

**Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
Case Study Series**

IS CAPACITY BEING BUILT?

**A Study of Policymaking Process
in the Primary and Secondary Education Subsector**



Sayed Muhammad Shah

July 2010

Editing and layout: AREU Publications Team

© 2010 Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Some rights reserved. This publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted only for non-commercial purposes and with written credit to AREU and the author. Where this publication is reproduced, stored or transmitted electronically, a link to AREU's website (www.areu.org.af) should be provided. Any use of this publication falling outside of these permissions requires prior written permission of the publisher, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Permission can be sought by emailing areu@areu.org.af or by calling +93 (0)799 608 548.

About the Author

Sayed Muhammad Shah is the Senior Policy and Communications Officer with the Communications, Advocacy and Information Department (CAID) at AREU. He has an MA in Mass Communications from Balochistan University in Pakistan. He has been working with AREU since August 2007 and has a major involvement in AREU's policymaking process studies and other communications activities.

About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research institute based in Kabul. AREU's mission is to inform and influence policy and practice through conducting high-quality, policy-relevant research and actively disseminating the results, and to promote a culture of research and learning. To achieve its mission AREU engages with policymakers, civil society, researchers and students to promote their use of AREU's research and its library, to strengthen their research capacity, and to create opportunities for analysis, reflection and debate.

AREU was established in 2002 by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, the United Nations and other multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organisations. AREU currently receives core funds from the governments of Finland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Specific projects have been funded by the Foundation of the Open Society Institute Afghanistan (FOSIA), the Asia Foundation (TAF), the European Commission (EC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the World Bank.

Acknowledgements

The author of this paper wishes to thank all the respondents of this study who generously shared their knowledge, time and key documents for analysis. Special thanks go to the staff of Ministry of Education (MoE), particularly to the Planning Department and the Teacher Education Department for their valuable inputs.

The author expresses his gratitude to Dr Dana Holland for her guidance and mentoring throughout this study and the Manager of AREU's Communication, Advocacy and Information Department (CAID), Dr Sarah Parkinson, Senior Researcher, Dr Adam Pain and the international staff of International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) for their highly important comments over the drafts of this case study. Finally, he presents his sincere gratitude to the Director of AREU, Dr Paula Kantor for her trust and confidence in the capabilities of the author for this research.

Sayed Muhammad Shah
July 2010

Table of Contents

Acronyms	iv
1. Introduction	1
2. Methodology	4
2.1 Limitations	5
3. Background of the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) Development.....	6
4. Strategic Planning and Working Arrangements.....	8
5. Consultative Process for the NESP	12
6. The Teacher Education Programme (TEP) as a Specific Case of NESP Formulation ..	13
6.1 Background to teacher education	13
6.2 Development of the TEP	14
7. Completion of the NESP and Implementation Challenges	16
8. Motivations to Revise the NESP	19
8.1 Education for All Fast Track Initiative (EFA FTI)	19
8.2 The Education Development Board	20
8.3 Formal application for the EFA FTI partnership	20
9. Process of Revising the NESP.....	22
10. Consultations for the Revision of the NESP.....	24
11. The TEP as a Specific Case.....	25
11.1 Process of revision of the TEP	25
12. Finalisation of the Revised NESP.....	27
13. Understanding Capacity and the Dilemma of Technical Assistance.....	28
14. Discussion and Analysis	32
14.1 Decisions about policies and setting priorities.....	34
14.2 Capacity and its technical assistance needs	35
15. Conclusion.....	37
Recent Publications from AREU	38

Acronyms

AC	Afghanistan Compact
ADA	Afghan Development Association
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
BEPA	Basic Education Programme for Afghanistan
BESST	Building Education Support System for Teachers
CAI	Creative Associates International
CF	Catalytic Fund
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CTAP	Civilian Technical Assistance Plan
DAD	Development Assistance Database
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
EDB	Education Development Board
EDF	Education Development Forum
EFA FTI	Education for All Fast Track Initiative
EMIS	Education Management and Information System
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
HRDB	Human Resources Development Board
iANDS	Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MoLSAMD	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NITTP	National In-service Teacher Training Programme
PACE-A	Partnership for Advancing Community Education in Afghanistan
PMU	Programme Management Unit
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SC	Steering Committee
SPT	Strategic Planning Team
STEP	Strengthening Teacher Education Programme
TAC	Technical Assistance Commission
TEP	Teacher Education Programme
ToR	Terms of Reference
TST	Technical Support Team
TTC	Teacher Training College
TWG	Thematic Working Group
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank

1. Introduction

This study is one in a series of case studies conducted by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) to understand policymaking processes in different sectors, a research project that started in September 2007. The earlier case studies covered agriculture and rural development, governance, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), and lawmaking (the Shiite Personal Status Law). This case study focuses on the primary and secondary education subsector and is the final in the series, all of which will provide input for a synthesis paper on policymaking in Afghanistan.

