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CAPACITY-BUILDING THROUGH POLICYMAKING:

Developing Afghanistan's National Education Strategic Plan

Contents

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Overview

With the fall of the Taliban regime, the Government of Afghanistan and the donor community made education a high priority. The issue of Ministry capacity entered into discussions about international aid to support the education system very shortly after the new government came to power. Civil servants had particularly limited experience in planning and policymaking, specifically in establishing priorities, developing detailed plans and budgets, and implementing them.[1] This briefing paper describes how the Ministry of Education's (MoE) capacity to lead and negotiate education policymaking has developed over the period from 2006 to 2010 through two major strategic planning processes, conducted with external support provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Capacity-building, especially in complex organisations such as the MoE, is a complicated, long-term process because it involves not just changes in individuals' knowledge and abilities, but changes in how organisations operate. Because they can alter access to authority, opportunities, and resources, these organisational changes are not just technical, but are also inherently political. This briefing paper therefore defines capacity as both technical and political, and as involving individuals and the organisations of which they are a part.

The briefing paper shows that over the course of the initial strategic planning effort, some individuals in the MoE gained skills in planning and policymaking such that Afghan nationals led the second planning effort. These individuals were national advisors whose salaries are paid by donor agencies. This represents a model of capacity-building that can be effective in achieving results, but risks making capacity contingent on a "parallel" structure within the Ministry.[2] Also, during the first strategic planning effort, Ministry leadership created organisation-wide focus on the planning process. As a result, ownership for the process was distributed to the programme departments, which were actively engaged more so than during the second strategic

[1] Jouko Sarvi, "A New Start for Afghanistan's Education Sector" (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2003), 24-25.

[2] Richard Blue, "Assessment of the Impact of USAID-Funded Technical Assistance-Capacity-building, Final Report," (Kabul: United States Agency for International Development, 2007), 6.

planning process, despite new technical capacity within the MoE to lead the process. In addition, the MoE's high dependency on foreign aid to fund its programmes made securing resources and securing control over those resources important aims of the planning process. This had the apparent effect of deprioritising feasibility and implementation of the plan. And while some MoE staff who led the second planning process demonstrated capacity to resist program ideas that were not aligned with plans, donor agencies continued to have strong influence through their current role in the overall endorsement of the plan. In sum, a number of challenges—including tension between planning and capacity-building goals, gaps between the intended and actual working structures used for planning, continuing need to prioritise resource acquisition, and lingering organisational constraints—were found to shape planning outcomes.

Specific recommendations include:

- Plan capacity-building into programmes. Capacity-building needs to be planned for, monitored and evaluated in its own right. This includes allowing sufficient time for individuals to develop skills and knowledge and for organisations to develop the communication and operational systems necessary to make effective use of these skills.
- Look beyond instrumental views of capacity. Although capacity is often understood in terms of instrumental action—the ability to carry out functions or tasks—this briefing paper suggests a broader definition that also includes capacities relating to ownership, resource attraction, organisational adaptation and maintaining focus on priorities. It may be helpful for the planning and evaluation of capacity-building programmes to assume a similarly broad definition of capacity.
- Distribute ownership evenly in a complex organisation. It is important to recognise that the MoE is a complex organisation encompassing differing interests and priorities. Although the strategic planning process was seen as demonstrating increased national ownership, this sense of ownership was not uniformly felt within the MoE. Future leadership and management of policymaking should try to ensure that ownership is distributed more evenly across departments, staff and other stakeholders.

1. Introduction

There is widespread concern in the Government of Afghanistan and the country's donor community about capacity and capacity development. Decades of conflict depleted the ranks of the Afghan civil service; many professionals left the country and those who remained had little access to new knowledge or professional growth opportunities. The Taliban government severely reduced the number and responsibilities of civil servants. The current government inherited an infrastructure with daunting capacity challenges: few staff members, limited material resources, and coming to power following years in which civil servants exercised little authority.[3] In response to these challenges there are programmes underway in the Afghan Civil Service Commission, for example the Management Capacity Programme. There are also various public administration reform efforts which the government is implementing across ministries.[4] The newly established Civilian Technical Assistance Programme aims to increase the extent to which the government delivers programmes by developing the capacity of permanent staff and organisations.[5] These efforts indicate that government capacity-building is viewed as a goal in its own right in Afghanistan.[6] But while capacity-building is seen as necessary for improving government performance, it also

[3] Sarvi, "A New Start for Afghanistan's Education Sector," 24-25.

[4] See http://www.afghanexperts.gov.af/ (accessed September 2010)

[5] Ministry of Finance, "The Civilian Technical Assistance Programme (CTAP). Programme Document Draft 2.2" (Kabul: Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, March 2010), 1.

[6] Thomas Theison, "Putting Evidence to Work: Linking Policy and Practice in Capacity Development" (Washington, DC: Capacity Enhancement Brief no. 33, World Bank Institute, 2009), 1.

presents complex challenges.[7] This briefing paper focuses on the challenge of capacity-building in Afghanistan by looking at the development of capacity through strategic planning and policy formation.

The development of the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) in 2006 marked the first time that the Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) used strategic planning to develop a comprehensive education policy. The NESP, designed to cover five years, was revised ahead of schedule, beginning in 2009.[8] This paper describes how the MoE's capacity to lead and negotiate the policymaking process changed between the initial formulation of NESP and its revision.[9] The paper draws data from a case study conducted in 2009-10 on policymaking in the primary and secondary education sector.[10] The case study gave particular attention to the MoE's Teacher Education Programme.[11] Along with several other studies focusing on agriculture and rural development, governance, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, and lawmaking (the Shiite Personal Status Law), this paper is part of a series collectively intended to contribute to understanding policymaking processes in Afghanistan.[12]

Organisation of the Briefing Paper

This briefing paper begins with a discussion about the concept of capacity followed by a brief description of the methodology used in the study. This is followed by a description and analysis of the case; the paper first describes the reasons NESP I was developed and the key actors, then it describes the NESP I development process, focusing again on the key actors and the working structures put in place to organise the effort. There is an overview of the reasons and motivations to revise the plan and develop NESP II, which also looks at how the key actors and working structures for NESP II contrast with NESP I. The paper then focuses on capacity. It first presents interviewees' definitions of capacity and then gives evidence about capacity change in the NESP process. There is then a discussion about capacity to "resist," that is, to argue, challenge and advance an agenda, and a discussion about the apparent effects of NESP. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations based on the findings presented.

Key Concept: Capacity

"Capacity" is a key concept considered in this paper. Definitions of capacity range from strictly technical views to definitions that incorporate power and politics. Technical definitions of capacity emphasise how human resources and organisations can be improved through specific interventions. More political definitions point to the importance of politics, culture and historical context in developing capacity.[13] Because capacity development involves altering access to authority, resources and opportunities, politics

[7] Vinod Thomas, "Linking Individual, Organisational and Institutional Capacity-building to Results" (Washington, DC: Capacity Enhancement Brief no. 19, World Bank Institute, 2006), 5.

[8] The revised NESP is in the final stages of drafting and approval, as of the time of writing.

