverty, such as access to safe drinking water, electricity, and under-5 mortality rates, the provinces are similar, however, Kandahar lags in access to electricity and Nangarhar in access to safe drinking water. Jawzjan has substantially higher numbers of children ages 5 to 15 engaged in child labor (see Table 1).

In each of the three provinces, two communities were selected as the focus of the investigation. One school was chosen in each site to be representative of the community in terms of size, school fees charged, and quality; they were schools in which Save the Children had not previously worked.¹⁰ The schools differed along several dimensions, as can be seen in Table 2, including the extent of their infrastructure (as measured by permanent classrooms and pupil: latrine ratios), the percentage of qualified teachers, their pass rates, and the percentage of displaced and ethnic minority children enrolled. Participants in the research were selected from the school (in-school children) and from the school's catchment area (out-of-school children and parents) to vary by gender, ethnicity, language spoken, and poverty level.¹¹ Data collection included focus groups with in-school children (n=15) and out-of-school children (n=13); focus groups with parents (n=9); individual interviews with in-school

⁷ Two female researchers from Kandahar were not able to travel to Kabul for the training because no male family member was able to accompany them. Consequently, the other researchers from Kandahar had to transfer the knowledge and skills developed to the female researchers upon return.

⁸ Due to the security situation, the initial sites identified for pilot testing of all instruments had to be changed at the last minute. Since the instruments could not be tested in a school, the school observation tool was not pilot tested in Afghanistan.

⁹ Figure 1 in final publication should be map of Afghanistan with research sites marked.

¹⁰ While it was planned that the research schools be non-SC impact schools, there were safety reasons for which some of the schools in which research was conducted were schools that Save the Children already had a relationship with. I am waiting on clarification from the Save teams in Afghanistan as to which schools were SC impact schools and which were not.

¹¹ Children with disabilities were not able to be included. Perhaps someone from the Afghanistan team can explain why?

children (n=24); individual interviews with out-of-school children (n=21); surveys with in-school children (n=116); surveys with out-of-school children (n=109); lesson observations (n=20); and interviews with education officials and NGO staff (n=4). In total, the research involved 495 children, 61 parents,¹² and 4 key informants. Fieldwork was carried out in September, October, and November 2009.

Analysis of the qualitative data involved the development of a coding system of *emic* codes that emerged inductively from the research participants and *etic* codes that derive from the literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Using the software program maxqda, all of the interviews, focus groups, and observations were coded line-by-line, using classical, free, and in-vivo coding processes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Basic statistical analyses were conducted on the quantitative data using the Stata 9.2 software package. The analysis is descriptive in seeking to explain *what* is happening regarding barriers to accessing education; it is also explanatory in seeking to explain *how* these experiences of barriers to access come about.¹³ The findings from this case study are not representative but instead aim to build understanding of barriers that exist in these areas of Afghanistan and that might be applicable to other locales.

3 Barriers to Accessing Education in Afghanistan: Findings

“[Education] is like a candle, which helps human beings,” said a schoolgirl in Jawzjan province. She echoed the thoughts expressed by both in- and out-of-school children as well as their parents, that education is what will lead children to a “bright future.” One boy in Nangarhar explained that an old man told him, “Study, my son! We are sightless [ignorant], but you will see things with two eyes and you will have a bright future” (see also, Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). Children expressed the benefits of education on three levels. First, they outlined the individual benefits of education. The most commonly cited benefit of education in survey responses was that it would help someone to find a job, with 75.1 percent of children saying this was true for boys and 63.6 percent for girls (see Table 4). An out-of-school boy in Nangarhar explained that indeed through education one can be “rescued from poverty and find good employment.” Over and over again, children expressed both the concrete idea that if they go to school, “they can become a doctor or an engineer”¹⁴ and the more abstract idea that school will help them to “be good people.” Out-of-school children on the other hand worried about their futures. Said an out-of-school girl in Nangarhar, “I’m thinking about my future because I was supposed to be a teacher in the future but I couldn’t reach to my desire. I’m unhappy and concerned about my fate.”

Second, children outlined the benefits of education for their families. On the survey, sixty percent of children said that an education would enable both boys and girls to support their families (see Table 4). In interviews and focus groups, most children described these benefits as financial, in terms of the money they would make in the positions of teacher, doctor, and engineer. More than 50 percent of children also thought that education plays a role in being a better parent, for girls, and 36 percent thought it plays that role for boys; 32.4 percent thought

¹² Plus the number of mothers in focus group from Khoja Do Koh, to be supplied by the Afghanistan team.

¹³ The final report further compares across the cases of Afghanistan and DRC and identifies patterns, in the context of the literature review, to examine possible explanations for *why* certain barriers exist and are understood in particular ways.

¹⁴ Hunte finds that this phrase is used so frequently “that it appeared to be just another term for ‘being educated’” (2005, p. 18).

education makes a better marriage for girls, and 23.1 percent for boys. Some children also spoke of the benefits the literacy they acquire in school brings to their families. For example, children expressed immense pride when they were able to read doctor's prescriptions and signs in public places. An out-of-school boy in Nangarhar said sadly, "I know they [children who are in school] are better than me. They can read boards, I can't." Children further highlighted how in-school children can think about the future, but out-of-school children can only think about the present: "this boy works to support his family today, but that student studies and will be a big man tomorrow," said an in-school boy in Nangarhar.

Third, children discussed the benefits of education for society. In particular, they articulated that children who are educated can help society whereas those who are uneducated are a burden on society. Many children mentioned that becoming educated was a way to "serve the country" and that it is educated people who will "rescue the country from bad fortunes" and "help needy people." More than 25 percent of children thought that a benefit of education is the learning of civic responsibility and values, for both boys and girls (see Table 4) and, in interviews and focus groups, they discussed the importance of school in building good character and social skills. An in-school girl in Jawzjan described how educated children would grow up to serve the country: "These children are determining the future of Afghanistan. We want to stand Afghanistan on its own feet. We want to build our economy, culture and society. We don't let foreigners interfere in our country." Without fail, every child said they would like to go to school.

Despite this immense potential attributed to education, there are severe barriers that limit access to education, such that only just over half of children in Afghanistan are in school. Survey responses for this study highlighted similar reasons for which children are not in school as have been identified in previous research and which were cited above. The dominant reasons were related to poverty, both to the direct costs of school for which money is necessary and the indirect costs of school such as the opportunity costs of labor (see Table 5). Other barriers that the survey for this study uncovered are differential access based on gender, disability, age, ethnicity, and language; the distance to schools; the quality of education; the security situation; and parents' values. These barriers and the mechanisms by which they impede access are explored in detail below.

3.1 Under-Investment

It is the strong belief of our country's top leadership that a revitalized education system that is guided by the tenets of Islam is at the core of the *State Building* exercise. Therefore, one of the top priorities of government is to rebuild an education system that will act as a fundamental cornerstone in shaping the future of the country through peace and stability, democracy and good governance, poverty reduction and economic growth. The centrality of education to the development, growth and thereby stability of Afghanistan cannot be overstressed.

—Mohammad Haneef Atmar, Minister for Education (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9)

Government and donors alike have stressed education as a sector for investment in Afghanistan. There is wide-spread belief that not only is education the cornerstone of economic development, as expressed in the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP), above, but also that a strong education system will be the sign of long-term stability in the

eyes of the people. With this belief, education in Afghanistan has been funded at relatively high levels, with 20 percent of the core budget allocated to education (all levels) (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 426). Nevertheless, there was a predicted funding gap in 2005 of approximately US\$173 million to meet the educational goals set out in the NESP (UN News Centre, 2005); in that year, the funding allocated was in fact less than one sixth of that required (Greeley, 2007), that at a time when US\$58 billion had been spent over five years mostly on military operations (Linder, 2005, p. 1). The share of the non-salary recurrent budget allocation is relatively high, at 40 percent, however, the actual expenditure on non-salary costs is low (Miwa, 2005, p. 5). Indeed, it has been documented that often funds do not reach the school-level (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 426), and children and parents in this study reiterated this point.

The education sector relies on multiple sources of funding. Through a growing tax revenue, government provides 45 percent, donors provide 30 percent outside of government mechanisms and 17 percent to the core government department budget, and the US-led military coalition provides 8 percent (Oxfam International, 2006, p. 4). International assistance provides approximately 55 percent of teachers' salaries and administrative costs (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 424; Oxfam International, 2006). Despite this cooperation, not only are there financing gaps in the education sector, there are also trust gaps (Sperling, 2006). Afghanistan rates second to lowest in the world (after Somalia) on Transparency International's corruption perceptions index (CPI) (Transparency International, 2009), and parents spoke explicitly about how funds allocated to their schools are not delivered. In addition to increasing the amount of aid available to education in Afghanistan, a priority needs to be the effectiveness of this aid.¹⁵

Unlike in many other conflict-affected fragile states, and low-income countries generally, there are no school fees in Afghanistan. The lack of user fees represents an enormous investment in education in Afghanistan. There are two particular areas, however, in which large-scale investments are still necessary to reduce the barriers to accessing primary education: infrastructure and the training of teachers.

Investment in educational infrastructure has been intense in Afghanistan, however, given the unprecedented increases in enrollment since 2002, the continued limitations of infrastructure constitute a barrier to access. Fifty percent of schooling occurs in tents or open spaces, 25 percent in traditional structures, and only 25 percent in concrete buildings (Wardak & Hirth, 2009). Although more than 4,000 schools have been recently constructed (Wardak & Hirth, 2009), only 25 percent of schools have useable buildings and nearly 6 percent of schools were burned or closed down due to terrorism in 18 months in 2005-2006 (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 11). In the study schools, the percentage of permanent classrooms ranged from 35.3 percent to 100 percent (see Table 2); yet children overwhelmingly believed that permanent structures are prerequisite to quality education with 100 percent of children reporting such in Nangarhar, 98.7 percent in Jawzjan Nangarhar, and 86 percent in Kandahar. Most schools also do not have desks, chairs, and books. In one school in Nangarhar, a researcher commented in observation notes that the classroom "has a blackboard but lacks desks and chairs so the students have to sit on the floor in the middle of the classroom. It was difficult to write in a sitting position." Due to a lack of timely textbook distribution, children in Nangarhar had to repeat use of their previous year's textbooks,

¹⁵ A review of this issue is beyond the scope of this case study. It has been well-documented elsewhere; see, for example: (Brannelly, Ndaruhutse, & Rigaud, 2009; Burnside & Dollar, 2000; Greeley, 2007; Strategic Policy Impact and Research Unit, 2007)

finally receiving new textbooks after seven months of the academic year. A boy commented, “I was happy because I got new books of grade 6, at the same time I was upset because two months of academic year was remaining.” There are also gaps in administrative infrastructure, with two children describing situations in which their names were inadvertently dropped from school registers and they were thus prohibited from attending school.

Distance to schools, especially in rural areas, also constitutes an access barrier based on lack of infrastructure. Distance is highlighted as the most important reason for non-attendance in the 2007-2008 NRVA, with 37.6 percent of out-of-school children citing this reason nationally. Among children in rural areas, 38.8 percent cite this barrier and among Kuchis is it 59.5 percent (Government of Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, 2008). In this study, 31.6 percent of children described the salience of the barrier of not having a school close to their houses (see Table 5). The perspectives of children echo published findings, that having a community-based school in a village causes 56 percent of children to attend it, an increase in enrollment of 47 percentage points after accounting for prior enrollment of children in schools outside the village; these effects are even more pronounced for girls (Burde & Linden, 2009).