Education is one of the key service delivery sectors in Afghanistan and under Article 43 of the 2005 Constitution, it is envisioned to be “the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be provided up to the level of Bachelors free of charge by the state. The state is obliged to devise and implement effective programmes for a balanced expansion of education all over Afghanistan.” Similarly, the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) has shown a commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which sets the goal that “By 2020 all children in Afghanistan, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education.”

To meet the targets of the MDGs and to deliver education services to the people of Afghanistan under the abovementioned article of Constitution, the GoA set education development benchmarks for primary and secondary education in the Afghanistan Compact and Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (iANDS): “By 1389 [2010] net enrolment rate for boys and girls in primary grades will be at least 75% and 60% respectively. Female teachers will be increased by 50%. A new curriculum will be operational in secondary schools. Seventy percent of teachers will pass a national competency test. National annual testing system for students will be in place.” The GoA reached a consensus on this and other benchmarks in the Afghanistan Compact with the international community at the London Conference in February 2006 and embarked on developing a national development strategy. The resulting ANDS was completed in April 2008 and presented at an international conference in Paris on 12 June 2008, where the donor countries committed to financially support the implementation of the plan. The focus of the current study is what the next steps in the national planning process were, specifically for the primary and secondary education subsector, for which a National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) that would be linked to the targets of the ANDS and MDGs was developed.

Budget figures show Afghanistan’s dependence on external aid. The country is funded by approximately 60 donors for its development programmes and a portion of its recurrent expenditures. According to sources from the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the total revenue generation of Afghanistan was US\$1,010 million during 1388 (2009-10) while the total National Budget was \$4,150 million, out of which \$1,868 million was the Operating Budget and \$2,282 million was the Development Budget. A total of \$2,891 has been received as external aid to the National Budget, out of which \$780 million was for the Operating Budget and \$2,110 million for the Development Budget, which shows \$77 million as deficit for the Operating Budget and \$171.9 million as deficit for the Development Budget. Similarly, the External Budget for 1388 (2009-10) was \$3,369.6 million, which are funds channelled outside the government and directly spent by donors on development programmes and projects through their implementing partners.¹

1 Budget figures provided by the Budget Department of the MoF.

Table 1: Afghan government budget, 1388 (March 2009- March 2010)

Description	US\$ million
Core National Budget	
<i>Operating Budget</i>	1,868
<i>Development Budget</i>	2,282
Total National Budget	4,150
Total Revenue Generation	1,010
External Aid Received	
<i>Operating Budget</i>	780
<i>Development Budget</i>	2,110
Total External Aid Received	2,891
Deficit	
<i>Deficit for Operating Budget</i>	77
<i>Deficit for Development Budget</i>	171.9
Total Deficit	248.9
Total External Budget	3,369.6

This study assumes that aid dependency, along with a lack of technical capacity in government institutions caused by the protracted civil war in the country, potentially weakens the position of the GoA in dealing with donors on setting national policies and priorities. The primary and secondary education subsector is supported by different donors with the majority of the funding still flowing outside government's control.² Some donors channel their funds through the government budget while some others implement their programmes through NGOs and private implementing partners. Similarly, some other donors, such as the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO, have a mandate to achieve the MDGs on education through the global partnership Education for All Fast Track Initiative (EFA FTI). These international targets in aid dependent environments are hypothesised to have considerable influence on policymaking.

The study also posits, however, that government capacity can increase through the policymaking process and enhance its ability to negotiate the policymaking process. For the purpose of the study, capacity is defined in both organisational and human resource terms. The capacity of staff is an integral part of organisational capacity but staff capacity is not the entirety of organisational capacity. Organisational capacity implies the ability of an effort to reach defined targets, which requires working structures, sufficient and active human resources, financial resources, and practical policies, programmes and procedures. Human resource capacity refers to individuals' capability to undertake their work according to their respective terms of reference. In turn, collectively, staff should then be able to fulfil the requirements of an organisation in terms of planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies and programmes for achieving the organisation's targets.

This study has therefore endeavoured to understand the process of education policymaking, and specifically how the Ministry of Education (MoE)'s capacity has changed in terms of its ability to shape the policymaking process in the formulation and later revision phases of the NESP. In addition, it examines how change in ministry capacity over the course of NESP formulation and revision has affected the government's position to negotiate the policymaking process. The study looks particularly at the Teacher Education Programme

2 Senior Advisor, Ministry of Education (MoE), 4 March 2009.

(TEP) as a specific case of policymaking. The timeframe of this study and resources did not allow for investigation of policymaking in all the NESP programmes, so one was selected based on criteria described in the methodology.