[9] In this paper, when the discussion relates to the strategic planning process the acronym "NESP" is generally used. When the discussion instead relates to the initial process and document that was created, "NESP I" is used; and when it relates to the revised strategic plan and planning process, "NESP II" is used.

[10] Sayed Mohammad Shah, "Is Capacity Being Built? A Study of the Policymaking Process in the Primary and Secondary Education Subsector" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2010).

[11] The Teacher Education Programme was selected because: 1) it is a consolidated programme compared with others; 2) it is directly linked to the quality and access of education; 3) past practices for teacher education can be compared with recent events; and 4) it involves varied forms of implementation both by government and non-government organisations.

[12] Martine van Bijlert, "Between Discipline and Discretion: Policies Surrounding Senior Subnational Appointments" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009); Lauryn Oates, "A Closer Look—The Policy and Lawmaking Process Behind the Shiite Personal Status Law" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009); Adam Pain, "Policymaking in Agricultural and Rural Development" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009); Sayed Mohammed Shah, "Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) Formulation Process: Influencing Factors and Challenges" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009).

[13] Heather Baser and Peter Morgan, "Capacity, Change and Performance. Study Report" (Maastricht: Discussion Paper no. 59B, European Centre for Development Policy Management, 2008), 20, 47-50.; Tony Land, Volker Hauck and Heather Baser, "Capacity Development: Between Planned Intervention and Emergent Processes" (Maastricht: Policy Management Brief no. 22, European Centre for Development Policy Management, 2009), 2.

should be considered in capacity initiatives. In Afghanistan, it is often said that Afghans "lack capacity." However, there is arguably a political dimension to this problem: Those who design training programmes, often expatriates, sometimes presuppose systems that do not exist or they do not take people's existing capacity into consideration.[14] In fact, in post-conflict conditions, building on the capacity that exists may be particularly effective because institutions that survive a war are likely to be more resilient and effective than they appear.[15]

Despite longstanding recognition that capacity should be prioritised in development cooperation, few definitions of capacity are grounded in empirical research. Capacity is therefore seldom based on people's actual experiences. One exception is a long-term case study of 16 development projects around the world.[16] This study defines capacity as existing at both the individual and collective (or organisational) levels and it includes five types of capabilities:

1) Ownership: capability to commit and to engage, which relates to the importance of ownership and motivation

2) Instrumental action: capability to carry out functions or tasks; instrumental action is the most common way of thinking about capacity

3) Resource attraction: capability to relate to others and attract resources and support, which emphasises the importance of entering into relationships that sustain existing sources and produce new sources of funding, staff and learning

4) Adaptation: capability to adapt and self-renew, which can be especially influential when there is a high level of reliance on external funding

5) maintaining focus: capability to balance coherence and diversity, which for large, complex organisations means preventing fragmentation and loss of focus, but at the same time encouraging innovation

This previous research also points to a general correlation between the size and complexity of an organisation and the amount of capacity needed for it to be effective. Although the type of capabilities needed varied according to sector, mandate and history of an organisation, the research found that the more complex was an organisation—in terms of having many actors and numerous views about priority activities and goals—the higher was the level of capacity required for the organisation to achieve its goals. As an institution, the Afghan MoE is clearly a complex organisation. Among the ministries, it is one of the largest employers of civil servants in the country and provides one of the most broad-reaching and visible government services. The central MoE is organised into a number of departments, including a General Secretariat. Deputy ministers coordinate departments. There were two deputy ministers until recently but now there are five.[17] The MoE is, in effect, numerous organisations (such as central ministry departments and provincial-level offices) that exist within one organisation. In addition to highlighting the issue of organisational complexity, this also means that it can be problematic to assume that "the government" or "the ministry" shares the same ideas and priorities.

Taking this discussion of capacity into consideration, what would be evidence of change in policymaking capacity? It would require changes in both individuals and organisations. The MoE is complex and would therefore require strong capacity of all the types described above. In addition, since NESP development involved the technical assistance of non-Afghan personnel or "internationals," evidence of capacity change would also be a transfer of instrumental action from internationals to Afghan nationals. This brings up a complicating issue. In Afghanistan, there are different definitions of who does and who does not represent the MoE. The Ministry employs Afghan nationals who work under different types of employment contracts, including "national

[14] Barnett R. Rubin, "Who Lacks Capacity? Using the Skills of the Opium Trade for Counter-Narcotics" (Informed Comment: Global Affairs, 2008). http://icga.blogspot.com/2008/04/rubin-who-lacks-capacity-using-skills.html (accessed May 2010).

[15] Alastair J. McKechnie, "Building Capacity in Post-Conflict Countries" (Washington, DC: Capacity Enhancement Brief no. 5, World Bank Institute, 2004), 3.

[16] Baser and Morgan, "Capacity, Change and Performance."

[17] Sarvi, "New Start for Afghanistan," 24.

advisors" who work under short- or long-term contracts paid by donor agencies, and "civil servants" who work under long-term contracts paid by the government. Some argue that only civil servants truly represent the MoE, while others contend that national advisors, who typically speak English and have some knowledge from outside Afghanistan, also legitimately represent the MoE. In terms of evidence of capacity, less reliance on non-Afghan personnel would suggest greater MoE capacity, but there are varying opinions among those interviewed for this study about whether capacity-building that involves, or is contingent on, national advisors as opposed to civil servants, represents real MoE capacity development.

This briefing paper defines capacity as both technical and political, involving individuals and the organisations of which they are a part. The elements of capacity presented above—ownership, instrumental action, resource attraction, adaptation, and maintaining focus—will be used to analyse the findings. At the same time, however, the people involved in the NESP process had their own definitions of capacity and this paper will also include these.

Methodology

This briefing paper is primarily based on 18 interviews with 20 people who are involved in the primary and secondary education sectors. They include representatives of the MoE, donor agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs). The interviews addressed individuals' involvement in and perspectives on the NESP process, particularly the Teacher Education Programme, as well as capacity issues. The interviews were conducted during Autumn of 2009 and early Winter of 2010. Data was also drawn from 18 brief interviews conducted in Spring 2009 and from a review of relevant documents.

While investigating the NESP development process provided focus for the paper, it also somewhat limited possible discussion of education policymaking in Afghanistan more generally. Many questions about policymaking in education remain; for example, from where does education policy derive and how effective is the current policymaking structure?[18] The study is not prescriptive and is not designed to result in recommendations for the education policymaking process or structure. It does not seek to identify existing policy needs, to track implementation of policy, or to assess the impacts of policy on beneficiaries. The sample did not include a number of key actors such as top Ministry leadership, provincial education leaders, or regular civil servant employees of the MoE, and the relatively small number of interviews further limited multi-source validation of the data. Data collection focused exclusively on actors based in Kabul and on Kabul-based policymaking activities.[19] The retrospective nature of the design also limited the study. Future policymaking studies would benefit from designs that incorporate observation of actual policymaking activities.

2. The Making and Revising of the NESP

Why Develop a NESP?