There has also been a lack of investment in teachers. Teachers are now, for the most part, paid on time and in full (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 424), however, their salaries of, on average, US\$50 per month are far from adequate to ensure their commitment to the work (Waldman, 2007), and they often need to work multiple jobs. It is especially difficult to attract teachers to insecure areas of the country, explained a UNICEF staff member in Kabul. Student to teacher ratios have fallen in recent years and are approximately 43:1 nationally (World Bank, 2009a), but they remain unequal across the country, ranging from 28:1 to 65: 1 (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 424). In this study, the number of children who were present in class, per teacher, ranged from 21 to 37 (see Table 2). The number of teachers has increased seven-fold since 2001, from 21,000 to 140,000, but only 22 percent of these teachers have completed secondary school and some basic teacher training (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 11; Jones, 2008, p. 281). During fieldwork, Jones found secondary school teachers with qualifications less than their students (2008, p. 281). In this study, children in all provinces directly attributed the lack of trained teachers to non-enrollment in schools.

3.2 Exclusion from Education Related to Individual- and Group-Level Characteristics

As described above, there are barriers to accessing primary education that result at the intersections of the socio-political context and macro-level policy and practice. There are other barriers that act at individual and school level, affecting different people in different ways. The mechanisms behind these forms of exclusion, as explained by children and families in Jawzjan, Kandahar, and Nangarhar, are explored below.

3.2.1 Barriers of Poverty

School is free in Afghanistan, but there are still costs associated with school that mean poverty is a barrier to access. Children surveyed for this research identified families as responsible for school supplies, clothes (uniforms), transport, and food. In Nangarhar province, children also described paying for examination fees. In some cases, these costs prove insurmountable for families. A mother in Jawzjan said:

We are extremely poor. There are lots of rich students in the school. They have good clothes and shoes. They have enough notebooks and pens. But we cannot afford these kinds of clothes and shoes. That is why our sons quit school. My husband is old. I weave carpets. I am tired of being a mother. I cannot realize my children's dreams.

The other mothers in the focus group kept silent for a moment after hearing the sadness in this women's voice. Children in all provinces described the embarrassment of not having school supplies or uniforms, an embarrassment so great that, especially combined with punishments from teachers for not coming to school prepared, it keeps them from going to school.

The opportunity cost of school, however, is the most important mechanism through which poverty acts as a barrier to accessing primary school. According to data from the NRVA, 11 percent of children ages 6 to 18 in rural areas are engaged in child labor (have worked for pay over the last seven days) and 17 percent had domestic chores (in Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 427). In this survey, almost 70 percent of children cited the need to work as an access barrier (see Table 5). An out-of-school boy in Nangarhar explained simply that "[A child] can go to school if he has time for schooling." "We are not happy that our children don't go to school," said a mother in Jawzjan, "but making a living is more important because there are also other children in the family." Families make choices about whether they will send their children to school or use their children's time for household chores or outside labor. In a sentiment echoed by parents in all provinces, a father in Jawzjan said, "children are forced to do hard labor out of poverty. I think if people lived a better life in terms of economy, everyone would have sent their children to school." Children described how the entire family is often involved in these decision-making processes, including parents, older brothers, and the children themselves. They also recounted the disagreements that resulted, specifically that they wanted to plan for their futures and that going to school was the best way to do that; they found it difficult to reconcile their parents' thinking, which was centered in the present economic situation of the family (see also Hunte, 2005, pp. for more about household decision-making).

Indeed, the great majority of children did not agree that, whenever necessary, parents should keep their children home from school to work or help in the household. Yet about one fifth of children in each province agreed that this way to increase household livelihoods was important (Kandahar, 21.0 percent; Jawzjan, 24.1 percent; Nangarhar, 21.5 percent). Children described the range of activities they engaged in to support their families, including selling food and carrying loads in the marketplace, tailoring, weaving carpets, working in ironsmith shops, bakeries, and restaurants, and doing household chores such as working in wheat fields, collecting wood, fetching water, grazing animals, and taking care of younger siblings while parents worked. Children who are out-of-school due to this need to work, for the most part, recognized the importance of the contribution they made to their families and felt good about that; "I was happy about it because I could support my family," said one child in Jawzjan. But, without fail, these children explained that they would prefer to be in school.

Some out-of-school children described feeling an immense sense of responsibility to provide for their families. Said one child in Jawzjan, "my father tells me I have to find the money for our family." With tears in her eyes, another out-of-school child from Jawzjan said: "We are very poor, so I have to weave carpets. I don't go to school, I don't have money to buy

notebooks and pen. I have never been happy. I have always been hungry. How can I know what happiness means?” Orphans and children who have experienced the loss of a parent or whose parents are old, sick, or disabled (often from mine blasts) are doubly vulnerable to the effects of poverty on their school enrollment (see also, Giumbert, et al., 2008, pp. 428, 430). An out-of-school boy in Jawzjan explained:

I had to work with my father and brother. My father said that the Taliban beat my father because they thought my father had weapons, so his leg was hurt, and now he complains about his leg. He is always sick, and has to rest. He cannot work. I am very sad about this, because I and my brother have to work instead of him, and not to go to school. When I see other children go to school, I feel very happy for them, but I feel very sad for myself. I wish I could go to school. The children who go to school are in a better economic condition. They don't work. Their fathers work. I feel very inferior. I would like to go to school and study, and become a teacher one day, to educate and guide children.

Children proposed three solutions to mitigate the effects of poverty on access to education. First, they advocated that the government invest more in poor students, supplying them with notebooks, pens, uniforms, and school bags. Second, they described how important school feeding programs can be in offsetting the need for children to work; said an out-of-school boy in Nangarhar, “if there is food items and relief assistance in order our families to be supported, then we will go to school.” Third, they recommended that schools hold late afternoon or evening classes so that they could go to school after work.

3.2.2. *Barriers of Region and Urban/Rural Residence*

In Afghanistan, there are vast regional differences in access to education. In the city of Kabul, enrollment is close to 90 percent, whereas in the mostly rural provinces of Uruzan, Helmand, and Badkhash, for example, enrollment is below 20 percent (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 423). At least 75 percent of people in Afghanistan live in rural areas (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 28), making the barriers of rural residence of particular salience in this country. Based on NRVA data, Giumbert *et al.* report that almost half (46.4%) of rural households have a primary school in their community (2008, p. 424), but that 30 percent of families report no school available as the reason for non-enrollment of children (2008, p. 431). In our sample, the discrepancy between region is evident: 52.3 percent of children in Jawzjan report no schools close to their homes as a barrier to access compared with 36.3 percent in Kandahar, and 10.0 percent in Nangarhar (see Table 5).

The children described how region interacts with other barriers, in particular, poverty, insecurity, gender, and quality. First, fathers in Jawzjan described how the poverty and remoteness of the region led to their neglect by the central government, which “pay very little attention to our problems.” Second, in this survey sample, the average distance to the closest school did not differ substantially between provinces, ranging from 20 minutes walking in Nangarhar to 28 minutes walking in Kandahar. Yet children were clear that distance became a greater barrier in areas where insecurity was great. Children in Kandahar, particularly girls and younger children, were “afraid of the long way” and concluded that “people will send their children to school if there is a school in the village.” In Jawzjan, parents recalled recent incidents of kidnapping of children on the way to school and described the need for transport to ensure safe passage. Third, children expressed the idea that girls were treated differently

depending on where they lived. “People living in the cities let their girls go to school” said an out-of-school girl in Kandahar who lives in a village without a school. Finally, children in Kandahar described the lack of qualified teachers in their schools and attributed this lack to their rural residence.

3.2.3 *Barriers of Gender*

By 1970, 14 percent of Afghan students were girls, and the numbers of girls enrolled in school increased until the Mujahideen government policies of the 1990s, which limited girls’ participation in education. In 1995, the Taliban began closing all girls’ schools in the areas they controlled such that, by 2001, girls’ enrollment in many provinces was almost zero (Samady, 2001, p. 591). The literacy rates of females over the age of 15 are much lower than those of males in all of the provinces under study as well as nationally (see Table 1), and in this survey sample mothers attended school at rates less than half that of fathers (see Table 3). The focus on girls’ education since the fall of the Taliban has resulted in unprecedented strides in increasing access among girls from virtually zero to 42 percent of girls enrolled. There has also been attention to the infrastructure that girls need in school such that in research schools, the ratio of girls to latrines and boys to latrines was almost the same (see Table 2). Nevertheless, in survey responses, 38.2 percent of children, ranging from 27.5 percent in Jawzjan to 55.4 percent in Kandahar, said that “girls are not welcome” in schools, which serves as a major access barrier (see Table 5).

Schools in Afghanistan operate within girl-unfriendly structures, cultures, and environments. Children described how their schools can be unsafe and, in some cases, have been targeted for attack by anti-government forces. Girls’ schools are often particular targets, following from certain religious and local beliefs that girls’ education should be forbidden. A night letter found in one girls’ school read: “Respected Afghans: Leave the culture and traditions of the Christians and Jews. Do not send your girls to school” (in O’Malley, 2007, p. 21). In these environments, parents and children alike are hesitant about school and, when they do go, girls often attend in fear. At the same time, some parents believe so strongly in education for their daughters that they sleep in the schools in an attempt to render them safe spaces. This type of community involvement has been a key strategy to make schools safe and acceptable. Combined with the intervention of religious leaders, these actions counter the misconception that girls’ education is anti-Islamic (Save the Children, 2008, p. 17). A group of fathers in Nangarhar explained that “if the Mullahs and influential people discuss about the importance of education and encourage the people, most of the parents will allow their children to go to school.” Several participants in this research expressed the idea that education is a “religious obligation” for both boys and girls. One girl in Kandahar described how initially her brother slapped her when he discovered she was going to school but that after the Mullah told him that “education is obligatory to all Muslims, men and women,” he changed his mind and now even helps her to do her homework.

Nevertheless, many girls across the three provinces described how they encounter substantial family pressure not to attend school. Girls explained how families must often choose only some of the children to attend school and that the boys are usually chosen, since they will not leave the household once they are married.¹⁶ Many mentioned that they hear their parents say that boys are better than girls. Two girls in Nangarhar said, “my mother loves my brothers

¹⁶ While all of the schools in this study, except one in Kandahar, described policies that permit pregnant and married girls to attend school, the children explained that such was not allowed in practice.

and she doesn't love me as much as them, I am therefore sad" and "I feel very unhappy when I am discriminated against by my parents. They differentiate between me and my brothers." After a certain age, often specified as 12, families make decisions that girls should not continue in school as they "should not study beyond literacy" and it is "shameful," especially in the social problems and troubles it breeds.¹⁷ In particular, boys and girls alike described the instances of teasing of older girls on the way to school, "which is so bad for our family." This kind of teasing can lead to conflicts between families and the dissolution of important social networks in the community that also aid in family livelihoods (for more on this topic, see Hunte, 2006, p. 6). One boy in Nangarhar explained that "if someone calls after a girl, that is bad in our culture, then it's better not to go to school." While mothers may be upset at this decision, girls explained that fathers and older brothers simply do not allow them to continue in school. "My father won't let me be a doctor so my dreams won't come true. I always cry," said an out-of-school girl in Jawzjan.