This paper initially explains the research methodology and background information on policymaking efforts in the MoE after the fall of Taliban, starting with curriculum reform. It then describes the development of the NESP in 2006, explaining the motivations behind its development, working arrangements, key actors, consultation mechanisms and perspectives on implementation, and highlights the development process of the TEP in the first NESP. The next section explains the process of revising the NESP during 2009, also describing the motivations for its revision, working arrangements, key actors, consultation mechanisms and the current status of the plan. The development of the TEP is again focused on as part of the revision of the strategic plan. The phenomenon of capacity in the MoE as well as existing technical assistance needs is discussed, and the paper then presents discussion and conclusion sections.

2. Methodology

To select a distinct topic for this case study and to gain familiarity with policies, programmes and issues in the primary and secondary education subsector, a scoping study was conducted during March and April 2009. The resulting report provided grounds for brainstorming the topic of the case study, which is to examine the capacity of the MoE for developing policies and programmes by comparing the processes of development of the NESP in 2006 with its revision in 2009. The process of strategic planning involved development of eight programmes in 2006, while in 2009 five programmes were developed as key components of the revised NESP. One programme of the strategic plan, the TEP, was selected as a specific case to look into its programme development processes. The TEP was selected because:

- 1) It is a consolidated programme compared to others, which makes it easier to explore in a comprehensive way;
- 2) It is directly linked to the quality and access of education, which are the mandates of EFA FTI and help understand its influence on the process;
- 3) Past practices for teacher education can be compared with the new programme and recent events to analyse the differences; and
- 4) It involves varied forms of implementation both by government and NGOs.

Qualitative research methods were employed for both data collection and analyses. Data was also drawn from the interviews and observation notes collected during the scoping study. As this is a case study, it is not an end in itself but a method of exploring broader questions. The following data collection methods were used:

Desk study of relevant documents

The collection of relevant documents and their review was an important part of this study. The reviewed documents included: the Constitution of Afghanistan, the Education Law, the ANDS education sector strategy, the NESP (1385-1389), a draft of revised NESP (1389-1394), EFA FTI documents, a recent situational analysis report, programme documents relating to teacher education, such as the Building *Education* Support Systems for Teachers (*BESST*) program, and their evaluation reports, as well as media reports on education. The study of these documents helped build on the findings of the scoping study and informed the research objectives.

Interviews and informal conversations

The sample for interviews was identified and divided into three clusters based on the nature of activities in the subsector. These were: 1) staff and advisors of the MoE, 2) staff of donor agencies, and 3) staff of implementing partners of the MoE. The donors and implementing partners of the subsector, particularly for the TEP, were identified through the Development Assistance Database (DAD) in the Budget Department of the MoF. In addition, interviews conducted for the scoping study facilitated the identification of key actors and built relations with them. A contact list was prepared that contained the names and contact information of key staff at the MoE, donors to the primary and secondary education subsector, and implementing partners of the MoE. Using snowball sampling, initial interviews were used to obtain suggestions for further contacts for data collection. Interview guides were developed separately for the three clusters of informants, matching each's respective activities and interventions. The following table illustrates the three main clusters of informants:

Table 2: Clusters of interviewees

MoE	Donor agencies	Implementing partners
Senior advisors in the MoE	USAID	PACE-A
Members of the working group for the Teacher Education Programme (TEP)	GTZ	Care International
Members of the Education Development Board	UNICEF	AKDN
Staff of the Teacher Education Department	World Bank	Save the Children (USA)
Relevant senior advisor in the Ministry of Higher Education	UNESCO	Save the Children (Norway)
Staff of the Planning Department of the MoE	JICA	BESST
	CIDA	ADA
	DANIDA	

A total of 22 interviews were conducted during December 2009 and January 2010 that focused on the NESP policymaking process, including a special focus on the TEP. The interviews were between one to two hours and were each conducted in English or Dari under conditions of confidentiality. The interview guides for each cluster of informants were structured around questions on the roles of stakeholders in the NESP development process, interventions in the subsector, particularly in the TEP, views on policymaking capacity in the MoE, etc. With the consent of the interviewee, the interview discussions were digitally recorded and written notes were also taken. The digital recordings were later transcribed and analysed with the aid of *ATLAS.ti* software. The notes of interviews and informal discussions were the main source of information and were used in conjunction with some observation notes.

