

# Millennium Development Goal 2: Universal Primary Education



*In a country that has one of the youngest populations in the world, with nearly half the population under the age of 15, the achievement of this Millennium Development Goal (MDG) is crucial for the Afghan people to lay the foundations that will enable them to re-build their country.*

- Only 61% of school age children (7-12yrs) attend school.*
- Only 31% of the population can read or write.*



## PROGRESS

### 1. ENROLMENT

In 2001, there were only **one million** children enrolled in schools, now statistics estimate there to be **9 million** (81% primary enrolment rates). However, enrolment does not equate to attendance or completion of schooling and the Ministry of Education (MoE) data shows that 19% of enrolled children are either **temporarily or permanently absent**.

### 2. ACCESS

According to a 2013 national survey (The Asia Foundation) 72% of Afghans said they were **satisfied** with the availability of education for their children. In 2010 there were approximately 12,500 schools in Afghanistan, according to the MoE, up from 7,650 in 2004. However, the MoE is struggling to keep up with **growing demand for education**, especially in rural areas. Kabul University was reopened in 2002 and other higher education institutions have opened since, but for the most part they remain accessible only to the elite.

### 3. GIRLS' EDUCATION (MDG 3)

Under the Taliban most girls were **banned** from receiving an education. Now, 14 years later, **over three million girls are in school**. This is significant progress. However, even though more than a third (37%) of pupils enrolled in schools are girls, fewer than 10% manage to complete secondary school education.



## BACK TO SCHOOL CAMPAIGN

Up to **four million children** returned to school due to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF's) campaign in 2002, which provided basic equipment for schools to start the school year. **Eight million school books** and 18 thousand boards and packages with school tools were distributed. Hundreds of trucks transported the cargo from Peshawar, a city in Pakistan near the border. It was the **largest logistical operation** in the history of UNICEF, backed by a major campaign including radio advertisements, street theatre, community meetings, and thousands of posters, flyers and stickers. Special attention was paid to **enrolling girls in school**.

## GIRLS RECEIVE AN EDUCATION

Miriam wants to be a teacher. Her school, built by Afghan Connection, is called Bibi Ayisha (Worsaj) and educates 1300 girls. Hardly a girl at the school has a mother who can read or write. At the beginning of 2011, Dr Sarah Fane, founder of AC, received a letter from one of the girls studying at Bibi Ayisha High School which shows just how much an education means to girls in Afghanistan:

“The best memory in my life is this one – so one day a kind and best woman came to our country and she built a good and nice school for us. Now we are very happy because we have a good and nice school in our Province and all of the girls can go to this school and study their lessons. Thank you kind and lovely woman.”





## FACTORS HINDERING THE COMPLETION OF MDG2 IN AFGHANISTAN:

### POVERTY (MDG1)

This is one of the main obstacles that prevent children attending school, as it is necessary for the children of poor families to work to supplement the family income. Approximately **one in five children (6-17 yrs) work** to feed their family. Even if families can afford for their children not to work, there are often extra informal teaching **fees and stationery costs** which prevent the possibility of education. Some send one child to school who can tutor the others. Predominantly this is a boy, while girls remain at home to help with household chores or are sent to work.

### QUALITY

a) Despite a surge in school construction, **over 5000 schools (40%) still have no buildings. Corruption** in education services and a **lack of access to general resources**, including text books and writing materials, are stalling efforts to improve school conditions.

b) The quality and availability of good teachers is a problem. There has been a decline in the ratio of teachers to pupils as **demand for education is growing**. Only half of teachers reach the **minimum teaching standard qualification** set by the MoE. In particular, female teachers are in short supply – nationally, only one in four teachers is female. In **rural areas** only 1% of teachers are female, in contrast to 80% in some **urban areas**.

c) Learning outcomes and **school completion rates are poor** with the low quality of teaching. Despite the fact that nearly 50% of children are now enrolled in school, only one in four can read and write. As one school principal in Kunduz said, “things work on the basis of **connections and bribes**, from textbooks to test results and teachers. Many teachers are not qualified to teach. I have seen cases where students who have studied under a teacher for three years weren’t even able to write their names.”



