

REPORT 1 April 2006 by staff of MTSA on
COMMUNITY BASED SCHOOLS:
A UNICEF INITIATIVE WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN
TO
**BRING SCHOOL TO VILLAGE CHILDREN
WHO CANNOT GO TO SCHOOL**

When UNICEF Afghanistan set up a Regional Team for the Central Provinces of Afghanistan, one of the top priorities was the challenge of finding a way for girls in rural areas to obtain the basic education which is their right, and which is taken for granted in urban and more developed areas of Afghanistan and the world.

Actively denied the right to learn during the Taliban era, the girls are still being denied education because of safety concerns: kidnapers, land mines, suicide bombers, roving terrorists. What parent would let a little girl walk for hours every day from a rural village to a Provincial school house? Even if there was a Provincial school within walking distance? And mostly there are not any such schools.

Boys as well as girls in the rural areas are being kept within the confines of their homes and villages, for even though they are continuing to lose precious years of learning, at least they are not losing their limbs, or their lives.

So if the children cannot go to school, can school come to the children?

In 2003, UNICEF helped the Government of Afghanistan, under its "Healthy Schools Initiative," to establish the first of what are now some 2,688 Community Based Schools in rural villages in Afghanistan. Some 55,344 little girls are attending these schools, and an equal or greater number of little boys. Many more such classes are planned.

The UNICEF Task Force published the criteria for establishing new Community Based Schools (CBS) as follows:

- CBS should be considered in places where girls and boys do not have access to formal schools or NGO [Non-Governmental Organization] run schools because of distance.
- The distance should be at least four kilometers from formal school or the distance between the formal school and the village is not safe.

- The community should be interested and show readiness for establishing CBS.
- Number of children 7-12 years should be above 30 children in the village. (The number of children = population of the village X 0.20.)
- The priority should be given to girl children.
- The community should provide the learning space and identify the teacher for CBS and more emphasis should be put on female teachers.
- The community should ensure the security of the children and the school.
- The community should support the teacher.
- Written agreements should be signed between DEO and the community council.
- The community/Shura should actively participate in school activities.
- The identified teacher should be committed to teach the children.
- DEO should collect information about the NGOs working the district.

Each village Community Based School is provided with school materials as well as literacy and elementary school text books. The teacher is not paid by the government but rather represents the contribution of the village to the program. The teacher is required to have an educational level of at least sixth grade, but if no one in the village can be found, then the village Mullah is tapped to teach the children.

Of the first set of approximately 200 Community Based Schools in Ghazni Province, according to Dr. Nik Mohammad Attaie, Assistant Project Officer, Ghazni, of the UNICEF Afghanistan Central Provinces Task Force, one or two Community Based Schools in larger villages graduated to become real schools with a real teacher, while one or two failed. In 2005, another approximately 300 Community Based Schools were started, so that Ghazni had approximately 500 such schools as the Afghan school year began in March 2006.

One key element of the Community Based Schools program is its adherence to the established and approved curriculum of the Afghanistan Ministry of Education. This will permit children enrolled in the program to move on to regular schools when that opportunity comes.

In the meantime, Community Based Schools are filling a great need. Although they are a small (but a rapidly growing) portion of the estimated 5.1 million children enrolled in school in Afghanistan, they are crucially important because they represent a whole generation of rural dwellers who will otherwise be denied even the most rudimentary education.

“Every child has the right to learn, and no child learns alone.”
UNICEF: Advance Humanity.

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