Children suggested that the most important strategy to counter the barriers of gender that girls face in accessing school was to have more female teachers. Of the children surveyed, 85.2 percent in Kandahar believed that more girls would complete primary school if they had more female teachers, 80.8 percent in Jawzjan, and 78.7 percent in Nangarhar. In this study, the percentage of female teachers ranged from zero to 100 percent, with an average of 39.3 percent (see Table 2). Yet nationally, only 28 percent of teachers are female. This statistic belies stark regional variations such that 64 percent of teachers are female in Kabul and less than 1 percent in Uruzgan (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 29). A study in Baghlan province demonstrated that in schools where female teachers are available, girls' enrolment is much higher; and whereas 15 percent of girls complete grade 6 in schools with female teachers, only 4 percent do so in schools without female teachers (Jones, 2008, p. 284).

While the access barriers of gender in Afghanistan have been defined to focus on girls, the children in this study also identified that there are immense barriers for boys, especially as they relate to the interaction of gender and poverty. Many research participants reported that boys are required to work in greater numbers as it is their labor that can support the family financially. At the same time, boys in Jawzjan reported that girls come to school more because they are "given more opportunity and facilities." Despite the fact that gender parity has not been achieved and there remains work to be done in terms of increasing access for girls, more research into the particular barriers that boys face will help to move toward universal access to education for all.

3.2.4 *Barriers of Disability*

People with disabilities make up about 1.6 percent of the population of Afghanistan (1.6 percent in Jawzjan, 1.5 percent in Nangarhar, and 0.1 percent in Kandahar); the causes of these disabilities is predominantly illness and old age, followed by mines, explosives, conflict, and war (Government of Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, 2008). As mentioned above, children attributed disabilities among parents to exacerbated poverty and the need to work rather than attend school. Among children ages 1 to 4, between 1 and 3.5 percent are affected by disabilities in the provinces under study (see Table 1); among children ages 7 to 13, approximately 2.5 to 3 percent are affected nationally (Government of

¹⁷ After age 12, the statistical likelihood of going to school also decreases dramatically (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 428).

Afghanistan (Central Statistics Office) and UNICEF, 2003, in Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 427). Physically disabled children are 14 percent less likely and mentally disabled children are 20 percent less likely to attend school than all children (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 428). Indeed, more than 75 percent have never accessed school and, of those who do begin school, 75 percent drop out before completing primary school (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 30).

There are few children with disabilities identified in the schools under study, ranging from zero to 1.7 percent of the school population (see Table 2). In the schools in Nangarhar, where disabled students make up more of the student population, 31.3 percent of children responded to the survey that “disabled children are not welcome” in school. In Jawzjan, on the other hand, only 6.3 percent of children saw disability as a barrier (see Table 5). When asked about children with disabilities accessing school, one child in Kandahar said, “in our area the majority of children, even healthy, do not go to school.” Interestingly, in focus groups in Jawzjan, both parents and children expressed the idea that “disability stops children from going to school,” and two mothers and one child described the experiences of their own children and siblings being denied access to school. Children described how disabled children are teased and bothered by other children. In Nangarhar, on the other hand, most children explained that teachers played an important role in making disabled children feel comfortable in school. They said: “we behave toward them kindly and friendly; “our teacher told that it is your responsibility to lend a hand to them”; “our teacher says that we shall help the children with disabilities and shall not tease them.” Several children commented that they hoped teachers would continue to make students more aware that disabled children have the right to education.

3.2.5 Barriers of Ethnicity and Language

Among research participants in this study, ethnicity and language were not perceived as major barriers to accessing education. Only 5.3 percent of children responded to the survey that not speaking the language was a barrier and less than one percent thought that people of certain ethnic backgrounds were excluded from schools (see Table 5). In Jawzjan, there were small numbers of ethnic/linguistic minorities at the schools (2.8 percent Pashtun in one case and 6.3 percent Turkmen in another) and one of the schools in Nangarhar was almost 20 percent Kuchi (see Table 2). Children of the dominant language groups in all provinces described how those who speak different languages study together with no problems. However, minority children told of different experiences. One Uzbek child in Jawzjan wished for books in Uzbeki¹⁸ and was delighted when the teacher responded to his questions in his own language. A Turkmen student in Jawzjan said that “as my father is a Turkmen, my classmates bothered me a lot. They were saying that I am Turkmen. I told my teacher and he punished them and honored me.” A similar tension was evident among the majority population of Nangarhar and the Kuchi population, with instances of fighting breaking out when they were collecting firewood and sometimes continuing at school. National statistics indicate that ethnic and linguistic minorities indeed face increased barriers to accessing education. For example, Pashtu speakers are 10 percent less likely to be enrolled than other language groups (Giumbert, et al., 2008, pp. 428-429), and enrollment rates for Kuchis are only 6.6 percent for boys and 1.8 percent for girls (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 30).

¹⁸ Textbooks in Uzbeki, Turkmani, Pashahei, and Nurustani for Grades 1 to 3 have been produced and tested in provinces where language groups are concentrated (Jones, 2008, p. 282), yet they were not available in this boy’s school.

3.2.6 *Barriers of Age*

There is wide discrepancy in the perception of age as a barrier to accessing school. In Kandahar, only 3.8 percent of children thought age was a barrier, while 30.8 percent believed such in Jawzjan, and 20 percent in Nangarhar (see Table 5). Children described three reasons for which children might seek to access schools at older ages: they had to work when they were younger; they had been displaced; or schools in their area had been closed during the war. Most of the children agreed that there were no school-level restrictions on older children studying. However, there were barriers placed on older children both by families and by individual perceptions. Older children, for example, were more useful at home for doing chores and therefore parents did not allow them to attend school. Children provided examples also of how age interacted with gender, such that at a certain age girls were too old to go out of the household unaccompanied. Children also described how older children would not want to attend school as it is “shameful [for young people] to sit with little children” and they had more important “family affairs” to attend to. Some children discussed how schools did sometimes refuse to allow older children because they “beat small children.”

Especially in Kandahar, children explained that older children needed to go to literacy classes and could not enroll in regular schools. These literacy classes have proven effective in improving access to education. There is one government accelerated learning program, designed for children between the ages of 9 and 14; upon successful completion of the two-year program, children can enter the formal education system. In 2005, 238 children graduated from this program and, of them, 69 entered the formal school system with the rest opting for vocational training (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 31). The Afghanistan Primary Education Project (APEP), funded by USAID, targeted overage girls, ages 10 to 17, to begin Grade 1 studies, completing six years of primary schooling in three years. By 2005, 170,000 learners had participated in this program (Charlick, 2005, pp. 64-68).

3.2.7 *Barriers of Displacement*

Displacement is a common experience for many of the people of Afghanistan. Five million people have returned to the country since 2002 (UNHCR, 2009a), more than 1.8 million remain displaced outside of Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2009b), and at least 235,000 are internally displaced (IDMC, 2009). In exile in Pakistan, many Afghan children accessed higher quality of education, and of life, than they do once returned to Afghanistan (Hunte, 2006, p. 3). One out-of-school girl from Nangarhar said, “I was unhappy when we returned from Pakistan to our country because we had a good house and comfortable life there, which we haven’t here.” Among the research schools, one in Nangarhar had a population made up almost entirely of children returned from displacement.¹⁹ These children had substantially higher rates of exposure to school than children in other schools; 97.2 percent of out-of-school children had previously been enrolled in school compared to only 7.7 percent in Jawzjan and 9.1 percent in Kandahar (see Table 3). The displacement experience in Pakistan shaped heightened expectations upon return to Afghanistan, which were often not realized. Further, both those returned from exile and those internally displaced face loss of livelihoods,

¹⁹ Question for Afghanistan team: are the Kuchis also “displaced”? “Nomads” make up 19.5 percent of the school population, yet the statistics on the school background sheet stated that 100 percent of the school population is displaced.

and resulting exacerbated poverty, as they have had to leave jobs and possessions behind and integrate into a frequently foreign community.

Of the children surveyed, 15.1 percent believed that displacement was a major barrier to accessing education. This belief was most widely held in Kandahar where 33.8 percent of children expressed this idea, compared to only 8.8 percent of children in Jawzjan and 6.3 percent of children in Nangarhar (see Table 5). Nevertheless, in focus groups and interviews, the children in Nangarhar described the challenges facing them vis-à-vis education on their return to Afghanistan. A boy who is now in school said, “I was very sad here in Afghanistan because I could not enroll in school for two years due to the lack of schools.” The experience in Afghanistan was in stark contrast to that in Pakistan. A boy from Nangarhar explained:

I have studied in Bajawar Agency of Pakistan. I was very happy, I had very good classmates and I was passing good time with them. While I came to this place, we just dropped our luggage in a desert, we did not have tents, there was no water, there were no sleeping beds and we were lying down on the floor and I was extremely sad.

Further, the relationships that returned refugees had with the long-time resident population of their area were often strained. One child explained that his family had not been allowed to build its own house and that “we were very sad that in our own country the government did not allow us to have our houses.” Another child considered himself a stranger in his own country and described missing his classmates from Pakistan and avoiding friendships with local boys. Children in returned areas indeed described many more conflicts in school than children in other areas, which negatively shaped their educational experience.

3.3 *Systemic Discrimination in Policies and Practice*

3.3.1 *Curriculum*

Curriculum in Afghanistan has often been portrayed as a barrier to education due to its highly politicized nature. Given the fractured nature of Afghan society after years of conflict, the need has been to develop an educational system that will “foster the cohesion of Afghan society and promote a culture of peace” (Samady, 2001, p. 601). Conflict particularly over these ideas of national unity and social cohesion – often described as the ideologies of the new curriculum (Jones, 2009; O'Malley, 2007) – has provoked intense violence, placing schools and school-going children in harms way. The Taliban Leadership Council has stated:

Present academic curriculum is influenced by the puppet administration and foreign invaders. The government has given teachers in primary and middle schools the task to openly deliver political lectures against the resistance put up by those who seek independence... [U]se of the curriculum as a mouthpiece of the state will provoke the people against it. If schools are turned into centers of violence, the government is to blame for it (in Human Rights Watch, 2006, p. 34).

The Taliban military rulebook, the *Layeha*, published in a report by Amnesty International further states: “Anyone who works as a teacher for the current puppet regime must receive a warning. If he nevertheless refuses to give up his job, he must be beaten. If the teacher continues to instruct contrary to the principles of Islam, the district commander or group

leader must kill him” (Amnesty International, 2007, p. 46). As a direct result of curriculum choices, schools have been turned into centers of violence and focal points in Taliban resistance to the current government. Children thus attend school in fear, and many families decide not to allow children to go to school as a result of the danger (Human Rights Watch, 2006). In this way, curriculum directly serves as a barrier to physically accessing schools.

Children and parents in this study, however, focused on two different aspects of curriculum when discussing how it can serve as a barrier to access. First, many out-of-school children expressed the desire that schools focus on skills useful “to make money.” In particular, they hoped that schools could adopt vocational curriculum that would lead children into professions where they might readily access jobs. An out-of-school girl in Nangarhar described the disconnect between economic realities and the curriculum followed in schools: “he wants to be a professional guy in the future, therefore he doesn’t go to school.” Second, children and parents expressed specific expectations that schools provide both a social and religious curriculum as well as an academic one. Children perceived the benefits of education for both boys and girls to include civic responsibility and values, critical thinking skills, and discipline and respect for authority (see Table 4). Parents would feel better about schools, they said, if they were “to teach them morality and good ethics,” “to inform them about both the religious and world affairs,” “to inform themselves about their own and others’ situations,” and to “teach them religious and scientific issues.” Children focused on the important role of schools in inter-personal learning: “when children do not go to school, they fight with each other and afterwards they went to school they learned how to be polite and respect their elders and parents. They have learned social skills.” These aspects of curriculum, according to parents and children, are essential to retaining children in school.