With the fall of the Taliban regime, the government and the donor community made education a high priority. Under the new Constitution, education was envisioned to be "the right of all citizens," obliging the state to "devise and implement effective programmes for a balanced expansion of education all over Afghanistan."[20] Due to decades of war and institutional decline, the newly formed government lacked sufficient financial and technical resources to rebuild the education system without international support. The issue of Ministry capacity entered into discussions about supporting the education system very shortly after the fall of the Taliban regime. Despite efforts to respond to pressing needs and public demands, MoE civil servants generally lacked capacity because they had had

[18] For a recent study that takes a broader, historical view of education policy in Afghanistan, see Antonio Guistozzi, "Nation-Building is Not for All: The Politics of Education in Afghanistan" (Afghanistan Analysts Network, May 2010).

[19] This brief is based on a case study that includes more detail about the consultative process than was described for NESP I and NESP II, including comments about efforts to include provincial and district representatives. But again, data about their own views and experiences were not collected.

[20] *Constitution of Afghanistan*. See http://www.afghan-web.com/politics/current_constitution.html

little substantive experience or responsibilities for years. Civil servants had particularly limited experience in strategic planning, specifically in establishing priorities, developing detailed plans and budgets, and implementing them.[21]

Prior to the development of NESP I,[22] which covered the period of 1385-1389 (2006-2010), the annual plans of the MoE were based on the Ministry of Finance's (MoF) budget allocations for education. However, MoE leadership realised this budget-driven approach did not match needs or growing public demand, as one interviewee described:

> *After the emergence of the new government and conceptual changes among the people, the demand for education throughout the country dramatically increased. If the MoE continued to plan according to the budget allocations by the MoF, it would never be able to fulfil the demands in the sector. These increased demands forced us to adopt a middle way that was programming based on the demands in the sector, not based on the budget allocations.*[23]

An important part of the MoE motivation to develop the NESP therefore had to do with wanting public need, rather than available resources, to determine plans. While the MoE realised the limitations of short-term planning based on annual budget allocations, the head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) signed an agreement in Kabul. This was to help develop the Ministry's planning capacity through UNESCO's International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP). The agreement was to jointly implement a three-year Strategic Planning and Capacity Development Project with the MoE.[24] The IIEP is a permanent institute that strengthens the capacity of countries to plan and manage their education systems.[25] Preceding this agreement, Deputy Minister of Education Dr Abdul Ghafoor Ghaznavi had established good relations with the IIEP, in part due to his work experience in France prior to returning to Afghanistan.[26] The MoE's agreement with UNESCO coincided with Dr Ghaznavi's attending an Education for All (EFA) meeting in Paris where delegates urged Afghanistan to have an EFA plan.

> As one IIEP representative characterised the situation, the MoE had to "ride the bike and assemble parts of the bike at the same time."

EFA is a global movement led by UNESCO to promote the basic learning needs of children and adults around the world. It represents uniform goals for all member nations and is also linked to the global pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, especially the second goal, on universal primary education, and the third goal, on gender equality in education. EFA is intended to be a means of securing greater bilateral and multilateral education funding as well as greater commitment of domestic resources for education.[27] One interviewee recalled that MoE leadership reasoned that developing a strategic plan could serve simultaneously both the MoE's goal of planning based on needs and those of EFA. Related to this is that UNESCO's capacity-building support through the IIEP is linked to the EFA initiative that it leads. The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, representing the Government of Norway, funded the IIEP's project with the MoE through its general support of UNESCO's capacity-building initiative. In sum, NESP I represented an opportunity to develop a strategic plan, thereby positioning the MoE to attract greater resources and gain greater control over the allocation of these resources.

MoE leadership also proved to be essential in creating focus and ownership across the MoE for the strategic planning process. In the first few years after the fall of the Taliban, from 2001-06, six different leaders served as Minister of Education. Although the initial agreement between UNESCO's IIEP and the MoE was made with Minister Younus Qanooni, the work moved ahead decisively in 2006 under the leadership of

[21] "New Start for Afghanistan," Asian Development Bank.

[22] Ministry of Education, "National Education Strategic Plan (1385-1389)" (Kabul: Ministry of Education, 1386).

[23] Interview with MoE representative in December 2009.

[24] IIEP, "Afghanistan Capacity Development and Strategic Planning," http://www.iiep.unesco.org/news/single-view/hash/4d4b01f063.html?tx_ttnews[pS]=1269945999&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=255&tx_ttnews[backPid]=81.

[25] IIEP, "Our Mission," http://www.iiep.unesco.org/aboutiiep/about-iiep.html (accessed 19 May 2010).

[26] Interview with MoE representative in December 2009.

[27] UNESCO Education Funding, http://www.unesco.org/en/efa/funding/ (accessed 19 May 2010).

Minister Hanif Atmar. When Atmar first assumed duties at the MoE, he was said to have viewed the strategic planning effort as a rare "bright point" of activity. He gave the task top priority and his personal attention.[28] More generally, Atmar's tenure at the MoE was characterised in terms of capacity to project ownership and maintain focus on priority initiatives. One interviewee said: "Before him, the MoE was a very silent organisation and unproductive...he would follow-up on his policies and decisions and wanted to get output. [Previously] even if decisions were consultative, there was no follow-up."[29]

The NESP I development process

As described above, the initial agreement to develop NESP involved a consensus among key international and national actors, specifically UNESCO, IIEP, several ministers of education, a Deputy Minister of Education and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which funded the effort. IIEP's capacity-building agreement with the MoE involved a long-term effort to provide training and technical assistance. Initially, MoE staff from the Planning Department and other central departments and provincial officers were to be trained. At a later stage, the MoE placed ten national advisors in the Planning Department to reinforce the strategic planning effort by increasing its operational work force. This happened at a time (2006-07) when the Minister was highly motivated to produce a five-year plan and most MoE staff were not trained in the process; many had additional constraints such as poor computer skills and little knowledge of recent educational approaches. Overall, the number of MoE staff who were trained either in-depth or partially was approximately 80.[30]

During NESP I development, there was tension between training and planning goals. As one IIEP representative characterised the situation, the MoE had to "ride the bike and assemble parts of the bike at the same time." Pressure to achieve quick development results is a general phenomenon in post-conflict nations.[31] Much of the aid in Afghanistan since 2001 has been characterised as prescriptive and results-oriented, "designed to deliver rapid, visible results, rather than to achieve sustainable poverty reduction or objectives."[32] This results-orientation has been attributed to both internal and external constituencies. After suffering from war, people expect a "peace dividend" and public expectations may therefore be unrealistically high. Donor agency expectations also tend to be high and, despite constraints to project planning, procurement and implementation, pressures to achieve early results are likely to be unrealistically high.[33] This creates a tension between efforts to build local capacity, which takes time and planning, and the need to achieve quick results.[34]

Working structures for developing NESP I were determined at an initial meeting between IIEP and the MoE Planning Department. Based on its experiences in other countries, IIEP had developed an organisational model for strategic planning that was adopted in the case of NESP I. It consisted of:

1) A Secretariat within the Planning Department to manage the work
2) A Steering Committee to supervise the work (supervised by the Minister, or a Deputy Minister in his absence)
3) Working Groups based in programme departments to develop programme content
4) Three Technical Working Groups to undertake cross-cutting analytical tasks. These included costing, projections, and alignment with education law, the Afghan National Development Strategy, Education for All, and other documents[35]

[28] Interviews with two MoE representatives in November and December 2009, a donor agency representative in November 2009, and an NGO representative in March 2009.

