

Educational Planning and its Problems in Afghanistan

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I. Introduction

Modern education started in Afghanistan in 1904, when the first school was established. While traditional Islamic education which has a long history, was not solely the responsibility of the State but also of private institutions and individuals, modern education has always been taken care of by the State. It has been provided free to the citizens without discrimination and the Government has provided boarding facilities for talented students from the provinces.

Until about three decades ago the main problem for the educational authorities was to encourage people to send their children to modern schools. Those graduates of the first and second level who wished to further their studies could all be absorbed in the next higher grade. However, as the number of educated and literates increased and the results of schooling were observed, the demand for more school facilities also rapidly increased.

Modern education developed at quite a rapid pace in the first decade after independence and then collapsed in 1928-1929 and revived in 1930. Up to the middle of the 1950's the educational system gradually expanded.

In 1956 the country's development had reached a stage where the government thought a more harmonious development of various sectors required over-all planning. So in 1957 the First Five Year Plan was launched. The Ministry of Planning was set up and planning units were added to the organization of some ministries.

II. Planning of Education

Now, the most challenging task before the Government is to meet the rising demand for more school facilities rather than to encourage people to send their children to school. The Constitution promulgated in 1964 served as a landmark in the way to social and political change. Article 34 of this Constitution which concerns education may be quoted here:

"Education is the right of every Afghan and shall be provided free of charge by the State and the citizens of Afghanistan. The aim of the State is to reach a stage where suitable facilities for education will be made available to all Afghans, in accordance with the provisions of the Law. The Government is obliged to prepare and implement a programme for balanced and universal education in Afghanistan.

It is the duty of the State to guide and supervise education.

Primary education is compulsory for all children in all areas where the facilities for this purpose are provided by the State.

The State alone has the right and duty to establish and administer the institutions of public and higher learning. Outside this sphere, Afghan nationals are entitled to establish technical and literary schools. Conditions for the establishment of such schools, their curricula and the conditions of learning in such schools are to be determined by Law.

The Government may grant permission, in accordance with the provisions of Law, to foreign persons to establish private schools for the exclusive use of foreigners."

Thus the need for a comprehensive planning for the balanced growth of education was evident.

1. Scope and Organization of Educational Planning

Subsequent to the establishment of the Ministry of Planning a bureau of planning was set up in the Ministry of Education, and later on a planning unit was added to the administration of Kabul University. These are the two units responsible for planning the development of the whole school system in Afghanistan.

The planning of the first and second level education and other training institutions under the Ministry of Education is done by the planning department of the Ministry. The University plans its own development. However, in the process of planning, the University's planning unit is supposed to be in contact with the Ministry of Education's planning department. Other Ministries such as the Ministries of Agriculture, Finance, Communications and some other Government agencies have training courses which are not included in the educational plan. As far as the training of skilled manpower outside the scope of the educational system is concerned, this forms a part of the respective projects. The coordination of all these is the function of the Ministry of Planning.

The Planning Department of the Ministry of Education has three sections namely, planning, statistics and coordination of foreign aid, their terms of reference being not limited to planning. The Planning Department is charged with the duty of preparing the Five Year Plan of education, supervising its implementation and the evaluation of the annual achievements. It also negotiates foreign aid and makes occasional and periodical statistical surveys. In the implementation phase of the plan, the only power of control it has is a voice in the allocation of quarterly budgets.

2. Mechanism of Coordination

Coordination is usually managed in two ways: (1) by the activities of the planning department with respect to the allocation of the development budget and negotiations in the process of preparing the plan, and (2) through meetings and ad hoc committees set up exclusively for solving such problems. The second method is the more common way of coordination. However, no definite rules and procedures exist for such meetings and no single bureau is responsible for the records. Consequently, the effectiveness of such measures depends much on the attitude and work habits of responsible high officials.

3. The Rôle of Provincial Authorities

The provincial directorates of education which are the local education authorities in the provinces, are not presently involved with the preparation of the Five Year

Plans. However, their role in planning is important, in that the planning department depends on these local directorates for information. They also have a major part to play in the implementation of the Plan. The provincial directors are annually informed of the number of new schools to be opened in their respective provinces. They are authorized to decide upon the location of new primary schools, and to upgrade the primary schools to middle schools within the quote annually provided in the plan and announced by the central authority. The schools in the provinces are financed centrally. The provincial directors prepare proposals for their annual budget and send them to the Ministry. These proposals are considered by the department of planning in the total annual budget of the Ministry of Education.

At present, educational administration in Afghanistan is highly centralized. However, there is now a tendency to strengthen the provincial directorates and delegate more authority to them.