3.3.2 Pedagogy and Quality

“Parents need a good reason to keep their children in school” (Miwa, 2005, p. 18), and the perspectives of children and parents indicate that the reason could be quality. However, in Afghanistan, parents complain about the poor quality of education (Hunte, 2006, pp. 4-5), in particular related to how teachers teach – their pedagogy. In this survey, 32.9 percent of children stated that that fact that “the teachers are bad” is a barrier to educational access (see Table 5). Improving teacher pedagogy and overall learning quality are long-term projects in a country where only 22 percent of teachers meet the minimum qualifications (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 11) and where teacher training is clearly linked to learning achievement (Jones, 2008, p. 282). In this study, the percentage of qualified teachers at a school ranged from zero to 44.7 percent (see Table 2). In-service training and supervision is also lacking. Although 94 percent of schools reported being visited for supervision (15 percent weekly, 25 percent monthly, and 37 percent quarterly), only 17 percent of visits related to pedagogy (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 426).

Despite a limited focus on pedagogy in national reforms targeted toward access, children in this study expressed a very clear image of what a good teacher would be. They said: “teacher considered all students”; “all the students seem happy”; “he enters the class saying hello and asks questions very cheerfully”; “I like those teachers who smile frequently and speak in a friendly tone”; “the teacher was having a very good relation with the student and was always controlling the class”; “she places on every bench one lazy student ... and one clever student to help him/her”; “the teacher... was always asking [the students] to contribute to the lesson”; “we learn our lessons very well and he does not punish us physically. When we do our homework, he tells our classmates to encourage us.” In the survey, children overwhelmingly

emphasized the importance of teachers asking children questions in class: in Kandahar, 84.4 percent of children stressed the importance of this method, in Jawzjan 91.3 percent, and in Nangarhar 92.3 percent. In many classes observed for the study, there was evidence of deep student engagement and participatory learning. Observers noted that a wide variety of children often raised their hands, and were called on, to respond to teachers' questions. The teachers were patient and allowed students time to think and complete work before asking them to contribute. Several teachers involved their classes in group work. One observation noted that "the teacher involved all the students in the class activities and if there was a child who was silent, then he tried to involve him too." A child remarked on the perseverance of his teacher in promoting learning: "I didn't know math, but our math teacher was very good and worked hard with me and now I know how to do addition and subtraction." In several instances, children asked teachers for more information and clarification on the lesson; when the teacher did not know the answer, she responded that she would find out and let the student know the next day.

Nevertheless, what children described experiencing in school and what researchers observed to occur in classrooms often did not live up to children's expectations of good teaching and served as a direct barrier to continued enrollment in school. In many observed classes, there was a lot of noise, and teachers struggled to control the children. In one class, girls were chewing gum and drawing in secret; in most classes, some children were unengaged in the lesson while the teacher remained unaware. Lessons were reported to be "boring" and "some of our teachers waste time," even coming "very late" or not at all. Students expressed the idea that "our teachers do discriminate between the students" and do "not involve all the children in the teaching process." In one case, "there was a girl in our classroom and our teacher liked her a lot and did not pay attention to us as a result we felt very unhappy." Often children who sat at the back of classrooms did not participate. A father reported that "my son is in grade three and says their teacher does not teach them." Many children explained how the lack of teaching quality in schools acted as a deterrent to enrollment and attendance: "they do not want to go to school because there are not good teachers in the schools to teach them properly."

A further barrier was the use of corporal punishment in all schools. There is historical evidence for the prevalence of corporal punishment in Afghan schools (Dicum, 2008), as well as reports that it is a daily occurrence at present (Save the Children Sweden-Norway, 2008). Almost every child described an incident of this kind of punishment, either of themselves or one of their classmates, including being hit with a ruler or stick, being slapped, being made to stand under the sun on one foot, being forced to stand on the desk and beaten, being caught by the hair and beaten, and being teased or called bad names in front of the class.

There is disagreement among children about the role of corporal punishment in schools and its relationship to quality. A large number of children supported beating, citing that it maintains discipline and makes schools of better quality: in Kandahar 84.1 percent of children supported it, while only 42.2 percent did in Jawzjan and 37.5 percent in Nangarhar. Yet many parents and children described the practice of beating as a reason why children refuse to go to school. "Children are scared of the cruel teachers," and they described feeling "humiliated" and "belittle[d]." One out-of-school child said that "we have heard that they beat at school; if boys know about it, they will quit school." A girl in Nangarhar was specific that some children leave school due to this "bad behavior of teacher." One child, who hopes to be a teacher in the future, said: "I will make classes free of punishment."

3.3.3 *Family and Tradition*

A further systemic barrier to accessing education is the role that parents play in preventing children from attending school. Over and over again, children stated explicitly that parents “do not know the value of education.” With national over-15 literacy rates at less than 30 percent (see Table 1), many parents have not been to school or enjoyed the opportunities and benefits that education promises. The idea that ‘if parents have not been exposed to education, they do not value it for their children’ was stated repeatedly. There were further disconnects between home and school. While 90 percent of children stated that parents’ active involvement in the school contributes to quality (87.3 percent in Kandahar, 88.1 percent in Jawzjan, and 87.5 percent in Nangarhar), the majority of the study schools had no mechanism for parent involvement (see Table 2). A Ministry of Education official also described how “when [children] come back to the house and the parents are illiterate and they haven’t any education, the parents cannot help the child and the child becomes hopeless and is encouraged not to go to school and leaves school.”

Parents described the “negligence,” “ignorance,” and “careless[ness]” that prevent families from sending their children to school. However, children and parents alike were clear that traditions played a role in decision-making about school enrollment. In 42 percent of situations where children were not enrolled in school, the following was given as reason: enrollment would be “contrary to a family commitment, the child’s marriage, or their tradition” (Giumbert, et al., 2008, p. 431). In this study, the same trend was evident. “My father does not allow me to go to school,” “my mother does not allow me to go to school,” “my brother does not allow me to go to school” were often expressed phrases in all provinces. While often uttered by girls, the role of family in preventing school enrollment cut across gender. One out-of-school boy in Jawzjan explained that “yes, I could like to go to school a lot. But I cannot say this to my parents out of shame.”

An out-of-school girl in Nangarhar described how “I became unhappy when my father told me I have to stop schooling... I felt so hopeless because I was happy at school I wanted to study more.” To counter this type of situation, children said they wanted the government and NGOs to encourage parents to send children to school, even to say that “going to school is not bad.” An out-of-school girl in Kandahar explained: “If children are not encouraged by their parents, it will have significant negative effects on the improvement of the children and is considered as one of the most important barriers to education. Parents should know the value of education and provide opportunities for their children.”

3.3.4 *Conflict and Violence*

Conflict and violence permeate Afghan society and act as an over-riding barrier to educational access in the country. “Whenever there is the danger of being killed, we can’t study,” said an in-school boy in Nangarhar. This danger comes often. In Jawzjan, the Taliban lays landmines, such that an out-of-school child explained that his cousin, a National Army soldier, “advises us not to go to school, to avoid being killed.” At one of the research schools in Kandahar, only about half of the girls attend school daily due to on-going threats on their lives. And an out-of-school boy in Jawzjan recounted the story of how conflict prompted him to leave school:

Later my father was on duty in the school [as a guard]. He was offering his evening prayer on the school rooftop. Since the weather was hot, he slept on

the rooftop so that he could see the surrounding areas of the school better. While offering his prayer, the American troops stationed in Balahesar, nearby the school, targeted my father. My father was wounded in arm and leg. It was only two months since I started going to school, but my father did not allow me to go to school again. This saddened me a lot.... Now we don't go to school, because the Americans are stationed near our school, and we are afraid that they may open fire on us one day.

Giumbert *et al.* reported that there is nine percent less enrollment in households that have mentioned a "security incident" in the previous year (2008, p. 430). Indeed, the constant fear for safety leads many families to decide against school enrollment. One out-of-school boy in Nangarhar expressed the sentiments of many: "if the security situation improves, then we will go to school."

In addition to pervasive insecurity, children described the impact of conflict on daily lives in their communities, which in turn affected their access to education. In particular, they experienced a generalized lack of trust between the community and the government due to the government's inability to keep citizens safe; this sentiment reduced overall faith in schools. Further, children described generalized violence in inter-personal relationships within communities that sometimes led to conflict, such as children beating each other or even neighbors killing each other, and always to fear, promoting students to stay at home and out of harm's way.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

This case study demonstrates that there are many reasons for which children in Afghanistan are marginalized and experience limited access to primary school. These barriers include continued under-investment in infrastructure and teacher training. They also involve exclusion based on poverty, rural residence, gender, language and ethnicity, disability, age, and displacement. Further, there are systemic policies and practices related to curriculum, pedagogy and quality, family and tradition, and the overall context of conflict and insecurity.

These barriers are similar to the barriers identified in the literature as common to conflict-affected fragile states and, to some extent, to all low-income countries. One of the central findings of this case study, however, is that the barriers interact in pernicious ways. On-going conflict and security permeate children's lives, contributing to both supply- and demand-side barriers to accessing education. Conflict and insecurity have, for example, limited the possible investment in necessary infrastructure and teacher training. At the same time, this volatile context exacerbates poverty that forces children to work rather than attend school; reinforces, through fear, families' traditional hesitations in sending their daughters, in particular, to school; and further marginalizes rural regions and ethnic and linguistic minorities. Within the insecure context, these various factors also interact with each other. Three of these intersections are especially salient. First, formerly displaced children experienced more intense poverty as their families sought to rebuild livelihoods while at the same time experiencing a decline in the quality of education accessible to them. Second, girls in rural areas encountered intense resistance from their families and communities around school enrollment as well as attend schools with untrained teachers in which the quality of teaching and learning does not meet their expectations. Third, in all contexts and for children

of all backgrounds, poverty impedes access to school, based primarily on the opportunity costs of lost work and financial contribution to the family's livelihood.

The findings of this study suggest the following actions in order to improve access to quality primary education in Afghanistan:

Recommendations for Government

- Continue to address the broader issues of insecurity and poverty that shape families' decision-making about school enrollment;
- Develop and finance innovative educational solutions that integrate children's need to work with their desires to go to school;
- Communicate with parents to encourage them to send their children to school, both girls and boys;
- Continue to invest in infrastructure and teacher training;
- Focus on the development and financing of teacher training institutes and programs, with a specific focus on pedagogy.

Recommendations for Donors

- Work together with government to continue addressing the broader issues of insecurity and poverty that shape families' decision-making about school enrollment;
- Assist in the financing of innovative educational solutions that integrate children's need to work with their desires to go to school;
- Support government in the continued financing of investment in infrastructure and teacher training.