[29] Interview with former MoE representative in January 2010.

[30] Interview with an MoE leader in November 2009, MoE Planning Department representative in December 2009, and information provided by an anonymous reviewer.

[31] McKechnie, "Building Capacity in Post-Conflict Countries," 1.

[32] Matt Waldman, "Falling Short: Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan" (Kabul: Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, 2008), 2.

[33] McKechnie, "Building Capacity in Post-Conflict Countries," 1.

[34] Yusuf Bangura, "Public Sector Restructuring: The Institutional and Social Effects of Fiscal, Managerial and Capacity-Building Reforms" (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2000), 36.

[35] Interviews with two MoE Planning Department representatives in November and December 2009.

The Secretariat, also called the Strategic Planning Team, coordinated the NESP I process among the Working Groups and served as the link between the IIEP and the MoE. The MoE Minister appointed its members as well as those of the Steering Committee.[36] As part of the IIEP's support, the Planning Department permanently restructured itself and established sub-departments in management information systems, coordination, strategic planning and monitoring and evaluation.

There were a total of eight Working Groups organised for the development of NESP I, which reflected the number of MoE departments at the time. The respective department leader led each Working Group, with the Minister again being responsible for appointing additional members. When he took charge of the MoE, Atmar brought some advisors with him. One MoE representative said Atmar literally "brought capacity for the Ministry" in the form of professional Afghans whom he could be assured would work and produce results.[37] Although these advisors all became part of the NESP process, they were not permanent employees of the Ministry. Instead, they were *Khidmati*, that is, providing "service" to the Ministry and working under contracts in which they were paid by donor agencies. In NESP I, these people served as technical advisors in the Working Groups. Non-Afghan advisors also assisted, especially with costing and budgeting. Regular civil servant employees of the MoE were said to have been involved in the NESP I process; they participated in Working Groups and made programme content suggestions through translation from English to Dari and Pashto, then back to English, which was the language in which NESP I was developed.[38] IIEP experts provided technical guidance; however, as one interviewee characterised it, "the Working Groups would do the work." In particular, the national advisors were described as taking the lead in writing NESP I. Working Group leaders led the groups in defining goals, breaking down goals into objectives, and defining these into specific activities.

MoE reliance on national advisors is consistent with the "embedded advisor" or advisory team strategy of technical assistance.[39] This is a model of technical assistance that is associated with capacity-building, but only if the goal of capacity development is an explicit focus. Capacity-building in this model is more limited if, on the other hand, the embedded advisor or advisory group becomes a "parallel" government body that takes on operational functions that the Ministry should perform. When the embedded advisor is an Afghan returnee there are many benefits from a donor agency point of view, including typically good English language skills, exposure to contemporary (usually Western) ways of thinking, as well as an understanding of cultural and social customs that influence Afghan practices. However, potential drawbacks to the strategy are resentment when returnees make substantially higher salaries than other Afghans, and calling into question returnees' supposed superior level of competence. In this study, national advisors were present in both the Teacher Education and Planning departments of the MoE, and in both departments national advisors had been with the MoE for a number of years.

In the NESP I development for the Teacher Education Programme, key actors were MoE teacher education leaders and specialists, and donors and NGOs involved in the area. These included the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), USAID, the United Nations Children's Fund, UNESCO, the World Bank, and Care International. The Teacher Education Department further organised the process through establishing a number of sub-Working Groups: research, education administration, pre-service, in-service, distance education, and standards and curriculum.[40] Although interviewees had different recollections about who led each subgroup, it appeared to have been a mix of national advisors, donor representatives and at least one NGO.[41] GTZ,

[36] Interview with MoE representative in December 2009.

[37] Interviews with an NGO representative and a MoE advisor in March 2009.

[38] Interviews with a MoE representative in November 2009 and one anonymous reviewer.

[39] Blue, "Assessment of the Impact of USAID-Funded Technical Assistance-Capacity-building, Final Report," 6-7.

[40] Different interviewees referred to different numbers and areas of focus for the sub-Working Groups. Additional subgroups that were named include accelerated and teacher education, special education, and non-formal education.

[41] Interview with an MoE leader in December 2009 and a

for instance, led in developing the pre-service sub-programme. Only a few NGOs appeared to have been involved in formulating the initial Teacher Education Strategic Plan, specifically by reviewing drafts and providing feedback and comments.[42]

Organisational and working structures for NESP I were characterised as very "specified;" that is, they were pre-determined at the outset of the policymaking process. All the members of the steering committee were defined, the number of meetings was defined, Working Groups were defined, and the process of work was defined.[43] While the IIEP might have suggested, based on its previous experience, the structural content for these specified processes, interviewees uniformly characterised Minister Atmar's leadership style as providing an enabling environment that meant that the structure was operational. "The moment Atmar entered into the ring, he said: "Everybody will listen to my command." There was a hierarchal system of decision making for NESP I. At the bottom were the Working Groups and then there was the Steering Committee. The results of the Working Groups would be presented to the board," said one interviewee.[44] In terms of capacity, MoE leadership's strong expression of ownership for and focus on the strategic planning process meant that the larger MoE system was engaged and responsive. Departments adapted by organising themselves to do the required planning tasks (evidenced in this study by the Teacher Education and Planning departments).

Despite the existence of specified working structures, there was some indication that they did not function as intended. The Steering Committee "could not be active enough" and, although programme department leaders led the Working Groups and provided comments, "they were less involved and had less contribution than the [Afghan national] advisors, who had key roles in the Working Groups."[45] One interviewee involved in the process for teacher education had the impression that plans for the way the working structures would operate "did not last very long."[46] Decisions tended to be made primarily by sending documents around for comments, which were received from Working Group members and technical advisors, as well as the Minister himself.

The gap between how the working structures for NESP I were intended to function and how they actually functioned was attributed largely to the timetable. The IIEP had suggested the need to accept a longer-term approach that was participatory and incorporated capacity-development into the formulation process. Although Minister Atmar abandoned the initial idea of setting a three-month deadline, he continued to remind all those involved to keep the product in sight.[47] One interviewee recalled that this had the effect of "altering the normal situation into an emergency situation," with the advisors putting the drafts together in English, which facilitated the commenting process with the international actors but may have limited the input of non-English speaking civil servants.[48]

For the Teacher Education Programme, each sub-Working Group used the same format of developing detailed strategies, targets, rationales and indicators. However, when the Working Group submitted a draft to the Steering Committee, the teacher education format differed from those used by other Working Groups. Indicators—which were present in the teacher education format but absent from others—were therefore dropped from the Teacher Education Strategic Plan draft and some changes in content were made. This resulted in the impression that the plan "lost the connection with the departments."[49] Despite this, representatives of the Teacher Education Department saw the NESP I process as a good activity, resulting in a usable plan that the department regularly referred to and used in annual planning:

donor agency representative in November 2009.