## FACTORS HINDERING THE COMPLETION OF MDG2 IN AFGHANISTAN:

### DISTANCE

For many children the nearest school is **too far away to walk to in rural areas** and children may walk for hours through mountainous landscapes to reach their school. The extreme climate in winter and summer prevent many pupils from reaching school in time for morning classes. This is a particular obstacle for **disabled children as well as girls**. **Conservative notions** of female honour prevent girls travelling longer distances to school and harassment of girls on their way to and from school by males is not uncommon.



### A Vicious Cycle

*Few teachers in rural schools are female.*

*Many parents will not send their daughters to school because the teacher is not female.*

*Without an education a female cannot qualify to become a teacher.*



## FACTORS HINDERING THE COMPLETION OF MDG2 IN AFGHANISTAN:

### SECURITY (MDG9)

It is often too **dangerous** for children to travel to school. Fighting does not always occur on specific front-lines and can flare up with **little warning**, so parents often decide it is not worth the risk. **Girls especially** are likely to be kept at home for their own protection. As one father in Kandahar said, “The suicide bombings and shootings lately have forced us to keep our children home. I hope we can send them back soon, but the situation is too difficult right now.”\*

\*Girls' Education in Afghanistan, Joint NGO Briefing Paper issued by Oxfam International, Feb 2011

### TRADITION

a) **RELIGIOUS VALUES OF THE FAMILY:** The **tribal customs and Islamic beliefs** of a family can prevent children from going to school. Depending on who has control in a given area, parents might prefer to send their children to a Madrassa religious school, where children learn Islamic values and practices through close study of the Qu’ran. Once females reach adolescence, particularly in rural areas, the completion of education is not a priority. Attending school as a young woman can risk harassment and abduction.

b) **COMPLETION OF EDUCATION IS NOT A PRIORITY:** It is considered enough to know how to read and write and some people do not think children learn anything of much use in the **higher classes**. However, the percentage of pupils completing school is gradually increasing. One obstacle to completing education is that young women of poor families are more likely to be **forced to marry early**, for the dowry (sum of money) the daughter’s family will receive.



## FACTORS HINDERING THE COMPLETION OF MDG2 IN AFGHANISTAN:

### THE TALIBAN AND EDUCATION

Under the rule of the Taliban (1996 – 2001), girls above eight years old were officially **denied access to schools** and only about 3% received a primary education. Many women risked their lives to provide an education, and organized underground secret schools for young girls. In Kandahar, a Taliban stronghold in the south of Afghanistan, **women are still fearful of going to school**. Although boys were allowed to attend school, the educational content was dominated by the study of the Qu'ran.

### A SOLUTION: THE TAKHAR EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Takhar is a province in the north east of Afghanistan where Afghan Connection (AC), together with the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, is addressing many of the factors hindering the progress of MDG 2, in a **sustainable development model**.

Rather than funding school construction across broader geographical areas of Afghanistan, since 2011 the charity has concentrated its efforts first in Worsaj (a district of Takhar), and now in Rustaq, providing education for a combined population of over 400 000.

AC funds **constructions for schools** with little or no facilities, provides **community based education (CBE)** for children who cannot reach Government schools and funds **teacher-training** to help raise the standards of teaching in schools. AC also supports the District Education Department with **management and training courses** so that they can maintain the projects in the long term.





## A SOLUTION: THE TAKHAR EDUCATION INITIATIVE



Out of the **43 schools** that AC has funded across Afghanistan, 12 are in Worsaj, educating almost **7500 children**. 2 resource centres have also been built. A resource centre comprises a library, computer suite, science laboratory and meeting hall and is shared between neighbouring boys' and girls' schools.

