

## Measuring Success and Challenges in Afghanistan: Minister of Education for Afghanistan Farooq Wardak

Wednesday, May 12, 2010, 3:30 pm – 5:00 pm

[Center for Universal Education](#) at Brookings, 1775 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC

On May 12, 2010, the Center for Universal Education at Brookings hosted a discussion with His Excellency [Ghulam Farooq Wardak, the Minister of Education of Afghanistan](#). Minister Wardak highlighted current efforts to train teachers, increase school enrollment, and improve quality education in Afghanistan. In his opening remarks, the Minister offered historical context into the challenges facing the Afghan education system. Between 1979 and 2001, war and internal conflict severely disrupted overall access to education and ideological opposition excluded most girls from any educational opportunities. Since 2001, the number of students enrolled has risen from 1 to 7 million, including 2.5 million girls. The Ministry has also focused on improving educational quality through developing a new national curriculum, distributing updated textbooks, and dramatically expanding training for teachers. Despite these reforms, there are still 5 million children—over 40 percent—who remain out of school in the country.

### Challenges for Education in Afghanistan

**Beyond Primary School:** Currently, Afghanistan has extremely limited educational opportunities for most children beyond primary school. Minister Wardak predicts that without adequate attention to both the quality of primary education and expanded access to post-primary learning, there will be a growing gap between rising expectations and limited opportunities. Over the next decade, primary graduation is expected to increase to 800,000 students each year but there is currently only capacity for approximately 50,000 students to move into meaningful post-primary education opportunities.

**Country-led Development:** In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, development efforts were guided by crisis management tactics, focusing on where immediate action could be taken. With increased stability in the country, it is important for national and community ownership to be the central focus with enhancing the capacity of indigenous institutions at the center. Only 20 percent of the entire development budget is currently available for country-led programs with most of it now being delivered through technical assistance and earmarked projects. The community-based education program, however, is one of the best examples of development projects aligning with national goals.

**Making Schools Safe:** [UNESCO's recent report, \*Education under Attack\*](#), found that in 2008 a total of 673 schools were closed due to security challenges. The Ministry of Education, with financial support from the Canadian International Development Association (CIDA) and significant involvement of individual communities, successfully reopened 230 schools within one year through enhanced community ownership. During the 2009 presidential election, overall attacks on schools nonetheless increased particularly in many isolated rural areas. This is likely because schools are often one of the only symbols of government presence as well as the use of schools as sites for electoral polling.

**Training and Professionalizing Teachers:** Over the last eight years, the teaching force has grown alongside rising school enrollments to a total of 170,000 teachers, 30 percent of whom are women, to reach 7 million students. Yet, only one in four teachers currently meets the minimum requirements for teachers and teachers are the lowest paid members of the public sector. Over the

next five years, the Ministry seeks to increase to at least 80 percent the percentage of teachers passing the national competency exam. One major challenge is expanding the number of trained women teachers in rural areas, where increased access has been achieved over the last decade in large part through highly-motivated community based teachers with limited or no training. Efforts to professionalize the teaching corps will have to include incentives and in-service training opportunities to ensure a presence of women teachers to maintain children's access to education while increasing educational quality in these rural areas.

**Religion and Education:** The Minister emphasized the importance of supporting regulated Islamic education within Afghanistan so that those seeking religious instruction do not seek out unregulated forms of instruction. Current education reform plans include a shift toward a mixed, modernized curriculum that includes courses on general education, Islam, vocational skills, information and technology, and English. Currently, the U.S. government cannot directly fund religious education but other emerging donors could provide support for mainstream religious instruction.