[42] Interviews with two international NGO representatives in November and December 2009.

[43] Interview with an MoE Planning Department representative in December 2009.

[44] Interview with a donor agency representative in November 2009.

[45] Interview with an MoE Planning Department representative in January 2010.

[46] Interview with NGO representative in December 2009.

[47] Comments by an anonymous reviewer.

[48] Interviews with current and former MoE Planning Department representatives in December 2009 and in January 2010 and an NGO representative in December 2009.

[49] Interview with an MoE leader in December 2009.

> *In my view it was a very good process and good activity because we had a combination of different levels of expertise. And what was not important was who should lead it and who should have the final say. Everybody was so open to have a better plan and to have more quality input and there was no resistance to it at all. The other thing was that people were watching it, thinking, "ok this is our strategic plan and we were very proud of it." And we were following the targets and we were referencing it. And I think vision building and planning became more a culture of work in the Ministry.*[50]

Prior to developing NESP I the Teacher Education Department had some informal strategic plans and felt, accordingly, well prepared to take on the task. In contrast, one Ministry representative said that other MoE departments "really received a push. Not all, but finance, procurement, infrastructure, for the first time they thought about the whole country and the whole system, about procedures and objectives."[51]

Why Revise: Motives and Process for Developing NESP II

NESP II is intended to go into effect in 1389 (2010) and cover the next four years until 1393 (2014). In July 2008, just before he became Minister of the Interior, Hanif Atmar asked the visiting IIEP team in Kabul to initiate the revision process. Several factors appear to have played a role in this request. Feedback on implementation, including data obtained through the MoE's new management information system, suggested that there were weaknesses in the original plan. Changes in educational targets agreed upon at the Paris Conference in 2008, as well as a restructuring of the MoE to include five rather than eight departments, also played roles.[52] Related to this is that the programme departments—more specifically the Deputy Ministers in charge of the departments—were said to feel little ownership of the initial NESP.[53] Additional factors related to donor conditions, specifically for success in gaining membership in the EFA Fast-track Initiative (FTI).

FTI helps achieve EFA goals by encouraging low-income countries to develop education plans and commit more resources to education in exchange for greater donor funding and assistance. FTI also includes the possibility of additional financial resources: the Catalytic Fund, which provides transitional funding, and the Educational Programme Development Fund, which provides assistance to developing capacity.[54] The new Minister of Education, Farooq Wardak, became interested in joining FTI when it became clear in 2009 that funds available for Ministry goals in school construction, teacher education, and other programmes, especially in the border areas, were not sufficient. Initially wary of the MoE maintaining such high targets, a World Bank representative suggested FTI as an alternative funding source.[55] Part of FTI's appeal is that in exchange for the donors' endorsement of the strategic plan (NESP II), the donors are then obligated to fund the plan through the government budget. Once approved, FTI also has the potential of making additional multilateral funds available to the sector. Afghanistan submitted its application for FTI membership in May 2009 and, as described below, several conditions for FTI membership influenced the working structures for NESP II.[56] In terms of capacity, motivation to revise the NESP illustrates the MoE leadership's consistency in prioritising resource attraction.

How did the actors and working structures for the NESP II policymaking process compare to those in place for NESP I? For NESP II, the Planning Department took a formal lead in the revision effort. Still supported by IIEP, especially in the area of projecting school enrolments and needed teachers, the Planning Department assumed the management and supervision of

[50] Interview with an MoE Teacher Education Department representative in November 2009.

[51] Interview with an MoE Teacher Education Department representative in November 2009.

[52] The shift from eight to five departments was requested by the Ministry of Finance to facilitate tracking and managing of programmes more effectively.

[53] Interviews with two MoE Planning Department representatives in November and in December 2009.

[54] UNESCO Fast Track Initiative, http://www.unesco.org/en/efa/funding/fast-track-initiative (accessed 19 May 2010)

[55] Interview with a former MoE representative in January 2010.

[56] Interview with an MoE representative in January 2010 and a donor agency representative in December 2009.

strategic planning. It created forms for recording situation analyses and policy frameworks (log frames) to be completed by departmental staff. The Planning Department was then to create drafts—in Dari, as opposed to English this time—that would be circulated for comment, including back to the departmental leaders for comments and ultimately for them to sign-off on the content.[57] In contrast to NESP I, the Deputy Ministers were said to be more actively involved in NESP II, specifically through membership in the Steering Committee, which also included the Minister, Director of Planning, and several other MoE leaders. As a steering committee member explained, "We integrated the Deputy Ministers in the process and it is very helpful because some said if our names are not in the document, we won't own it...when they see their name, they will feel ownership."[58] While ownership is defined here as involving commitment and engagement, it is unclear how active the Deputy Ministers were since their involvement did not appear to motivate the entire MoE system, as had been the case with the Minister's involvement in NESP I. As was the case for NESP I, five Working Groups were reported to have been put in place for NESP II (corresponding to each department in the new MoE structure) as well as three Technical Working Groups. NGOs appeared to have played a similarly minimal role in the NESP II development process, as was the case in NESP I.[59]

An important addition to the working structures put in place during NESP II was the formation of the Education Development Board (renamed the Human Resources Development Board [HRDB] in March 2010). The HRDB was one of the requirements for FTI membership and was also described as a mechanism of donor coordination that Minister Atmar considered to be necessary based on his experience with NESP I. Its function is as "a coordination bridge and mechanism for the coordination of policies, programmes and improvement of donor-MoE relations."[60] The HRDB consists of a Secretariat located in the MoE, a Steering Committee and five Technical Working Groups that correspond to the five NESP II programmes. The Steering Committee consists of 18 members from the MoE, education sector donors and NGO implementing partners. It meets on a monthly basis. The Chair of the Steering Committee is an MoE representative designated by the Minister, while the co-chair is selected annually from one of the donor agencies. As of June 2010 it is the Danish International Development Agency. The HRDB's Technical Working Groups use the same organisational structure—a Ministry representative chairing and a donor representative co-chairing. Based on evidence from the Teacher Education Department, a preliminary interpretation of this new structure, the HRDB, and its effect on NESP II development is that internationals shifted their involvement in the process from the Working Groups to the HRDB. Related to this is that their task involvement also shifted from helping to shape programme content to responding to and providing feedback about already-drafted content. Therefore, a notable point of contrast with NESP I was that non-Afghan advisors were less involved and that, generally, control over the work shifted to nationals.[61]

NESP II drafts have been shared with the HRDB five times with the aim of soliciting comments for review and integration.[62] A key aspect of the HRDB's role in terms of FTI is that it serves as the mechanism for endorsement of the MoE's strategic plan as part of its application for FTI membership. This gives the HRDB influence over the plan. At the same time, the MoE leadership created the HRDB in order to better coordinate education aid and to align donor activities with NESP priorities. As one international who was involved in the process characterised it: "There is now one legitimate forum for discussing long-term planning [and funding] with donors, rather than there being numerous time-consuming bilateral negotiations or no coordination between donors as before." So, while one can argue that the HRDB gives the donors leverage over the MoE in terms of its role in endorsing NESP II, the reverse is also the case. It is also important to note that

[57] Interviews with two MoE Planning Department representatives in December 2009 and in January 2010.