As to the scope, the planning process covers all levels and types of education. There is also a long-term plan projecting the expansion of the enrolments and increase of costs upto 1980.

4. The Procedure in the Process of Planning

The procedure followed in the process of planning has not been exactly the same in the three Five Year Plans. When the First Plan was drafted a unit of planning did not exist and statistics were much less satisfactory than they are now. However, the situation had greatly improved when the Second and the Third Plans were being drafted. Before the Third Plan of the Ministry of Education was drafted an analytical report was prepared by the Planning Department showing the possibilities and problems in the educational system and indicating the possible rate of expansion. This report was discussed in the regular meeting of the heads of departments in the Ministry. After obtaining the comments of the meeting and the policy directives, the department of planning prepared the first draft of the Third Five Year Plan of the Ministry of Education. The first draft then was studied by the Ministry of Planning. This has been the usual procedure for all other Ministries and Government Agencies too.

Each government agency concerned prepares proposals and plans and submits them to the Ministry of Planning. Then the Ministry of Planning studies them in relation to each other and coordinates various projects to draft the general development plan. The sketch of the general plan and its implications are studied by the Cabinet. After the Cabinet has given the policy directives and has determined the priority and the maximum amount to be allocated to different sectors, the Ministry of Planning announces the ceiling for the development budget of each government agency. When the ceiling of the development budget for the Ministry of Education is announced, the planning department prepares the final text of the plan, and submits it to the Ministry of Planning which then prepares the final draft of the general development plan.

The targets of the Five Year Plan are indications of the directions and size of the expansion in the school system. In the phase of implementation, the annual budget and the program it covers shows the commitments. The development program for

the year is finalized by the Planning Department and announced to other departments which are responsible for implementing the plan.

The development expenditure consist of three parts: (1) construction, (2) equipment and (3) operating cost of new institutions. The procedures for execution and financing of these different categories of the plan are not the same. In school construction five central agencies are involved, namely the Ministries of Education, Finance, Planning and Public Works and Da Afghanistan Bank. The provision of equipment is mainly the function of the department of administration in the Ministry of Education. The operating cost of new institutions is made a part of the ordinary current budget and is handled in accordance with the usual administrative procedures.

In the phase of implementation the Planning Department is not directly involved. It only demands progress reports on the projects being implemented, and has a say in the distribution of quarterly allocations. As far as the implementation of the plan within the financial limitations is concerned, the Ministry of Education is in a strong position because practically all schools and educational institutions are state-owned and administered. The Ministry of Education provides and maintains school buildings, prescribes and supplies all textbooks and equipment, trains and appoints teachers. Foreign assistance is also used in accordance with the plan. The school system is financed by the Government. Private assistance is a recent development, but the amount is very limited and in no case entitles donors to administer aided schools. Obviously this situation is favourable for central planning.

Nevertheless, due to the fact that different government agencies are involved and the administrative system is not sufficiently oriented to development planning, lags between implementation and the plan's targets are quite frequent. Each year the implementation of a number of projects is hampered or delayed partly because of the time consuming administrative procedures and lack of programming in the units concerned with implementation. This is especially true in the case of school buildings and equipment.

III. The Plans and Changes in Education

In Afghanistan, three five year plans have already been implemented, the third one ended in March 1972. The First Plan of education aimed mainly at expansion of all levels with particular emphasis on primary education. The Second Plan, while envisaging the expansion of all levels, gave higher priority to vocational education.

During these two plans the school system was greatly expanded. The plans exceeded their enrolment targets in general education. The enrolment ratio of the primary age group rose from 5 to 17.7 but in vocational education some of the projects envisaged were not implemented because these projects were to provide manpower for the general development plan. (Since the general plan was to be partly financed by foreign aid and the latter was not made available as anticipated, the plan was revised and so the number of technicians was also curtailed.) As a result of the expansion during the two plans the number of schools and enrolments

in the provinces also increased, thus narrowing the gap between the capital city and the provinces.

As already mentioned, the Third Plan ended in March 1972. The expansion in the educational sector which took place during this plan was more than the targets of the plan. A larger number of secondary schools were opened, the enrolment in general secondary schools was almost tripled, and enrolment in higher education doubled. This quantitative increase was more than could be reasonably accommodated by the facilities available or facilities which could be provided by the budget allocated.

The following table shows the increase in the number of students during the Third Plan:

Table 1:

Increase in Enrolments in Afghanistan (in 1000)

	March 1966	March 1972
Primary schools (including village schools)	381.0	573.0
Secondary schools	42.8	127.0
Vocational schools	12.8	12.6
Higher education	3.6	8.0

Source: Department of Planning, Ministry of Education of Afghanistan.

