



Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Social Effects of Community-Based Education, Afghanistan (ALSE)

Research Brief #11: Can Communities Take Charge? Sustainability and CBE

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This research brief presents the Executive Summary of the [Phase Two Endline Report](#).

Studies show large positive effects of community-based education (CBE) on education access and quality.ⁱ The Afghan Ministry of Education considers CBE a pivotal contributor to the significant growth in school attendance over the last decade in Afghanistan and identifies it as a key pathway to dismantling barriers to education access.ⁱⁱ International non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have made strides in establishing CBE classes in rural, remote, and marginalized areas. However, sustaining the classes inside these villages when the NGOs depart is challenging. For example, of the 226 villages where NGOs had handed over USAID supported CBE classes in 2011, only 48 of the communities continued to have a school either within their community or within 2.5km of it by 2014.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Social Effects of Community-Based Education in Afghanistan (ALSE) is a multiyear, randomized controlled trial that aimed to deepen our understanding of ways (1) to maximize primary school access and learning through CBE, and (2) to sustain the gains achieved through CBE into the future. ALSE's Phase One explored the effects of CBE on education access, children's learning achievement, and villagers' trust in and the legitimacy of local and national government institutions. We presented these results in the [ALSE Phase One Baseline Report](#), [Phase One Endline Report](#), as well as in series of [research briefs](#) (Research Briefs #1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9). Please visit www.alseproject.com for these documents.

Phase Two focused on testing a CBE sustainability model, where village-level community institutions take charge of the CBE management jointly with local government education offices. The sustainability model is put into effect when the original implementing NGOs end their programming. To study the sustainability model, ALSE facilitated the handover of a randomized half of its sample villages from NGOs to village community councils, trained the village councils, and provided basic but essential support that included teacher salaries and textbook supplies. The other half of the communities were funded for sustained

NGO implementation, which established a benchmark for comparing the performance of community management under the sustainability model.

Phase Two data came from an extensive household survey administered with 4,620 heads of households, a learning assessment with 5,544 children age 6-13, a teacher survey with 215 CBE teachers, and a community leader survey administered with 175 community leaders.

We used a "non-inferiority equivalence trial" approach in our Phase Two analysis, whereby we aimed to evaluate whether the sustainability model can achieve outcomes that meet a benchmark set by the exemplary NGO administration, or whether it is inferior to a degree that is not acceptable. We assessed the effects of the sustainability model on primary education access, learning, school quality, and villagers' confidence and trust in and the legitimacy of local and national government institutions. Here are the key findings of this randomized impact evaluation.

Key findings from the Phase Two study

1. ALSE's cost-comparison analysis of CBE administration shows that the cost of the sustainability model of CBE is 53.7% the cost of NGO management of CBE per village. This calculation is based on CBE classes that were already established by NGOs.
2. Community administration of CBE under the sustainability model is as effective as under continued NGO administration in terms of promoting access to education and children's learning, significantly outperforming what one might expect, given the cost difference mentioned above.
3. Community management under the sustainability model provides access and learning opportunities for both boys and girls; the model performs slightly more effectively for girls than for boys in increasing access to education, although this difference is not statistically significant.

4. The confidence in village community institutions among heads of households and CBE teachers did not differ from their confidence in those institutions under NGO administration. However, under the sustainability model, community leaders' confidence in local institutions was lower than their confidence in these institutions under NGO management. Moreover, CBE teachers' confidence that CBE classes will continue under the sustainability model was weaker than that of their peers in communities under the NGO model. The absence of mechanisms, including funds to ensure long-term access to the CBE classes, likely influenced this decline in confidence.
5. The level of villagers' trust in and the legitimacy of local and national government institutions under the sustainability model of CBE were not significantly different than the level found in areas under continued NGO administration.

With the basic funds provided, including teacher salaries and textbook supplies, our experiment demonstrates that it is indeed possible to mobilize village community institutions and local education offices to sustain CBE classes in villages upon the departure of NGOs. Moreover, community-managed classes perform at a level comparable to classes under sustained NGO management.

However, the sustainability model needs improvement before being scaled up.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the Phase Two study, we recommend the following to strengthen the CBE sustainability model:

- For the sustainability model to work, well-coordinated support from national, provincial, and district government authorities must be made available, along with a reliable funding mechanism. To realize the promise of the sustainability strategy studied in this report, the government must make these mechanisms available. The Citizens' Charter initiative may serve as a coordinating mechanism to establish such funding pipelines.
- The sustainability model should not be viewed as a substitute for NGOs that initiated CBE classes. Instead, it must be seen as an effective model to sustain the gains those NGOs created. The sustainability model offers a mechanism for NGOs to ensure that services they helped to put in place do not disappear after their departure. NGOs should thus plan on involving the village shuras increasingly throughout their CBE program implementation to facilitate the transfer. Such a plan may include shura capacity-building, joint management and monitoring of CBE classes during the NGO administration, and close collaboration throughout the transition/handover process.
- CBE programs need to expand to serve multiple cohorts and grades simultaneously. Only then will CBE meet ongoing education needs, rather than serving as a temporary system. The switch from single cohort-based enrollment to multi-grade annual enrollment will require financial and programmatic modifications that should be taken into account by NGOs and the donors who support them.
- Village-level community institutions, namely, Community Development Councils, Education Subcommittees, and School Management Shuras, can provide an effective institutional infrastructure for delivering primary education. Our research demonstrated that training is necessary to ensure these institutions' management capacity. Moreover, to ensure complete buy-in among community leaders, it may be necessary to couple the handover of administrative responsibilities to community institutions with other benefits, such as communities' access to development funds.

ⁱ Burde, D., & Linden, L. L. (2013). Bringing education to Afghan girls: A randomized controlled trial of village-based schools. *American Economic Journal-Applied*, 5(3), 27–40.

ⁱ Burde, D., Middleton, J., & Samii, C. (2016). *Assessment of learning outcomes and social effects of community-based education: A randomized field experiment in Afghanistan. Phase One outcomes report*. New York: New York University, Steinhardt School.

ⁱⁱ Ministry of Education of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. 2018. Community-based education policy. Kabul: Ministry of Education of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

ⁱⁱⁱ Burde, D., Middleton, J., & Samii, C. (2015). *Community-Based Schools and Institutionalized Access to Education in Rural Afghanistan. Preliminary Findings*. Retrieved at: <http://um.dk/en/danida-en/partners/research/other/~media/UM/English-site/Documents/Danida/Partners/Research-Org/Research-studies/PACEA%20104DAN8b84.pdf>