[58] Interview with an MoE representative in December 2009.

[59] Interviews with two NGO representatives in November and in December 2009.

[60] Interview with an MoE representative in January 2010 and comments of one anonymous reviewer.

[61] Interview with two MoE leaders in November and in December 2009.

[62] Interviews with an MoE representative in January 2010 and a donor agency representative in December 2009.

the donors do not necessarily concur about policy issues and the HRDB may therefore generate different and conflicting views. Related to the HRDB's aid coordination role, recent discussions in HRDB meetings about NESP II have focused on donors' "forward looking agenda" for the next five years. These discussions have sought to determine the specific activities and resources to which donors will commit. And in the long-term, the HRDB is expected to be used as a monitoring mechanism for NESP II implementation.[63]

Despite the working structure said to have been put in place for the development of NESP II, it appeared that the gap between the intended development process and the actual process was even greater in NESP II than for NESP I. As one interviewee explained, "The MoE leadership wanted revision of the strategic plan (NESP II) but had not thought of an organised structure." While it existed in name, the Steering Committee was not formal or organised in predetermined ways as was the case for NESP I. After the completion of NESP I, the Working Groups were converted into the Programme Management Unit (PMU) for the management of the programme. However, for unknown reasons the PMU did not play a management role for NESP II. Neither were the Working Groups at the programme level very active during NESP II development. Generally, the revised plan was seen to have been drafted by the Planning Department with the assistance of IIEP. As one MoE official recalled: "The programme [departments] did not participate in a way they needed to." Instead of content initially emerging from Working Groups as was the case for NESP I, the Planning Department initially drafted content for NESP II and then sought comments and feedback from the programme departments, Deputy Ministers and others, including the HRDB. In this drafting process, Planning Department representatives drew a distinction between the technical and political aspects of the process. National advisors in the Planning Department put together technical content for the draft of NESP II; the politics of the process—"veto power to take decisions on policy issues"—was given to the Director of the Planning Department at an initial level, and then ultimately to department leaders who were to sign off on the content.[64]

Timing again appeared to have played a role in the NESP II policymaking process, with the Minister once more imposing a three-month deadline. The timetable did not enable the Planning Department to undertake fully what it had learned to be the first step in strategic planning: undertaking a situation analysis of the implementation of NESP I to inform NESP II policy changes and decisions. The tight timetable was also problematic for the Teacher Education Department. Leaders said that because there is so much work and because many parts of the MoE system—finance, procurement, provincial offices—are like a "broken machine" that does not function very well, sometimes the department operates in an ad hoc way, "like an emergency department of a hospital, where a patient comes and everybody runs." In light of this, there was sometimes insufficient time to look at NESP II drafts from the Planning Department. Also, feedback was not always given on draft content in a timely way.[65] An apparent result was a lack of consensus within the Teacher Education Department about the content of the final draft.[66] There was also some evidence that the tight timetable reduced some donors' ability to read drafts and make comments at HRDB meetings.[67]

To sum up the NESP I and NESP II working structures in relation to capacity, MoE leadership showed consistent capacity to adapt, especially to new or perceived opportunities to attract resources while projecting some level of ownership for the process. Planning Department staff learned the strategic planning process during NESP I sufficiently to lead the process during NESP II. An MoE department leader characterised the NESP I experience: "We participated in the process; the foreign advisors did the job, but we learned." However, despite notable increases in the instrumental capacity of the Planning Department to lead and engage in strategic

[63] Interview with a senior MoE advisor in January 2010.

[64] Interviews with two MoE representatives in December 2009 and January 2010.

[65] While the Planning Department gave departments one month to complete the framework, this was extended by an additional month. However, in light of how busy the Teacher Education Department was, this time period seemed and was recalled as only being a few days.

[66] Interviews with representatives of MoE Planning and Teacher Education Departments in November and December 2009.

[67] Interview with a donor agency representative in December 2009.

planning, the larger MoE system appears to have been less engaged in NESP II formulation than it was in NESP I formulation (based especially on evidence from the Teacher Education Department). The reasons for that are not entirely clear. While the Planning Department gained instrumental capacity in its own staff and systems, it appeared not to have the authority or legitimacy to consistently motivate other departments to focus on the planning process.

Students walk through the hallway at Bog-i-Poh School in Farah. Photo from ISAFmedia

3. Key Issues Identified

Capacity Definitions

Both MoE and donor agency representatives involved in the NESP process consistently identified two aspects of "capacity": human resources and organisations. Human resource capacity was understood to involve skills development—increasing individuals' instrumental capabilities. Rather than focusing on capacity deficits, one interviewee advocated a mutual approach that started with people's existing capacity:

> *Capacity-building should be to find out where someone is and what is needed and that is how you build capacity and that is a mutual thing. As [an international] part of my capacity-building as technical assistance giver has to be to find out from Afghans what works for them and what does not.*[68]

Human resource capacity-building through "peering"—that is partnering civil servants with international education experts in order for new skills and knowledge to develop in the context of work—has been a goal for some MoE leaders. Notably, this was the model used by IIEP for its efforts with the MoE Planning Department. However, international advisors and consultants often face short deadlines and must produce results, which compromises time and opportunity for this type of capacity-building with civil servants.[69]

In terms of organisational capacity, interviewees pointed to the necessities of an efficient and effective organisational structure, clear mandates, division of responsibilities, specified methods and procedures, and timeframes for each activity on particular organisational levels. From their perspective, organisations were connected to human resources through clear job descriptions specifying formal qualifications, experience and knowledge, which then made it possible to measure performance and provide incentives based on what people were supposed to do.[70] Interviewees, both Ministry and donor representatives, very commonly identified a deficit of organisational capacity as an outstanding area of technical assistance need for the MoE.[71]

Several interviewees attributed organisational capacity weaknesses in the MoE to a lack of management capacity, with too many responsibilities associated with individuals rather than with systems. Some also feared that since much human resource capacity, including for example the capacity built in the Planning Department among national advisors, was "artificial and temporary...brought in from the outside," it was therefore not assuredly available for the future.[72] In addition, a number of national advisors have gained authority in the MoE, creating what one interviewee called a "mixed up" situation, in which advisors are both government employees (in terms of responsibilities) and non-government employees (in terms of who pays them). As the interviewee put it, "They are in both positions and they are also nowhere." In an attempt to resolve this organisational ambiguity, some advisors were appointed to government positions but were required to draw only one salary, either from the MoE or from the donors supporting their positions.[73]

From a capacity viewpoint, national advisors might add diversity which, while introducing innovation into the organisation, also has the potential to increase fragmentation of the already very complex MoE system. Maintaining focus and coherence in light of different constituencies of MoE staff might be creating an additional management and leadership burden. At the same time, however, MoE leaders and the donors that have supported national advisors generally believe they have contributed to achieving results. One remaining capacity challenge is how to convert these task-related instrumental results into values for the wider organisation and

[68] Interview with an NGO representative in December 2009.