The number of children attending community based schools has almost **doubled** (802 to 1482) since 2011, which illustrates the popularity of CBE in rural districts.

Furthermore, AC has been working hard to improve the standard of teaching through teacher training courses. In the last 4 years **AC has funded 742 courses**, of which 543 were for women, and 199 for men. The **increase of female teachers** helps to show young girls that they *can* complete an education, and that there is not just a place for them in the world of work, but a *need*.

AC continues to support CBE, teacher training and the district education departments, even when school constructions are finished.

In 2015 AC began to **replicate** its Worsaj educational model in Rustaq. Rustaq is a large, impoverished district with a **population of 350 000**. The needs for education are great and teaching standards are low, as they were when AC started work in Worsaj District in 2011.

In May 2015 AC funded its first construction in Rustaq: Bibi Ayisha School. Bibi Ayisha School serves 472 girls in the rural village of Beshkant.



## Activities: How Important is MDG 2?

**TIME:** 45 minutes

**MATERIALS:** MDG 2 information and 'The Story of the Street Children' (see end of document)

**OBJECTIVE:** Explore the different barriers to education in Afghanistan and the benefits of receiving an education if these can be overcome.



### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Draw a **tree** on the blackboard similar to the one in this photograph
2. The roots represent **factors** preventing pupils from having an education
3. The trunk represents **education**
4. The branches represent the **fruits of education**, both for those receiving it and for the Nation
5. Using information from this chapter and the appendix, ask pupils to come to the board and label the roots with the problems preventing an education and the branches with the fruits of an education

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. **Consider** what factors are the **most crucial** for MDG 2 to be achieved in Afghanistan.
2. **Consider** in what ways the **future of Afghanistan** could be changed for the better if MDG 2 can be achieved.





## Activities: Obstacles and Opportunities with Snakes and Ladders

*This exercise is aimed at a younger age group (8-12 years). To explore these issues with an older class, use the same material from the MDG2 information and 'The Stories of Afghan Children' (see end of document) without using the Snakes and Ladders game. Decide each character's ultimate goal in life, along with the obstacles and opportunities they are likely to experience. Then lead a discussion around why education is more important or more likely for each individual.*

**TIME:** 45 minutes

**MATERIALS:** Dice, six game pieces, Snakes and Ladder game board and 'The Stories of Afghan Children'

**OBJECTIVES:** \*Analyse another person's circumstances and evaluate their obstacles and opportunities in life. \*Understand the issues that prevent Afghan children receiving an education.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Divide students into **six groups**, providing each group with a case study from 'The Stories of Afghan Children'
2. The pupils in each group must set **one objective** for their character; they must decide what their character most wants to achieve in his/her life. They must write down **five possible obstacles** that their character could face and **five possible opportunities** that could contribute to achieving his/her objective, using the information on MDG2 for suggestions.
3. Play as you would a normal game of snakes and ladders. Before each group's first turn they must introduce their character and read aloud their story to the other groups. When a group goes up a ladder, they must read out loud an opportunity that would bring that child closer to his/her goal. Similarly, if a group goes down a snake, they must read out an obstacle.

### DISCUSSION POINTS:

- \* Which character has the highest chances to achieve his/her goal? **Why?**
- \* Is it difficult to imagine the challenges and ambitions of these children? If so **why?**
- \* In **comparison** what are your personal life goals and what are the chances of achieving them?
- \* Is **education** an important goal/opportunity for all the characters in the stories? If yes/no, why?
- \* **What have you learnt** about the lives of Afghan children from the stories and what has surprised you?



## 'The Story of Street Children'

According to the annual report of The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Afghanistan is one of the worst places to live for children, especially girls:

- The country's **rate of child mortality** is one of the highest in the world: over 200 deaths per 1000 children born.
- In many rural areas almost half the population do not have access to **drinking water**.
- Over 70% of the population over the age of 15 years are **illiterate**.