At the end of the Third Plan the enrolment ratio of the primary age group (7–12) was 23 per cent.

The Fourth Plan of education (March 1972–March 1977) consists in the plan of the first and second level education and the institutions under the Ministry of Education plus the Kabul university plan. The main objective of this plan, as far as the first level is concerned, is rapid quantitative expansion. In the second and third level, however, it mainly aims at qualitative improvements and changes. The following table shows the increase in enrolments as envisaged in the Fourth Plan.

Table 2:

Fourth Plan — Planned increase in Enrolments in Afghanistan (in 1000)

	March 1972 (end of 3rd Plan)	March 1977 (end of 4th Plan)
First level	573.0	914.0
Second level (general)	127.0	163.8
University level	8.0	9.3

Source: Same as Table 1.

The enrolment ratio of the primary age group is to be raised from 23 to 35 per cent.

The quantitative changes indicated above show how the school system has expanded and is going to expand. It is worthwhile to consider the qualitative changes too.

Some important changes and improvements in the education system of Afghanistan had already taken place in the period before planning started such as, for instance, the change of the school system from 4+3+3 years to 5+4+3 and 4+4+4+4 and finally to 6+3+3. The introduction of modern subjects in traditional education given in Madrassas, and changes in curriculum and textbooks too. However, when it was decided that the country's social and economic development be planned, the rate of expansion as indicated above was to be much greater than before. As a consequence of rapid expansion and democratization of schools, the emerging dual role of school education (both preparatory and terminal) became prominent. During the plans new teacher training schools were established to provide teachers with a new outlook for the increasing number of new general schools and an emergency teacher training scheme was also launched. Similarly, different types of vocational schools were opened to meet the manpower need of various projects. Experiments were carried out by the Ministry of Education in view of improving teaching methods.

Whereas traditional education had essentially religious and moral objectives, modern education at the early stage of its development in this country was attempting to train administrative personnel and an elite. Now the objectives have become multisided and the education system is to be adapted to changing and diversified needs of development.

New textbooks were published and written, some curricular changes were also introduced in the teacher training schools. Recently, in order to raise the standard of teacher's qualifications it was decided to gradually abolish the emergency program and begin a new level of teacher training. The "emergency teachers" were graduates of grade 9 who had received one year of professional training, that is, a total of 10 years' training. The new program will consist of professional training to be given to graduates of grade 12 of lycees, of either one year for primary school teachers or two years for middle school teachers.

Nevertheless, in spite of the measures taken to improve the quality of education the rapid increase in enrolments, which was caused as a consequence of increasing social demand, raised the P/T ratio so that there is an increasing number of students per qualified teacher. Consequently, on the average quality has been severely affected.

IV. The Problems

Educational planners in the developing countries are faced with numerous problems such as lack of economic planning data, inefficiency of the administrative system, social and political factors influencing a plan in its various phases. These are difficulties which have to be taken into consideration. For the problems to be discussed here two categories are distinguished: the development problems and the planning problems.

1. Development problems

The main problems of educational development in Afghanistan which concern the planners may be summarized as follows:

a) Shortage of qualified teachers and school facilities

a¹) When the Fourth Five Year Plan was being drafted, the Government teaching force numbered 20,426 in all (1971 figures). Of these, 13,584 taught at the first level (grades 1–6), 3,799 at the second (7–9) and 3,043 at the third (10–12). Only 12 per cent of the first level teachers in 1971 were properly qualified, i.e. had 12 years of general education plus one year of teacher training; only 13 per cent of the second level teachers were qualified (grade 12 plus two years of teacher training). At the third level only 22 per cent were university graduates, but of the 649 graduates, only 100 had graduated from Kabul University Faculty of Education; the others were professionally unqualified to teach. This imbalance should be corrected during the course of the Fourth Five Year Plan by the output of about 15,000 new teachers from the Government training colleges, supplemented by the in-service training of the thousands of unqualified or underqualified teachers presently in Government service.

a²) There is a severe shortage of school buildings and equipment. In 1967 about 290 schools had no shelters. Approximately 747 primary and village schools had no buildings and classes were held in the mosques. According to 1971–1972 education statistics, 451 village schools had no shelter and the shortage of facilities for primary and secondary schools still constitutes a problem. In some provinces hostel facilities were badly needed for teachers. Many schools had no laboratories and insufficient teaching aids. The challenging problem is how to achieve further expansion of education inspite of these shortages. Because public demand for schools is rapidly rising, any slowing down of the rate of expansion will cause social discontent.

b) The problem of balance

Modern education is more developed in the capital than in the provinces of Afghanistan. Similarly, due to social factors the education of women has not progressed as fast as that of men. Consequently, narrowing the gap between the educational development of different regions and between that of two sexes deserves special emphasis.