Recommendations for NGOs

- Assist in the development of innovative educational solutions that integrate children's need to work with their desires to go to school;
- Focus on the development of programs on teacher training, specifically related to participatory pedagogy and positive discipline.
- Involve parents in school- and community-based programs that encourage them to enroll their children in school, both girls and boys and encourage their continued attendance.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Provinces

		Jawzjan	Kandahar	Nangahar	National
NER	Boys	59.8%	20.5%	64.6%	60.4%
	Girls	42.1%	8.1%	43.1%	42.1%
	Total	51.0%	14.4%	54.1%	51.7%
Literacy Rate (over age 15)	Male	26.1%	13.8%	40.3%	39.3%
	Female	10.1%	1.5%	7.7%	12.5%
	Total	17.9%	7.9%	24.1%	26.2%
Mean age at first marriage (women)		18.8	18.1	17.6	17.9
Access to safe drinking water		42.9%	36.7%	23.9%	27.2%
Access to electricity		45.8%	28.5%	34.0%	42.4%
Under-5 mortality rate per thousand		250	200	180	257
Disability rate among children ages 1-4		3.4%	1.4%	1.0%	Unavailable
Children 5-15 years involved in child labor		26.8%	17.2%	15.8%	Unavailable

Sources: (Government of Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, 2008; UNICEF, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; World Bank, 2009b)

Table 2. Characteristics of School Research Sites

Ward of School	Jawzjan		Kandahar		Nangarhar	
	Aqcha Town	Khoja Do Koh	Loy Bala Karez	Tajrobawi	Kaja Town	Hejrat Abad Returnee Camp
Type of school	Boys and Girls (double-shift), grades 1-9	Girls, grades 1-9	Boys and Girls (double-shift), grades 1-12	Boys and Girls (double-shift), grades 1-9	Boys and Girls (double-shift), grades 1-12	Boys and Girls (double-shift), grades 1-8
Enrollment ^b	1624	898	162 ^a	557	1992	861
Displaced	1.0%	None	0.03%	None	None	100%
Ethnic/linguistic minority	2.8% Pashtun	6.3% Turkmen	None	None	None	19.5% Kuchi
Disabled	0.3%	0.3%	None	None	1.7%	0.8%
Qualified teachers	44.7%	31.4%	0%	33.3%	16.4%	0%
Paid by gov't	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Paid by NGO	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	44.4%
Female teachers	81.6%	100%	0%	0%	26.2%	27.8%
Permanent classrooms ^c	57.1%	100%	100%	Unavailable	54.3%	35.3%
Average class size (observed)	27	21	28	21	32	37
Pupil: Boys: Latrine Ratio	203:1	n/a	5:1	15: 1	79:1	89:1
Girls: Latrine Ratio	203:1	150:1	5:1	21:1	87:1	83:1
Children repeating Pass Math rate, grade 6	1.5%	0%	30.2%	42.7%	5.3%	4.4%
Language	57.4%	100%	Unavailable	Unavailable	98.1%	84.9%
Corporal punishment practiced ^d	60.2%	100%	Unavailable	Unavailable	98.5%	84.9%
Frequency of Parent-Teacher Association Meetings	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	None	None	None	None	Monthly	Monthly

^a These numbers are from the previous year as enrollment was ongoing and could not be calculated for the current year. The previous year's enrollment was also incomplete, such that this number should be taken as only a rough guide to the number of students.

^b Children cannot be deleted from the enrollment register until they have been absent for three years. When possible these cases of "permanent absence" have been deleted from the enrollment numbers.

^c With zinc/tin roof.

^d As reported by children in focus groups and interviews and observed by researchers at the school.

Table 3. Characteristics of the Quantitative Sample (n=225)

	Jawzjan	Kandahar	Nangarhar
N	65	80	80
Gender			
Boys	50%	53.9%	52.5%
Girls	50%	46.1%	47.5%
% of children in-school	49.2%	50%	55%
Of in-school children, average years in school	4.3	3.6	4.3
Fathers' education (ever attended) ^a	30.0%	23.1%	42.5%
Mothers' education (ever attended) ^b	20.3%	9.4%	12.5%
% out-of-school children who ever attended school	7.7%	9.1%	97.2%
% in government schools	100%	97.2% ^c	91.7% ^d
% participation in literacy program (outside of primary school)	25.3%	10.8%	31.9%
Average distance to closest school (minutes walking)	23	28	20
Government school closest	100%	100%	92.4% ^e

^a Of those who did attend, the majority attended only pre-primary or primary.

^b Of those who did attend, the majority attended only pre-primary or primary.

^c One student not in government school, but not specified what type of school.

^d Two students in community schools; four in "other" such as NGO or UNHCR school.

^e The others are community schools and "NGO" schools.

Table 4. Benefits of Education for Boys and Girls (n=225)

	Benefit for Boys (%)	Benefit for Girls (%)
Find (better) job	75.1	63.6
Provide support to family	60	60.0
Literacy	52	53.8
Learn to be a good parent	36.0	51.1
Agricultural practice	31.6	20.0
Make a better marriage	23.1	32.4
Learn math	27.1	31.1
Chance of going to secondary school	28	22.2
Learn languages	29.3	28.4
Health/nutrition habits	27.6	28.4
Learn technical/vocational skills	21.3	22.7
Civic responsibility/values	28.4	24.9
Critical thinking/skills	24.4	23.1
Discipline/respect for authority	24.9	26.7
No benefits	0	1.3

Table 5. Barriers to Access as Identified by Children (n=225)

Barrier	Overall %	Jawzjan	Kandahar	Nangarhar
They have no money	72.0	72.5	72.3	71.3
They need to work (inside or outside the home)	69.8	67.7	76.3	65.0
Girls are not welcome	38.2	25.0	55.4	37.5
The teachers are bad	32.9	27.5	36.9	35.0
There are no schools close to their houses	31.6	52.3	36.3	10.0
Disabled are not welcome	20.0	6.3	23.1	31.3
They are too old	17.3	30.8	3.8	20
Security situation is bad	15.6	26.2	1.3	21.3
They are displaced	15.1	8.8	33.8	6.3
They don't speak the language	5.3	3.8	6.2	6.3
Parents don't value education	5.3	5.0	10.8	1.3
People of certain religions are excluded	4.9	0	12.3	3.6
Parents don't allow children to attend	3.1	0	0	8.8
People of certain ethnic backgrounds are excluded	0.4	1.3	4.6	7.5

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Barriers to Accessing Primary Education in Conflict-Affected Fragile States

CASE STUDY
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

By Sarah Dryden-Peterson



Photo by Amadou Mbodj

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1 Introduction

Lack of access to education stands in the way of human rights and development promises. It is a stumbling block to reaching the global Education for All (EFA) targets and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015. In recent years, there has been remarkable progress in many countries toward these targets. Yet 77 million children are still out-of-school globally (UNESCO, 2008, p. 60). Over half of these children (53 percent) live in conflict-affected fragile states (CAFS) (Save the Children, 2009).

A country particularly affected is Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where estimates suggest that more than five million children are out-of-school (UNICEF, 2005). It is one of the five countries in the world with the largest number of out-of-school children (World Bank, 2005, p. xiii). While data are limited, the gross enrollment ratio (GER)¹ in primary school is approximately 64 percent (World Bank, 2005, p. 16), with only 49 percent of those beginning primary school completing the primary cycle (UNICEF, 2005). DRC is one of the countries least likely to meet EFA and MDG targets. This case study explores the barriers to accessing primary education, primarily from the perspective of in-school and out-of-school children in the Nord Kivu province of eastern DRC. Their experiences are set in the context of government policies and school practices to reveal an education system that has been decimated by on-going conflict and the collapse of state financing and that is massively failing the nation's children. The report concludes by offering recommendations to government, donors, and NGOs on actions that could be taken to improve access to quality primary education in DRC.

The case study of DRC is part of a larger Save the Children Alliance research project on barriers to accessing primary education in conflict-affected fragile states. The overall project includes a comprehensive literature review, two field-based case studies,² and a synthetic final report. The project aims to identify evidence for the types of barriers to accessing education that exist in CAFS, how they function, and the kinds of policies and programs that might prove useful in promoting increased access to primary education. Findings from the literature indicate that these barriers fall into three broad categories: under-investment in education; exclusion related to individual- and group-level characteristics; and systemic discrimination in policies and practices. These categories have guided the design of the case study of DRC and the presentation of findings in this report.

¹ Net enrollment ratios are not available.

² Afghanistan and Democratic Republic of Congo.

2 Background

2.1 *Education and Conflict in DRC*³

On-going conflicts in DRC since the early 1990s have resulted in more than 5.4 million deaths (IRC, 2008). Civilians have borne the brunt of this violence, with most deaths the result of infectious diseases and malnutrition. As rebel groups fight to control territory, there has been wide-spread looting, plundering of crops, rape, and abduction; millions of people have been displaced. At the end of July 2009, 2 million people in eastern DRC lived in displacement, with 800,000 of them having been displaced in the previous six months (IDMC, 2009b, p. 5).

These conflicts and resulting displacement have been particular impediments to school enrollment and attendance. The majority of displaced children have had no access to formal or informal education since 1998 (IDMC, 2009a, p. 108). At the same time, economic failure has impacted all spheres of life including investment in education. The GDP per capita dropped from US\$380 (in constant dollars) in 1960 to US\$224 in 1990, and to US\$139 in 2006, making it one of the lowest in the world (World Bank, 2008). Life expectancy is 43 years, and under-five mortality is more than 200 per thousand (World Bank, 2008). The Human Development Index ranks DRC 177 out of 179 countries (UNDP, 2008).

Donors' efforts have been on short-term projects and infrastructure rather than systems development (AfriMAP & Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2009, p. 7). Further, delivery of this aid has been limited by the extent of violence and the targeting of humanitarian workers as well as the geographic dispersal of people and the absence of roads in eastern DRC (OCHA, 2009). It has indeed been local communities that have been the front-line in responding to the humanitarian crisis; seventy-five percent of those displaced have found refuge with local communities or are in hiding in remote forest areas (IDMC, 2009b, p. 5). In Nord Kivu, where this study was conducted, 1.1 million people were displaced as of July 2009 (IDMC, 2009b, p. 5). In this setting, estimates suggest that only 34 percent of children have access to basic education, much lower than national enrollment ratios (Refugees International, 2009).

2.2 *Methodology*

This study was designed as a qualitative investigation seeking to understand children's perspectives and experiences of the barriers to accessing primary education in DRC.⁴ A participatory and child-friendly approach guided the development of six research instruments to collect data from in-school and out-of-school children and to triangulate it with a limited amount of data from parents, schools, education officials, and NGO staff.⁵ The instruments included:

³ A thorough review of the background to the conflict in DRC and its effects on education is beyond the scope of this case study. For more on this topic, see, for example: (AfriMAP & Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2009; Balegamire, 1999; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2009a; World Bank, 2005).

⁴ Due to the security situation in Nord Kivu, less data was collected for this study than anticipated. The analysis therefore relies more heavily on secondary sources than was the intention.

⁵ The same research instruments were used in Afghanistan and DRC in order to facilitate comparison across the cases in the final synthetic report.

- Focus group guide for in-school and out-of-school children, which involved photos of in-school and out-of-school children and objects used at school (notebook and pencil) to act as prompts for conversation about barriers to access.
- Interview guide for individual interviews with in-school and out-of-school children, which involved engaging the child in constructing a timeline of his/her life using local materials and marking the times where school has been important to promote conversation about barriers to access.
- Questionnaire for in-school and out-of-school children, which gathered basic demographic data such as gender, age, location of residence, and parents' educational levels as well as educational data such as school fees paid, experience in school (eg. years, grade levels, type of school), reasons for attendance/non-attendance, and perceptions of quality and benefits of schooling.
- Focus group guide for parents, which involved photos of in-school and out-of-school children to act as prompts for conversation about barriers to access for their children.
- Observation guide for participant observation in classrooms, aimed at understanding the educational experiences of children with respect to discrimination, inequalities, curriculum, quality, and pedagogy.
- Interview guide for individual interviews with education officials and NGO staff, which involved open-ended questions and prompts to generate broad thinking on possible access barriers and to elicit their personal experiences with promoting access.