The north of the country is more peaceful and safe than the south and the east. Dozens of little figures wander around the market at the edge of the town of Mazar-i-Sharif in the darkness, some of them pushing wheelbarrows. The students from Aschiana work to save their families from hunger. Sayd lives here and dreams of becoming the Minister of Defence when he grows up. What UK child has similar dreams? The children here dream mostly about peace and life in safety. They believe that they could achieve this through working in government.

At half past five a remote bus line to Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, is waiting to set off. The drivers wash the windows of older but well-preserved buses in which three pupils from Aschiana are offering food and drinks from their baskets to the passengers. It seems that nobody has bought anything yet today. A teacher is observing them at work. He himself is not much better-off. Teachers earn about twenty or thirty Afghanis a day. This is equivalent to just under 50p. In the meantime, other pupils are arriving at the market with fruits and vegetables. They are wearing shabby sweaters, T-shirts and traditional clothes, shalwar kameez (similar to pyjama's) made of wool. The girls have their faces covered with scarves, not because of the cold weather, but out of respect for the values of their religion, Islam. Even though the temperature is slightly above zero, many children are wearing sandals without socks.

The first tank trucks loaded with bags full of potatoes and onions arrive. The children hurry to approach them, spreading their arms. They are fighting over rotten potatoes thrown at them by farmers and keep on showing each other what they managed to seize. Some of them sweep the sellers' stalls, bring water or arrange the goods. If they're lucky, they can earn about 20–30 Afghani. They have to leave at seven as the lesson starts at eight in Aschiana and the journey from the market to school takes about an hour. The school is composed of four big tents where the children sit on the floor – boys and girls separately.



## 'Stories of Afghan Children'

**DHARA:** Darah is 17 and lives with her family in a rich neighbourhood of Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, in a luxurious villa. She has a little brother. Her father is a banker, her mother a politician; both support her. Dhara attends a prestigious high school. She wants to study in Western Europe. She is torn between the idea of life away from the hardships of living in a war-torn country, and using her privileged position to help her country.

**FARID:** Aged 14, a physically disabled boy called Farid from a family of 8 without a father is fortunate. He is one of the 4000 street children in Kabul that are helped by a non-profit organisation, Aschiana. Thanks to Aschiana, Farid gained a basic education; he can attend art, sport, and practical training classes, which could help him to find a better job. Although Farid has no clear idea about his future, he wants to find a job to sustain his future family.

**LAILA:** Laila is 15 and lives in the poor province of Kapisa, north of Kabul. She has three siblings: two sisters and a brother. Her parents are pastoral nomads. If the family settles in an area with a girls' school, she attends it, but sometimes they settle in an area where there are no schools and so Laila stays at home. She wants to become a doctor.

**MAHMUD:** Mahmud is ten years old and works on the streets of Kabul. He sells an English newspaper to locals and foreigners. His father died in the war and his mother is not able to sustain her five children. One of the elder siblings, Mahmud has to work to help his family. However, his earnings can pay only for one room in a small house without electricity or running water. Mahmud dreams of graduating from high school and become a clerk.

**SAHRAA:** Sahraa is 13 and lives in Kandahar, a province under the influence of the Taliban. There are no girls' schools in her village or in the surrounding area. If Sahraa wanted to attend school, she would have to commute 100 kilometres to the neighbouring province. None of the family members can read or write. When Sahraa is 16 years of age, she is supposed to get married. The marriage is arranged, her husband is 20 years older than her and he is her distant relative. Sahraa would like to work as a tailor.

**TARIK:** Tarik lives in the big city of Herat, in western Afghanistan. His father is a civil engineer and studied in former Czechoslovakia. Now he works for a foreign construction company that builds roads in Afghanistan. His mother is a housewife. Tarik has a younger sister and an older brother. He is 16 now and after finishing high school, he would like to study at polytechnic university in Kabul.