[69] Interview with an MoE leader in December 2009.

[70] Interview with a senior MoE representative January 2010 and a donor agency representative in December 2009.

[71] Interviews with three MoE representatives and two donor agency representatives in November 2009 and January 2010.

[72] Interview with an MoE representative in December 2009.

[73] Interview with a former MoE representative in January 2010.

a variety of MoE staff, particularly permanent civil servants.

NESP effects: A Plan to implement and/or something else?

While NESP I was seen as ambitious, NESP II was seen as "overly ambitious," to the point that implementation would be unlikely in the timeframe of the plan.[74] The ambitiousness of NESP II was particularly evident in terms of the increased financial requirements to support NESP II (US$8 billion) in comparison to NESP I ($3 billion). Further undermining implementation of NESP I was the fact that some programmes, such as Islamic Education, had no current donors who were willing to provide financial support.[75] Implementation of NESP I was similarly challenged by the need to map existing donor-funded activities and determine how these activities might contribute to implementation.

NESP II's perceived lack of realism was attributed to weaknesses in managing the strategic planning process and absence of sufficient analysis of the implementation of NESP I. A tension between realism and ambition of development plans is a general phenomenon that is debated. Some argue that setting unrealistically high targets sets governments up for failure, while others contend that only ambitious targets, especially when accompanied by clear plans, will lead to greater resource mobilisation and better eventual results.[76]

It is therefore possible that MoE leaders and donors might have effects other than implementation of the plan in mind. Both NESPs might not be merely a guide for action but a mechanism to secure funds and gain more long-term Ministry control over education programming, including over Ministry-donor relations, as described by MoE and donor representatives:

> *The Minister always encouraged us to make the plan and he would find the money. That is why the plan was made extremely ideal, which took all the needs and requirements of the Ministry into consideration.*[77]

NESP development increased donor confidence in the MoE, specifically the Government of Denmark, which increased the level of its funding to the MoE without conditions. However, ongoing weaknesses in the MoE financial system, in particular the transfer of money from Kabul to the provinces, caused other donors to withhold their confidence as of yet.[78] At the same time, donor funds were said to be frequently delayed, in terms of both communicating to the MoE that funds were available as well as actually releasing committed funds. Thus, while the NESP process may have demonstrated growing capacity to *increase funding* on the part of the MoE, there are still outstanding weaknesses on both the government and donor sides in capacity to *increase spending* in a coordinated way.[79]

While NESP I was seen as ambitious, NESP II was seen as "overly ambitious," to the point that implementation would be unlikely in the timeframe of the plan

Donors, too, appeared to deprioritise implementation of NESP I. Most donors were seen to continue to pursue their programmes without any reference to NESP, including continuing to neglect some provinces and districts often in favour of areas where donor-country troops were operating.[80] This situation is less likely to be the case for NESP II since its endorsement by the HRDB for FTI approval would put pressure on the donors to articulate long-term programmatic and financial commitments to education in Afghanistan and to align these with the MoE plan.

A senior MoE representative described the NESP II process as demonstrating the government's commitment to improving education.[81] Although recognised by some donors as a sufficient basis

[74] Interview with an MoE Planning Department representative in December 2009.

[75] Interviews with one MoE representative and two representatives of a donor agency in December 2009.

[76] Steven Radelet, "Aid Effectiveness and the Millennium Development Goals" (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, February 2004), 4-6.

[77] Interview with an MoE representative in December 2009.

[78] Interview with a MoE leader in November 2009.

[79] Interview with a senior MoE representative in January 2010.

[80] Interviews with one MoE representative and three donor representatives in April, November and December 2009.

[81] Interview with a senior MoE representative in January 2010.

for coordination, NESP II was also seen as lacking priorities, an issue compounded by the plan's ambitiousness.[82] The resulting concern is that although donors might be able to claim that their programmes align with NESP II, it might be less clear that these efforts align with the *priorities* of the MoE. Donor and NGO representatives also expressed concern that many of the capacity reforms associated with NESP did not adequately filter to the provinces and districts where most programme implementation actually occurs.[83]

Capacity to Resist

One way that capacity can be manifest in policy development is through resistance—proposed programme ideas that are seen as not in-line with plans are argued about, challenged or "resisted" as a result of capacity development. Afghanistan is highly aid dependent; roughly three quarters of the 2009-10 national budget was derived from external sources and roughly the same amount was spent directly by donors outside the Government budget.[84] Aid dependency makes it crucial to have the capacity to adapt to changing resource opportunities and maintain and expand relations with sources of funding, training and technical support. This dependency suggests that the MoE would simply accept, rather than resist, donor-proposed ideas. At the same time, however, capacity development can potentially provide conceptual and discursive skills to resist proposals, without compromising resource relationships. Did the NESP process enhance the MoE's capacity to resist donor-proposed programmes or topics that it viewed as not aligned with government plans? Data relating to this issue is not extensive. Planning Department representatives did recount instances of negotiating different donors' contradictory views and also times when they argued against programme ideas considered not in-line with the NESP II.[85] One interviewee described the discussions:

> *[HRDB members] would have their comments that we would note and evaluate to incorporate them into the document, but not every comment because many would not make sense. For example, [one donor] wrote a three-page article on poverty alleviation and asked us to incorporate it into the framework of our strategic plan. We said we have our targets linked to poverty alleviation in our strategic plan but this is not Ministry of Rural Development or Ministry of Finance, this is Ministry of Education. And the role of education is more to assist or contribute to poverty alleviation, but it does not have direct role in poverty alleviation. So we would not incorporate all the comments in the NESP.*[86]

Another example demonstrates that capacity to resist was exercised not only with donors, but also within the MoE. It concerns a suggestion to establish special schools for intelligent students made by an MoE leader. Since this would represent a departure from the strategic plan, the Planning Department invoked its instrumental capacity to explain to the interested official that a situation analysis should first be conducted, because:

> *There is not more than 15 percent of the students in good conditions in southern provinces; 55 percent of our schools are without building...the Ministry is intending to establish 364 technical vocational training centres in all the provinces during the next four years. So I said, given such a situation, how can you think of establishing separate schools for intelligent children and how are you going to equip these schools?*[87]

The FTI review of NESP II underway at the time of writing and the HRDB endorsement of the plan represent possible occasions of resistance to suggested changes to the new plan. As anticipated by a former MoE official: "Only rational and reasonable suggestions will be integrated into the document."[88] Whose versions of "rational and reasonable" will prevail as being legitimate in these discussions will provide additional insight into MoE capacity.

[82] Interview with a donor agency representative in December 2009 and comment of one anonymous reviewer.

[83] Interviewers with MoE and NGO representatives in November and December 2009.

[84] Shah, "Is Capacity Being Built," 2.

[85] Interviews with two MoE representatives in November 2009 and January 2010.