Seven Save the Children staff members from the Lubero office participated in a four-day workshop designed to build capacity in qualitative and quantitative research theory and practice as well as in the implementation of the particular instruments for this research. During the training, all instruments were piloted in a school outside Lubero town and with parents and out-of-school children affiliated with partner NGOs. The instruments were reviewed and adapted based on this piloting and translated and back-translated to ensure accuracy.

Data was collected in three areas of Lubero district, Nord Kivu: Kipese, Lukanga, and Butembo (see Figure 1).⁶ Kipese and Lukanga are rural areas with families making their living primarily through subsistence agriculture; Butembo is a large town with a more varied economic base. These areas were chosen to represent the diversity of educational experiences in Lubero as well as places with large numbers of out-of-school children. Research was initially planned in Beni district as well but was omitted for security reasons. In each of the three communities, one primary school (grades 1ère through 6ème) was selected as the focus of the investigation. Schools were chosen to be representative of the community in terms of size, school fees charged, and quality; they were schools in which Save the Children had not previously worked. The schools differed along several dimensions, as can be seen in Table 1. All were public schools but included one *école non-conventionnée* (managed by the government) and two *écoles conventionnées* (managed through church organizations).⁷ Participants in the research were selected from the school (in-school children) and from the school's catchment area (out-of-school children and parents) to vary by gender, ethnicity, language spoken, disability status, and poverty level. Data collection included focus groups with in-school children (n=5) and out-of-school children (n=5); focus groups with parents (n=5); individual interviews with in-school children (n=6); surveys with in-school children

⁶ Figure 1 in final publication should be map of DRC with research sites marked.

⁷ Approximately 80 percent of schools in DRC are *conventionnée*, managed by churches (Ombaka, 2007, p. 1).

(n=17); lesson observations (n=15); and interviews with education officials and NGO staff (n=5). In total, the research involved 79 children, 46 parents, and 5 key informants.⁸

Analysis of the data involved the development of a coding system of *emic* codes that emerged inductively from the research participants and *etic* codes that derive from the literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Using the software program maxqda, all of the interviews, focus groups, and observations were coded line-by-line, using classical, free, and in-vivo coding processes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The analysis is descriptive in seeking to explain *what* is happening regarding barriers to accessing education; it is also explanatory in seeking to explain *how* these experiences of barriers to access come about.⁹ The findings from this case study are not representative but instead aim to build understanding of barriers that exist in these areas of DRC and that might be applicable to other locales.

3 Barriers to Accessing Education in DRC: Findings

Both in-school and out-of-school children attribute immense potential to education. All of the children who participated in this research wanted to be in school, whether or not they were able to be. They described how school would help them to acquire concrete skills of reading and writing and assist them to realize their plans to help care for their families. They saw school as the one pathway to making money. Education, three children said in sequence, will help us to become “teachers,” “priests,” “presidents.” Children also expressed ideas about the less tangible benefits of education, including the acquisition of “new knowledge” and the way it helps one to “live a good life,” meaning “living without too much suffering.”

Parents, too, universally described the value of education. Education, they said, will help children “become useful to themselves and to society,” to raise the standard of living of their families, to support parents in their old age, to become “important people,” to develop the abilities to “reason profoundly,” to help “change the image of our community,” to become “role models,” to become “judges who will fairly rule on land conflicts,” and to become politicians “to save this country.”

Out-of-school children described not being able to share in this dream of what education can help to achieve. Over and over again, out-of-school children recounted their distress as they are looked down upon when they walk in the community, how “people do not love us.” Despite widespread belief in the value of education for both the present and the future, children in Lubero face significant barriers to accessing school.

3.1 Under-Investment: “The population is abandoned”

An education official in Lubero told the story of how former Zaire President Mobutu Sésé Seko called education the “fifth wheel or replacement tire” of the country, downplaying its importance and the state role in sustaining it. Over the past several decades, there has been massive under-investment in the education system to the point of its near collapse. The World

⁸ We aimed to collect substantially more data, especially with out-of-school children, however, both security concerns and budget constraints limited the time spent in the field.

⁹ The final report further compares across the cases of Afghanistan and DRC and identifies patterns, in the context of the literature review, to examine possible explanations for *why* certain barriers exist and are understood in particular ways.

Bank notes that a key feature of the education system in DRC is the “almost complete lack of government provision and financing of all levels of education, including the primary level” (2005, p. xiv). While spending on education represented 7 percent of GDP and 25 percent of the national budget in the 1960s, it represented only 1 percent of GDP and 5 percent of the national budget in the early 2000s. Spending per pupil per year fell 96 percent, from US\$109 in 1980 to US\$4 in 2002 (AfriMAP & Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2009, p. 2). Spending has increased somewhat in recent years such that in 2008, 8.36 percent of the national budget was spent on education, and 2009 allocations are for 7.1 percent (Ministère de Plan, n.d.). This allocation, however, does not come close to the 16.7 percent of the national budget projected for education by 2008 in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) (IMF, 2007, p. 106).

Aid flows to education in DRC have increased in recent years, despite on-going hesitation about investment given the scope of state fragility and institutional instability. Preliminary analysis indeed indicates that more than half (53.41%) of the 2010 national budget will come from foreign aid (Le Phare, 2009). Yet the country remains a donor “orphan,” receiving relatively little aid given its size and level of poverty (Greeley, 2007). Education officials and NGO staff in Lubero and Beni universally state that there is the capacity to absorb a great deal more aid, but that funding is simply not available and urgent proposals go unfunded, often for years. Further, in published reports and policy document as well as on the ground, there is widespread criticism of the focus of education aid on systemic issues rather than immediate provision of services (Boyle, 2009; IMF, 2007; World Bank, 2005). In particular, there is little trust in the central government to deliver on reform and calls for a shift toward the decentralization of educational provision (Greeley, 2007; Kaplan, 2007, 2008). Critical to meeting educational needs is not only substantial budget increases through both national expenditures and foreign aid allocation but a concurrent focus on how the money is spent (AfriMAP & Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2009).

On the side of the government and donors, there is clear rhetorical commitment to increasing access to education in DRC, with explicit objectives to increase the primary GER to 80 percent in 2008 and 100 in 2015 (IMF, 2007, p. 81; République Démocratique du Congo Ministère de l’Enseignement Primaire, 2005). Despite these goals, there has been under-investment of actual resources; this under-investment has served to limit access through three particular mechanisms: limited and poor quality infrastructure; lack of investment in teachers; and the persistence of prohibitive school fees. The evidence for these mechanisms is evident both in the literature and in the findings from interviews, focus groups, and observations with children and families in Lubero.

First, there has been a lack of investment in infrastructure, particularly in the building and maintaining of schools. Over the past several decades, most schools have been built by parents (Tshiala, 1995 in Balegamire, 1999, p. 244). Mumpasi and Pitshandenge cite data from a national household survey that nine percent of children provide the reason of “no local schools” as explanation for why they are out-of-school; in Nord Kivu, it is almost seven percent that face this barrier (2003). In our sample, on the other hand, no child lives more than a thirty minute walk from a school. In most situations, however, the poor condition of schools serves as a major barrier to access. In the early 1990s, there were two major episodes of school looting by army forces when building and furniture were destroyed on a large scale (World Bank, 2005, p. 14). This destruction continues daily in eastern DRC with children and parents describing in detail the use for firewood of school furniture, doors, and other building materials by fighting forces. What infrastructure does exist is stretched thin. Estimates of

average child to teacher ratios range from 46:1 to 60: 1 (AfriMAP & Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2009, p. 8; Smith & Motivans, 2007, p. 367), with some classes observed at over 70:1 (Semali, 2007, p. 407). In the classes observed in three schools in Lubero, the average class size was 60. In these schools, children sat, on average three to each bench and shared latrines at ratios between 48:1 and 62:1 (see Table 1).

Second, there has been a lack of investment in teachers. In DRC as a whole, only 57 percent of the teaching force is trained (Wolhuter, 2007, p. 352) and Ministry of Education (EPSP) officials in Lubero described how those teachers who are trained prefer to take up posts in cities, leaving rural areas neglected. In our sample of schools, most teachers have six years of secondary school education, with the rest having only four years, but there is “no good” pedagogical training in secondary school according to NGO staff members in Beni. Further, in-service support is severely limited; the EPSP in Lubero does not have a vehicle with which to even visit the schools under its supervision. Difficulties in providing for teacher compensation is a further barrier to access related to under-investment in teachers. Despite the fact that 86 percent of the national education budget goes to pay teachers’ salaries (World Bank, 2005, p. 19), most teachers are supported by school fees, with estimates that between half and 90 percent of salaries are supported by parents (AfriMAP & Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2009, p. 7; UNICEF & World Bank, 2006, p. 17; World Bank, 2005, p. 16).

This issue of teacher compensation is intricately connected to the third access barrier exacerbated by under-investment: school fees. The World Bank reports that parents pay fees of between US\$9 and \$14 per year at the primary level (World Bank, 2005, p. 19), yet Save the Children found that in South Kivu in 2005 parents were paying almost \$16 per child per year in rural schools in addition to \$10 for uniform and \$6 for school supplies (Ombaka, 2007, p. 3). These fees are prohibitive for most families. Mumpasi and Pitshandenge report that, in a national household survey, 62.5 percent of out-of-school children cite the reason for non-enrollment as “can’t afford fees” (61 percent in Nord Kivu) (2003). All children surveyed as part of this study reported that families are solely responsible for school fees, uniforms, school supplies, and meals, and that they often are not able to pay, an issue discussed further under poverty, below. UN staff in Beni and Lubero described how children sometimes pay teachers in bananas and that children who cannot pay, even in bananas, are a “burden” and are chased away (see also, PAGE, 2007). They further confirm that the salaries and supplements that teachers do receive are not consistent and often so low that teachers need to cultivate gardens or teach in more than one school in order to make ends meet (see also, Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2009; World Bank, 2005, p. 19). An EPSP official in Beni explained:

The basic problems is that the central piece of the education system is abandoned by the Congolese state. I mean by that the teacher is not in a condition that enables him to work easily and to look after children, therefore the quality of education is threatened because the teacher is not motivated. He works in bad conditions. Some have no proper housing. Some don’t have a table to work. They sleep with difficulty, eat with difficulty. How do you want a teacher in those conditions to do proper work? That’s the first difficulty. This difficulty then impacts the rest of the work

There is also a perverse incentive to enroll more children, since teachers in schools with more children make more money (Ombaka, 2007, p. 2).

Parents in Lubero universally express the wish that “the government would do its work to make sure to pay the teachers” as “we are tired of paying the teachers.” The group Justice et Libération in Kisangani expressed how the lack of investment in teachers combines with other factors to be a critical and persistent barrier to access: “the current system of bonuses paid by the parents to the teachers is fundamentally bad; it absolves the State of its responsibilities, makes the teachers dependent on the parents, imposes an undue burden on the parents, condemns the pupils and students to a mediocre education, and closes school to those who cannot pay, thus perpetuating social inequality” (as quoted in Balegamire, 1999, p. 244). Ultimately, as an OCHA official in Beni expressed, “the children are the victims of the lack of involvement of the state in infrastructure and payment and supervision of teachers.”

In this environment of under-investment by the state, where families need to take primary responsibility for education of their children, there is pervasive blaming of parents for not taking the necessary initiative to ensure that their children go to school. In Lubero, in-school children described parents of out-of-school children as “negligent” and outlined what they wish these parents would do: they need to buy school supplies, they need to take their children to enroll them, they must encourage them with their studies, they need to pay school fees, they need to not ask them to work in the fields or to take care of young children. Parents, on the other hand, see an expanded role for the state and call for both greater investment in education by government and the development of ways in which parents and schools can collaborate to work “hand in hand” to find ways to increase access for all children.