The imbalance between the capital and the provinces has become a matter of concern. The situation, however, is improving. In 1964 the first level enrolment in Kabul was 16 per cent and that of 2nd level 51 per cent of the national enrolment. In 1967 these percentages were 12.9 per cent and 36.5 per cent respectively. But it should be pointed out that in the 2nd level enrolments of Kabul city over 50 per cent consisted of students coming from the provinces.

The relative size of enrolments of girls has changed as follows¹:

	1955	1965	1967	1971–1972
1st level	8 ⁰ / ₀	15.2 ⁰ / ₀	14.1 ⁰ / ₀	15 ⁰ / ₀
2nd level	10 ⁰ / ₀	18.9 ⁰ / ₀	17.2 ⁰ / ₀	17 ⁰ / ₀

¹ Source: Educational Statistics, Department of Planning; Kabul 1967–68 and 1971–72.

The decline of relative figures in 1967 is due to the rapid expansion in the number of schools and to enrolments in the provinces where, due to social reasons, the enrolment of girls has not proportionately been increased. The problem to be faced in this case by planners is the optimum point where quality and economy can be maintained under a policy of a balanced expansion.

c) The problem of the surplus of school leavers

Until the beginning of the First Five Year Plan almost all graduates of primary schools who wished to continue their education could be accommodated in the secondary schools or other training courses. But, as a result of the rapid expansion of primary school during the first planning decade, it is no more possible to take all the graduates of primary schools into grade seven, or the graduates of the 12th grade into the University. This is because the higher levels could not be expanded in parallel to the primary level.

Consequently, the public demand for schools is more directed to secondary schools, and to entrance into the higher level of training specially the University. The opening of secondary schools in excess of the annual targets of the plan can only be accounted for by this pressure of demand. As the relevant projections show, the absorptive capacity of the higher levels in relation to the graduates of lower levels will still decrease.

This situation indicates the beginning of another problem in Afghanistan, that is unemployment of the educated. Until now the surplus has been partly absorbed by accepting an excessive number in some of the higher institutions and partly by employing them as unqualified teachers. However, as early as 1969 and inspite of these measures, a small number were left to find employment for themselves.

Most of the graduates who could not be employed by the government are coming from general high schools and have no vocational orientation. Actually the existing curriculum does not seem to fit todays needs. The main reasons for this situation are the following:

- The high school curriculum is mostly academic.
- There is very little flexibility in the general schools which form the majority of secondary schools; there are no alternative streams and elective subjects.
- Practical work and contact with the out-of-school environment is very limited. This is specially true in rural areas. Even the vocational schools have no regular contacts with the enterprises or institutions where they will have to look for employment.

d) The problem of finance

In Afghanistan the whole school system is financed by the Government, private contribution is occasional or negligible. Consequently the rapid expansion of the schools means increasing the burden of finance on the Government. As a matter of fact, the increase of financial resources for education seems to be possible only through the increase of overall Government resources, internal or external, or by raising the relative share of education in the national budget compared to other sector of Government activity.

Although the relative share of education (Ministry of Education and Kabul University) in the total government budget has gradually increased during the Second Plan from 9 per cent to 13.2 per cent owing to increasing demand in other sectors it seems difficult to drastically increase this share. So, the effective way to meet this challenge would be the increase of overall resources coupled with the decrease of expenditure per student. There remain two sources for increasing financial resources: (1) more external assistance and (2) tapping new sources of revenue inside the country.

2. Planning problems

Although educational planning in Afghanistan has been greatly improved during the first decade of planning, the obstacles which inhibit planning are numerous.

a) Socio-political pressures

First, effective planning requires a suitable socio-political environment. It is possible to recruit good experienced planners through foreign aid but it needs time and energy to create the right atmosphere and machinery for planning. The developing countries can depend on foreign assistance for the recruitment of qualified planners, but they cannot overnight change the socio-political environment of the country. Obviously, successful planning requires objectivity, discipline and courage on the part of the Government and of those responsible for directing and implementing a planning process. In the underdeveloped countries while the need for planning is realized and the governments are determined to do planning, the environment for planning leaves much to be desired. Socio-political considerations form the main diverting factors. Afghanistan is not an exception to this. Most of the divergences in the implementation of the education plan could be explained by the influence of such factors.

b) Administrative set-up

When planning was started in Afghanistan an organization for planning and planning units in some government agencies were also gradually created. However, other corresponding changes in the administrative procedures were not introduced. In other words, planning organizations were added but the administrative system was not accordingly improved to meet the requirements of planning. The procedures for allocating money to a project, procuring materials, budgeting and accounting are not suitable to planning.