[86] Interview with an MoE Planning Department representative in December 2009.

[87] Interview with an MoE Planning Department representative in December 2009.

[88] Interview with a senior MoE advisor in January 2010.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, the findings of this study show that capacity developed for instrumental action is dependent on capacities developed in the larger organisation to support those actions. Ownership capacity and capacity to focus organisational attention on a task provide conditions for the task to be accomplished. Findings also point to more subtle capacity change, specifically conceptual change that is evident discursively: in the ability to argue or challenge in legitimate ways.

The NESP I policymaking process had pre-determined working structures and the consistent support of top Ministry leadership, which showed capacity to adapt and maintain focus on the planning process across the MoE. IIEP support given to the Planning Department resulted in increased capacity for instrumental action; approximately 80 staff received some level of training in strategic planning, while a sub-group of national advisors gained sufficient skills and knowledge from NESP I that they could lead the NESP II process. Notably too, the Planning Department showed adaptation capacity in restructuring its internal systems along the lines suggested by IIEP. Despite gaining instrumental capacity in NESP I, the Planning Department was not consistently able to make other departments carry out the strategic planning process as intended for NESP II. As a result, the gap between intended working structures and actual work was greater in NESP II than NESP I. It is likely that organisational capacity limitations were at least part of the reason for this; for example, insufficient ownership, focus, and leadership authority. Overall, although there was evidence of capacity increase in some individuals' skills and in the Planning Department's own organisation, there was not strong evidence that overall MoE organisational capacity increased from NESP I to NESP II.

NESP I and NESP II were also compared in terms of which actors were key and who drafted programme content. In general, there was a shift of primary responsibility away from non-Afghan personnel towards Afghan nationals in NESP II. For the Teacher Education Department, NESP I was formulated with "many internationals involved." The Department created a number of sub-Working Groups to develop NESP I and incorporated the activities being pursued through existing donor funding and NGO implementation. This involvement of internationals, in addition to the fact that NESP I was developed in English, contributed to the impression that it was "donor driven."[89] NESP II was, instead, informed by goals and targets determined by the Planning Department based on information obtained through meetings with Teacher Education Department representatives.[90] Because internationals were not as involved in the initial formulation of the policy, NESP II has been seen as more nationally driven, and as reflecting national ownership.[91] Internationals' involvement in NESP II shifted from participating in the Working Groups (in NESP I) to the HRDB (in NESP II). And the fact that the document was written in Dari and later translated into English in order to obtain comments from donors and others was seen as evidence of Ministry ownership. The absence of "foreigners" at a Steering Committee meeting of the first presentation of the NESP II draft was characterised as a "big advantage," despite acknowledgement by some that there is still insufficient Afghan educational expertise.[92] It is also unclear to what extent the donors, through the HRDB and FTI approval, will have ultimate decision-making authority over NESP II and as importantly to what extent donors will act collectively in asserting this authority. Also, although there was a shift in primary responsibility for policymaking from internationals to nationals from NESP I to NESP II, in both strategic planning efforts national advisors played key roles more so than regular civil servants of the Ministry.

A final point about evidence of capacity change concerns a common motivation to formulate both NESPs: resource acquisition, including financial

[89] Interviews with two donor agency representatives in November and December 2009 and one MoE leader in December 2009.

[90] Interview with an MoE Planning Department representative in December 2009.

[91] Interview with representatives of one donor agency in December 2009 and an MoE leader in December 2009.

[92] Interviews with three current and former MoE representatives between November 2009 and January 2010.

and relationship resources. The MoE sought increased funding from donors as well as an enhanced position to control relationships with the donors—that is, to better coordinate their activities and, in capacity terms, to maintain donors' long-term focus and commitment to programmes included in the NESP. There are still, however, questions about how and how uniformly donors respond to the MoE in terms of long-term financial commitments to education, expending more funds through the government, HRDB endorsement of NESP II, and alignment of donor programmes with NESP II.

Recommendations

Findings presented in this briefing paper highlight a sad irony. Afghanistan needs high levels of capacity to support and expand primary and secondary education in the country. Yet the organisations that exist to provide that support—including the MoE, donors and NGOs—create considerable complexity and potential fragmentation that in turn requires even greater levels of capacity on the part of the Ministry (to coordinate, fund, monitor and maintain focus). Achieving educational programme results must be understood to include building capacity within the MoE. This in turn takes time, planning and sustained effort, not just to train people but to establish procedures, lines of communication and authority structures so that new skills can be deployed in the organisation. The following recommendations might be useful in future efforts to build and understand capacity:

- **Explicitly define capacity.** A number of those interviewed for this study gave definitions of capacity that included both individual and organisational levels. They uniformly defined organisational capacity as an area of need for technical assistance. Future capacity-building should assess both individual and organisational capacity needs and be sensitive to the fact that individual and organisational capacity are distinct yet inter-related phenomena.
- **Plan capacity-building into programmes.** Capacity-building needs to be planned for, monitored and evaluated in its own right. This includes allowing sufficient time for individuals to develop skills and knowledge and for organisations to develop the communication and operational systems necessary to make effective use of these skills. Notably, the Civilian Technical Assistance Programme includes explicit plans, a long-term timetable and commitment to monitoring and evaluation.[93]
- **Look beyond instrumental views of capacity.** Although capacity is often understood in terms of instrumental action—the ability to carry out functions or tasks—this briefing paper suggests a broader definition that also includes capacities relating to ownership, resource attraction, organisational adaptation and maintaining focus on priorities. It may be helpful for the planning and evaluation of capacity-building programmes to assume a similarly broad definition of capacity. This study provided preliminary evidence that the effective use of newly developed human resource capacity (such as that developed in the MoE Planning Department) is contingent on other kinds of capacity. For instance, leadership which shows insufficient ownership capacity may not inspire staff to carry out functions, even if they have the knowledge and skills to do so. Or if leadership cannot overcome loss of focus because of fragmented priorities, similarly human resource capacity might not translate into programme results.
- **Expand effective capacity-building models.** As an example of technical assistance, "peering," the model of capacity-building used by the IIEP in its support of the MoE's Planning Department, might effectively be used as a model for other capacity-building efforts.[94]
- **Distribute ownership evenly in a complex organisation.** It is important to recognise that the MoE is a complex organisation encompassing differing interests and priorities. Although the NESP II process was seen as demonstrating increased national ownership, this sense of ownership was

[93] Ministry of Finance, "The Civilian Technical Assistance Programme."

[94] For a detailed description of this model please see Sigsgaard et al., "On the Road to Resilience: Capacity Development with the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan" (Paris: IIEP, forthcoming).

not uniformly felt within the MoE. Future leadership and management of policymaking should try to ensure that ownership is distributed more evenly across departments, staff and other stakeholders.

- **Monitor how capacity elements interact.** Future research on capacity development could further examine the relevance of the elements described here to the Afghan context and explore how these elements interact. Could it be, for example, that in building capacity to adapt and attract resources in the aid-dependent environment, other elements of capacity are neglected or compromised in some way?

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