3.2 *Exclusion from Education Related to Individual- and Group-Level Characteristics*

As described above, there are many barriers to accessing primary education that result at the intersections of the socio-political context and macro-level policy and practice. There are other barriers that act at individual and school level, affecting different people in different ways. The mechanisms behind these forms of exclusion, as explained by children and families in Nord Kivu, are explored below.

3.2.1 *Barriers of Poverty*

The new Constitution of DRC declares elementary education to be free and universal. The existing National Education Law (the *Loi Cadre d’Enseignement National*), however, authorizes parental contributions for the financing of schools (PAGE Project Education Policy Team, 2007). The costs associated with school mean that access to education is highly unequal, with GER for the poorest 20 percent of households only about two-thirds that of GER for the richest 20 percent of households (World Bank, 2005, p. 16).¹⁰ The PAGE projects estimated that, in Equateur province, school fees for one child equaled 60 percent of per capita GDP and, in Sud Kivu, they equaled 19 percent (2007, pp. 36, 42). School fees are, in this way, unsustainable for families and constitute a regressive tax on poor families.

All three schools in this study charge school fees (see Table 1), and every child and every parent discussed school fees, and the associated costs of school attendance, as a major barrier to accessing primary education. The overwhelming hope for education was that it would be

¹⁰ The World Bank report states that it is also likely that the GER for poor households is over-estimated due to problems with the survey data.

“free.” The fact that parents were not rich was the dominant explanation for why children are out-of-school. Indeed, several out-of-school children expressed the sentiment that they would be at school “from the moment they found money for school fees.” Both in-school and out-of-school children described little flexibility in terms of fee payment. “I knew moments of joy until I was chased away to find school fees, over and over again,” a 13-year old girl in Lukanga explained. A 14-year old boy in Kipese said that “the fact of being sent home often affected the quality of my school performance.” This continued disruption of school also led to abandonment of education completely, as one girl in Kipese described how “I left school because every day I was sent home for not having school fees.” One mother in Kipese even found that her daughter was continually sent home when the school did not have enough money, even though her family had already paid school fees.¹¹

A central difficulty in paying school fees is lack of access to money. Most of the parents in this study live on subsistence agriculture. One mother described how “the fields don’t produce regularly enough; we plant only once a year and we harvest only once a year. It is therefore difficult to have money for the whole [school] year.” When there is surplus harvest, agricultural products are sold at low prices, insufficient to meet school costs. The lack of access to money is heightened in rural areas such as those under study and, indeed, rural residence also acts as a barrier to access, with school admission rates at 71.6 percent in urban areas and 43.6 percent in rural areas (IMF, 2007, p. 38).¹² Staff of OCHA in Beni further explained how even parents who have jobs in the civil service cannot afford school fees as they are often not paid or not paid regularly. War exacerbates this poverty, as one out-of-school girl in Kipese explained:

We fled the war and, as a result, I failed my 2ème class. When we came back, Papa found our fields destroyed, pillaged, and even our livestock killed. He said it was difficult to pay school fees for everyone, and he asked us to abandon our studies. Only my oldest sister stayed in school.

In a national household survey, only 0.9 percent of out-of-school children cited the need to work as a reason for non-enrollment (1.1 percent in Nord Kivu) (Mumpasi & Pitshandenge, 2003), however the children in this study described the need to work as a critical barrier. In the conflict setting of Lubero, parents struggle to feed and clothe their families let alone pay school fees, and children need to work to support their families. Girls, in particular, are asked to work in the fields or to stay home and take care of the younger children. Boys often keep the goats or work odd jobs in the city. Single mothers in particular, who number many in this region due to war deaths, ask their children to work rather than attend school. Several parents also commented that boys, in particular, “like money better than school.” Not only the direct costs but also the opportunity costs of school are high.

One father in Butembo expressed a sentiment common among parents and children alike: “The community should unite with poor parents and help them with the education of their children: school should be free.” The PAGE project demonstrated the possibilities for reducing the burden of school fees on families through the creation of alternative financing

¹¹ The PAGE project found the same to be true as parents who had already paid were asked to pay again in order to fulfill the “law of enrollments” whereby “inspectors require principals to pay to the provincial and central education institutions the full amount of fees not as a function of the rhythm of the payment of the fees but as a function of the enrollment numbers declared at the beginning of the school year” (PAGE, 2007, p. ix).

¹² Region and Rural/Urban Residence is not explored separately as an access barrier in this case study due to the scope of data collection, limited to one region, and the focus on predominantly rural areas.

mechanisms such as school-level income-generating activities (IGAs), school-based businesses, and savings and investment groups for parents (Boyle, 2009). Yet larger structural issues of school financing policy at national levels are slow to change. Despite the centrality of school fee abolition in the PRSP (IMF, 2007), the creation of a National Commission for the Abolition of School Fees, and advocacy by churches, teachers unions, and parents in favor of eradicating school fees (PAGE, 2007), there has been little movement in that direction and the cost of school remains one of the most salient access barriers in DRC.

3.2.2 Barriers of Gender

There are large inequalities in access to primary education by gender in DRC. In the 2001-2002 school year, the GER for girls was 56 and for boys was 72 (World Bank, 2005, p. 16). Children, parents, and NGO staff described a culture of prioritizing boys over girls when making a decision about which child to send to school. Especially due to early marriages, NGO staff explained that girls are less valuable to the household as they will leave once they are married. No parents, however, cited this reasoning. They did describe, however, the need for girls in particular to stay at home and take care of younger children. In a national household survey, very few girls cited pregnancy as a reason for dropping out of school, with 0.1 percent listing this reason overall in DRC and 0.0 percent in Nord Kivu (Mumpasi & Pitshandenge, 2003). In none of the schools in this study, however, are girls allowed to attend school while pregnant; one of the three schools allows girls to return to school after the baby is born; and none of the schools permit either boys or girls who are married to attend school. An EPSP official in Lubero stated that it is policy that girls not attend school once they are pregnant or have a child, as it is “a morality question.” Several children also mentioned the prevalence of girls being recruited as military wives and drawn into lucrative prostitution as explanation for the lower enrollment of girls in school.

While boys are enrolled in school at greater rates, children and parents were quick to point out that there are several barriers that boys uniquely face in accessing education. In particular, several children said that “boys are recruited into armed groups” and that “boys love money” and “boys do not like school.” Many described the draw of street life for boys, including the ability to make money and the lure of alcohol, cigarettes, and the cinema. Several mothers also explained that schools were not set up for boys, as their sons were shamed by being beaten by teachers and would not put up with being sent home over and over again for lack of school fees.

3.2.3 Barriers of Disability

The education and training of disabled children is specified as a goal in the PRSP (IMF, 2007, p. 87). Despite this policy-level focus, disabled children face significant barriers to accessing school in Lubero. One girl in Kipese described a physically disabled child in her class and education officials explained that disabled children are, by law, admitted to schools. However, they face several barriers in gaining access. Given the distance that many children must walk to school, physically disabled children “have trouble moving [to school].” If they do make it to school, an OCHA staff member in Beni explained, “[disability] is a cause of being teased and, from there, the child is marginalized and he will not go to school. They are usually alone at recess. He doesn’t have the support of the community.”

Children with mental disabilities often face even greater barriers. One mother in Kipese said that “children with mental disabilities who come to school are often sent home because the teachers have trouble making them understand the material.” Moreover, OCHA staff in Beni explained that mental disability, in particular, is a cause of shame for the family as it “does not come from nowhere, there’s always someone behind it.” For this reason, parents described how families themselves can be hesitant to enroll disabled children in school. A further source of disability, parents explained, is conflict itself, as some children have been traumatized and they cannot focus in school causing a “negative impact on learning.” The overall attitude toward disability was expressed clearly by one father who said, “how would you wish for a disabled child to go to school when, ever since we were born, we have never seen a disabled person among church leaders, political administrators, teachers. Where would disabled people work? It is therefore useless to have them study.”

3.2.4 Barriers of Ethnicity and Language

Despite the wide diversity of ethnicities and languages in DRC broadly and in Lubero specifically, research participants did not think that these factors were salient barriers to accessing education. And none of the schools in which research was conducted noted the enrollment of ethnic and linguistic minority children. One father described how the all-encompassing conflict that people in this region have lived and are living through means that it is only war they can think of as a barrier. “There is no discrimination,” he said. Ministry officials and NGO staff echoed this description, but they also highlighted the “marginalization” of the Pygmy, or Batwa, population.

Part of this marginalization of Batwa children vis-à-vis education relates to the type of nomadic movement the communities engage in to follow their livelihoods. An NGO staff member explained that “when there is the harvest of honey, fruit, mushrooms, the children leave.” Several education officials advocated that Batwa “settle” and begin to “wear clothes,” and then they will be “doing well.” A Save the Children report, however, underscores how previous programs to increase educational access have failed for precisely this reason, for not taking into account the cultural and social characteristic of this ethnic group (2008). The words of some educational officials and NGO staff belie the deep discrimination that Batwa face and that inhibit their access to education. One man, for example, states that “[i]t’s a people, permit me the word, retarded compared with others.” As if trying to counter this pervasive stereotype, another felt the need to specify that “these children are by nature intelligent.” The issue, he explained, is that “they are not stable in school.” An NGO staff member explained that “they are not interested in school.” Similar glimpses into discriminatory sentiments against the Pere ethnic group were also evident in conversations, such as when an educational official attributed the issue with access to education among the Pere to “culture,” and elaborated that “I hear there is a Pere priest that is intelligent and he has showed that it’s possible for Pere to be intellectual.” These issues of discrimination warrant much more extensive study, particularly including the perspectives of Pere and Batwa children, to understand the barriers to educational access that result.

3.2.5 Barriers of Age

In DRC, on-going conflict, displacement, and recruitment into armed forces have interrupted schooling for many children, often for many years. In 2001, delayed or interrupted schooling affected more than 16 percent of boys and 12 percent of girls (IMF, 2007, p. 38). By 2007, it was estimated that over 30,000 children had been attached to fighting forces (Amnesty

International, 2006),¹³ and estimates place between 3000 and 7000 children still in government forces and armed groups (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008, p. 106; MONUC in IDMC, 2009b, p. 7). Active recruitment continued in 2007 (and likely beyond), especially in Nord Kivu (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008, p. 107).

Once stability has returned or child soldiers have been demobilized, children often seek to enter school, often at advanced ages (Amnesty International, 2006, p. 50). While many parents in Lubero stated that there were no restrictions placed on older children attending school, children, especially out-of-school children, disagreed stating that “they cannot go [to school], they are not admitted.” Published reports confirm the strict nature of age policies within the DRC school system (Amnesty International, 2006, p. 53). In addition to these policy restrictions, there are also barriers to access that emerge in the interactions of older children with schools. One boy in Lukanga commented that “some older children are afraid to go [to school] because they are ashamed to be in the same class with younger children.” A boy in Butembo discussed how “they are already used to staying at home” and therefore do not have the motivation to attend. A girl in Lukanga observed that “they are made fun of.” A father in Kipese noted that older children can “feel more intelligent than the teachers; it takes a special kind of teacher for that type of child.” Many children mentioned that older children, in particular, do not have access to money for school fees and that their parents do not support them in seeking an education.