The actual system gives greater weight to control rather than to speed so that the procedures now in practice help to control the expenditure, but also form a handicap to operation. Signatures required for different cases of procurement and purchase range from 20 to over 60. Authority is too much concentrated on the top official in the hierarchy.

c) Lack of planning data

Relatively speaking, educational statistics have greatly improved and are quite satisfactory. However, lack of reliable population statistics and of data on cost and actual expenditure, inadequate research, etc. make it difficult for the planners to appraise the implementation of a plan and to prepare an elaborate plan covering

the qualitative and quantitative aspects of educational development. This is why the educational plans have been mainly concerned with the quantitative projection of the expansion of the school system.

d) Inadequate machinery for coordination between agencies concerned

Planning requires a great deal of coordination, both inside the educational system and between the educational system and other agencies concerned. In order to adjust the output of the school system to various manpower needs, it is unrealistic to simply ascertain statistical correspondence between supply and demand. Quality of educational output, prospects, working conditions and incentive are also important factors. Therefore, in the process of drafting an educational plan continuous consultation with different agencies and enterprises should take place. This is accepted in principle by the Afghan planning authorities, and the Ministry of Planning is the meeting point of all proposals. Nevertheless, before these proposals reach the Ministry of Planning they should be thoroughly discussed in coordinating committees in which all the interested agencies should be represented. This is what is missing now.

e) Problems related to foreign aid

Afghanistan receives foreign aid for education from various sources. Table 3 gives a picture of the diversity of foreign aid. Multiplicity and diversity of sources of foreign aid might have some advantages. Here, however, we are concerned with the difficulties caused by this situation. In the case of Afghanistan, the main problems related to foreign aid could be summarized as follows:

- Dependence on different sources of foreign aid limits the mobility of resources more than if all educational institutions received aid from a single source or homogeneous sources. The existing situation in Kabul University is a case in point.
- Coordination of activities in projects receiving aid from different sources, especially when these sources are politically poles apart, is difficult and often not practical.
- Projects dependent on foreign aid are less amenable to adjustments and changes according to national priorities than projects based on internal resources.

f) Absence of a link and lack of close cooperation between planning bodies and research

The planning department in the Ministry of Education is concerned with the preparation of the Plan and the development budget. In the process of carrying out its job it comes into contact with other departments. This contact, however, covers only matters related to quantitative expansion of the schools. The planning department has no regular and obligatory contacts with the institutions doing research on education. Consequently the plans are not supported by research and do not sufficiently take into consideration the qualitative changes accompanying expansion. Of the many adverse results of such uncoordinated planning, one is unemployment of graduates and a lack of qualified personnel trained properly.

Table 3:

Assistance to Afghanistan in the Field of Education, 1971

Source of assistance	Teachers training	Technical education	Elementary and secondary education	Agricultural education	Fellowships	Volunteer services	Regional educational development	Food assistance to boarding schools	Educational planning and broadcasting	Miscellaneous	Total
UN and its agencies	413	—	—	—	300	—	308	592	19	2	1,634
USA	—	623	677	286	296	612	—	—	—	263	2,827
UdSSR	—	600	—	—	2,100	—	—	—	—	—	2,700
India	—	—	—	—	69	—	—	—	—	—	69
UK	—	—	—	—	104	12	—	—	—	—	116
Czechoslovakia	—	—	—	—	158	—	—	—	—	—	158
Poland	—	—	—	—	72	—	—	—	—	—	72
Italy	—	—	—	—	18	—	—	—	—	—	18
W. Germany	—	—	n. a.	—	—	15	—	—	—	—	15
France	—	—	n. a.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Asia Foundation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	62	62
Total	413	1,293	677	286	3,117	639	308	592	19	327	7,671

Source: Annual Report on Development Assistance to Afghanistan: UNDP Resident Representative, covering period January–December, 1971.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that Afghanistan in its present phase of development has reached a stage where major changes in its educational system and in the methods of educational planning are now required. Fortunately, this need has already been felt by the Government in the last few years. The Government, in fact, is considering the reorganization and major improvements in general planning and also in education as a whole.

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