Accelerated learning program (ALP) have been particularly effective at addressing the access barrier of age. Save the Children programs in Beni, Bukavu, and Bunia had 100 percent completion rates, with 65 percent of learners then successfully transitioning to formal schooling (Save the Children UK, 2008a, pp. 6, 12-13). Another Save the Children ALP program in two towns in Sud Kivu successfully enrolled 800 children (406 girls) and of these 800 children, 734 completed the program (Save the Children UK, 2008b, pp. 4-5). An evaluation conducted on the program, which included learning assessments in eight schools, showed a 75 percent success rate on tests in French and mathematics. It also documented that community members perceived the number of children in the streets and acts of violence in the towns to have decreased (Lubamba-Panda, 2008). Despite this type of success, there remain several key challenges to reaching the many overage out-of-school children in DRC, as elsewhere, including continued marginalization of ALP programs due to donor’s focus on formal systems (PAGE, 2007), difficulties in providing accreditation and certification, and lack of links to formal education (Amnesty International, 2006; Echessa, n.d.).

3.2.6 Barriers of Displacement

As explained above, there has been massive displacement in eastern DRC, with 1.1 million currently displaced in Nord Kivu, where this study was conducted (IDMC, 2009b, p. 5). Parents and children cited this displacement as a primary cause of non-enrollment in school. Often they do not find schools in the areas to which they are displaced due to destroyed infrastructure or they find themselves in “forest” areas where there are no schools. Some children in this study have not been affected by displacement as the “troubles” did not reach their home areas. For those that have been affected, however, the displacement has often been constant. An education official in Lubero explained that “displacement is sometimes daily”

¹³ This was the figure accepted by the Government of DRC and the World Bank in their plans for child demobilization.

such that children move around constantly and their schooling is disrupted. In this situation, “people are losing their sense of schooling.”

Most importantly, children who are displaced described facing greater poverty than they did in their home communities. In displacement, their families’ livelihoods have been taken away: they have left most possessions behind, they do not have access to their fields, and animals are frequently stolen. In this situation, there is no possibility of money for school fees. One out-of-school boy in Lukanga explained that “we fled the war with my family and, up to the present, my parents have no money to speak of. I cannot go to school.” A mother in Butembo described similar difficulties: “the war brings displacement of people and all activities are interrupted, including school. This has been my case: I left Kirumba in November [one year ago] and up to now I have difficulty in paying school fees for my children.”

3.3 *Systemic Discrimination in Policies and Practice*

3.3.1 *Curriculum, Quality, and Pedagogy*

In a national survey, 76 percent of Congolese households were not satisfied with the education of their children (IMF, 2007, p. 20). The participants in this study similarly described the quality of education in DRC as “low.” Repetition rates are very high: only 20 percent of children reach the end of primary school without repeating at least one year, and only 14 percent achieve their school-leaving certificate without repeating (World Bank, 2005, p. 17). In the sample of schools in this study, an average of 11.7 percent of students repeated each class, and the 6ème pass rates in mathematics and the official language ranged from 34 to 97.9 percent (see Table 1). The World Bank concludes that even students who pass “do not acquire minimum competencies” (2005, pp. 17, 23). In comparison to other similar countries, the returns on schooling are low in DRC, especially in rural areas. The PRSP attributes this fact to the disappearance of the formal private sector and the decline of wages in the public sector (IMF, 2007, p. 28). Yet the decisions that children and parents make about education as a “waste of time” (Mumpasi & Pitshandenge, 2003) may also relate to quality.

Children and adults commented only briefly on the quality of *what* they learn. An education official from Lubero stated that “we should not always receive things from the Capital,” describing the lack of relevance of the content of the curriculum, especially to the remote and mostly rural areas of the country. Almost all children (93 percent) surveyed felt that schools should not become more vocational in nature, as is sometimes suggested. In terms of the content of the curriculum as it is taught daily in schools, few conclusions can be drawn from this study; in the majority of the 15 lessons observed, researchers sensed that the material had been taught before and was being put on display for the observers.

Children are much more concrete about the quality of *how* they learn. They commented particularly on the importance of a good teacher. A 14 year-old girl from Kipese said, “each time that I encounter a good teacher” is a moment of “joy.” In survey results, children specified some characteristics of what makes a good teacher. All of the children, for example, agreed that if teachers posed more questions in class, education would be of better quality. In an interview, one boy in Kipese was explicit that the reason he liked his teacher was that the teacher responded well to questions. In lessons, however, teachers were observed to interact with students in divergent ways. In several instances, observers described teachers as “mean,” with one teacher incessantly crying “silence” in lieu of teaching. In another class, the

children's silence was taken as an indication that they were afraid of being "injured or chastised" if they behaved differently. In a different school, one teacher was observed to pay attention only to the students who sat in the front and who were strong academically. Another teacher referred to her students negatively, as "bandits" and continually berated them for disrupting her class. In many cases, teachers hurried their students to finish exercises even when the students were not given enough time to properly reflect on and process the material. In other classes in the same schools, teachers were "dynamic" and created a "jovial atmosphere." Indeed, many classes were participatory with teachers making an effort to involve all students. In several classes, one student from each bench took a turn at the board presenting work. One observation noted that the lesson had been a remarkable success in that all students contributed to the learning of the class.

The issue of corporal punishment, practiced across the three study schools (see Table 1), emerged as a salient access barrier in interviews and focus groups. Several children described how they decided not to go to school any more because they could not predict their teachers' behavior and felt as if teachers often acted on "whim" or with "bad behavior." In particular, many children and parents mentioned their fear of the cane and listed it as a particular reason for non-attendance. A thirteen year-old girl who dropped out of school said, "[f]or the rest of the year, I saw others drop out because of the cane. I didn't like this bad behavior of the teacher because it was the reason for many of my colleagues dropping out." Another boy said that "our teacher is good but he beats students on the head. If you make an error for the first time, he excuses you, but the second time he whips you." In Lukanga, children described how they are beaten if they disrupt the class, and they are made either to stand by the door or are sent home if they do not have school fees or are late. In a focus group, a girl described another punishment for being late: "[the teacher] asks you to carry rocks on your head for a distance of about two kilometers. That makes children drop out, for sure." The definition of a "good teacher" in children's words usually included the idea that "they do not beat me."

Parents felt quite helpless in terms of contributing to the improvement of quality in their children's schools. In the survey, almost all children (88 percent) agreed that more parent involvement in education would also make education better. Although one of the schools has "communications books" in which parents and teachers converse with each other, School Management Committees and Parent Teacher Associations meet infrequently, leaving little opportunity for parents to participate (see Table 1). Parents stated that the only way for them to be involved is through paying the teachers, an issue that they felt should be the state's responsibility, as described above. Of particular concern to the parents in Lubero was that since teachers are paid so little (if at all), no one who is educated wants to be a teacher, which serves only to promote a continuous cycle of poor quality teaching.

3.3.2 Conflict and Violence

An education official in Lubero described the situation in this part of DRC as “permanent insecurity.” Universally, participants in this research described war and conflict as the overriding barriers to educational access. “Without peace,” one father in Kipese said, “it is difficult for us to educate our children.” A 14-year old boy outlined the impacts on his family: “I have come to understand how bad war is: it ruins families... two of my brothers have abandoned their studies, two of my sisters have become pregnant: everyone stays at home, idle.”

The access barrier of conflict is, on one level, about infrastructure. As described above, fighting forces often burn benches and other school furniture for firewood. They also occupy schools, which compels schools to close to children indefinitely. During the course of this research, the team observed a rebel camp on the hill just above a school, waiting for the moment to occupy; heard news from an education official that five schools has been burned; and also learned from NGO staff of the positive development that a few schools has been returned to the communities through negotiations with armed leaders. As children described it, however, the situation is always volatile with uncertainty from one day to the next whether there will be a physical school to attend.

On another level, this access barrier is about the consequences of conflict on children’s and families’ lives. Children are often on the front lines of conflict, either fighting in armed forces or vulnerable to the possibility of recruitment. In this situation, they described being “afraid to go to school.” In all cases, children discussed in depth the impacts of conflict on their lives. In particular, they described the deepening poverty that results, and the immense barriers this poverty imposes on access to education.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

This case study demonstrates that there are many reasons for which children in DRC are marginalized and experience limited access to primary school. These barriers include continued under-investment in infrastructure, teacher training, teacher compensation, and school fee abolition in a country in which state financing for education has all but collapsed; exclusion based on gender, language, disability, age and, most importantly, displacement and associated poverty; and systemic policies and practices related to the quality of education, particularly pedagogy, and the overall context of conflict.

These barriers are similar to the barriers identified in the literature as common to conflict-affected fragile states and, to some extent, to all low-income countries. They are amplified, however, by the pervasive and on-going nature of the conflict in DRC and the concomitant collapse of state financing for education. In particular, one of the central findings of this case study is that conflict and poverty act in synchrony to create insurmountable barriers to accessing primary education. Children and parents acknowledge that conflict is the basis for the poverty they experience and the resulting economic problems that prevent access to education. Yet it is not only an end to conflict they suggest, but a complete remaking of the system of education in DRC based on the abolition of school fees and the fair and timely compensation of teachers.

The findings of this study suggest the following actions in order to improve access to quality primary education in DRC:

Recommendations for Government

- Develop mechanisms of state financing for education that will allow for forward movement on the abolition of school fees;
- Follow through on commitment to fair and timely payment of teachers' salaries;
- Realize promises of decentralization of educational services so as to allow decision-making and supervision to occur in the provinces;
- Focus on the development and financing of teacher training institutes and programs, with a specific focus on pedagogy.

Recommendations for Donors

- Work together with government to develop mechanisms for financing of education to move toward the abolition of school fees;
- Develop ways to support concurrent efforts at long-term systemic reform and short-term educational provision, specifically in situations of on-going conflict such as Nord Kivu.

Recommendations for NGOs

- Develop programs, building on past successes, that both increase parents' ability to pay school fees and increase resources available to schools through other sources;
- Continue to build ALP programs for over-age children as well as expand them to target girls, ethnic minorities, and disabled children who have been marginalized from the education system;
- Focus the development of programs on teacher training, specifically related to participatory pedagogy and positive discipline.

Table 1. Characteristics of School Research Sites

	Kipese	Lukanga	Butembo
Type of school	Conventionnée (Protestante)	Conventionnée (Catholique)	Publique
School fees required for attendance	Yes	Yes	Yes
Enrollment	1317	662	1533
Displaced children	6.5%	None reported	3.7%
Children with disabilities	1.7%	None reported	0.07%
Qualified teachers (at D6 level)	80%	83.3%	63.6%
Paid by government	76%	66.7% ^a	100%
Paid by parents	24%	16%	100%
Permanent classrooms ^b	86%	100%	100%
Average class size (in observed classes)	64	58	58
Average no. pupils sharing a bench (in observed classes)	3	3	3
Pupil: Latrine Ratio			
Boys: Latrine	50: 1	62: 1	48: 1
Girls: Latrine	52: 1 ^c	62: 1	48: 1
Children repeating	11.6%	7.7%	15.7%
Pass rate, 6ème			
Math	34%	97.9%	94.9%
Language	56%	75.4%	94.9%
Corporal punishment practiced	Yes ^d	Yes ^{d,e}	Yes ^d
Frequency of School Management Committee Meetings	2 times/year	1 time/year	2 times/year
Frequency of Parent-Teacher Association Meetings	5 times/year	1 time/year	2 times/year

^a Paid by both government and parents.^b Roof made of iron sheets.^c None dedicated for girls.^d As reported by children in focus groups and interviews.^e As observed by researchers at the school.

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