Half-day validation seminar

A half-day seminar was organised on 3 March 2010 to validate the data gathered during the fieldwork. Participants at the seminar were from the MoE, donor organisations, and national and international NGOs that are working as MoE implementing partners. The findings and other information from the study were shared with these participants and their comments were recorded for addressing in this report.

2.1 Limitations

The study did not include the views of the leadership of the MoE, as the minister and all but one deputy minister were inaccessible for interviews. The fieldwork was done mainly during December 2009 and early January 2010, during which time few policy-related meetings, dialogues or consultations took place, so there was little opportunity for observing such processes. Some implementing agencies and government staff did not feel comfortable talking without formal permission from their organisational heads and this sometimes made it difficult to obtain in-depth information on the issues surrounding the NESP process.

3. Background of the NESP Development

After the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the policy discussion in the education sector began with curriculum reform to adjust the curriculum according to the changes that had occurred in society and requirements of the time. The MoE facilitated a national workshop in December 2002 titled “Basic Education and Policy Support Activity,” with the primary aim to promote dialogue on the proposed new curriculum framework for the Afghan education system.³ The workshop was attended by a range of national and international education experts and the discussion, which involved identifying goals, fundamental policies, programs and standards for primary and secondary education, set the stage for the ministry’s future direction. Later, with the technical assistance of UNESCO, a group of senior staff from all the key departments of the ministry designed the National Curriculum Framework of Afghanistan (2004), which became a “mother policy document” and reference for future policy discussions. A senior advisor at the ministry said: “The National Curriculum Framework of Afghanistan was the first original document that set the stage for the ministry’s direction. It illustrated what we want from the education system and how we should programme our system and structure in respect to that.”

The discussions for development of the NESP, which is the subject of this study, came up with government’s commitment to achieve the global targets of Education For All (EFA). The MoE had signed a memorandum of understanding with UNESCO’s International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) in 2004 to develop an EFA plan for the country.⁴ At this point historically the MoE was confronted with high educational demands, which had increased dramatically with the emergence of the transitional government—both from the Afghan people, who quickly set education as highly important to their future, as well as from the international community, who came to help Afghanistan make progress on this front and stand alongside other nations in meeting the global education targets of the MDGs.⁵ Ministry representatives recalled that, at the time, the MoE did not work in terms of a planning document that was matched to meeting educational demand. Instead, the ministry’s projects and activities in the primary and secondary education subsector were largely determined by the budget allocated by the MoF. The signing of the memorandum of understanding to develop an EFA plan for the country required the MoE to switch its approach from programming based on the available budget to programming based on needs—needs that would be specified in a strategic plan articulating goals, objectives and programmes in the subsector. The MoE and IIEP agreed to direct their strategic planning cooperation to incorporate the six EFA goals⁶ within a framework that was clearly linked to poverty reduction⁷ and to fulfil the ministry’s interest in programming based on needs.

3 “Sharing Perspectives on Curriculum Development in Afghanistan,” Final Report of the Basic Education and Policy Support Activity Workshop, 21 January 2003.

4 Document provided by a staff member of a UN agency. It is dated 28 January 2006 (p. 3).

5 Director of the Planning Department and a technical assistant, 10 November and 9 December 2009.

6 The six EFA goals are: “1) expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, specially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, 2) ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality, 3) ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes, 4) achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, 5) eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to an achievement in basic education of good quality and 6) improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.”

7 Document provided by staff of a UN agency. Dated: 28 January 2006 (p. 3).

Soon after the initial agreement was formalised, in early October 2005 the Deputy Minister of Education, Mr. Abdul Ghafoor Ghaznavi, visited IIEP's office in Paris, where a concept note was developed for the formulation of the NESP with the technical assistance of IIEP.⁸ Both sides agreed that the strategic plan would be designed to spell out the ministry's priorities and help coordinate donor aid. Procedurally, both sides also agreed that technical staff at the ministry would prepare the plan under government leadership, that IIEP's technical support would be a first phase in a long-term programme to build national capacity for strategic planning, and that the planning process would be participatory, carried out in consultation with international development partners and civil society.⁹

Then in late 2005 the Minister of Education, Mr. Noor Muhammad Qarqin, made the formal request to IIEP to expand its technical assistance, which had started on a small scale in 2002 around basic planning and gender sensitisation, to include strategic planning. Following the formal request of the ministry, in January 2006 the first IIEP strategic planning mission to Afghanistan took place to work out the specific organisational arrangements. This mission started by putting together a strategic planning team composed of selected members of the Planning Department of the MoE, which acted as the technical counterpart group for the mission members. Organisational arrangements were also informed by an evolving model of technical support that the IIEP has developed to support ministries of education of its members, including Afghanistan, Egypt, Palestine and Iraq.¹⁰ The key emphases of this evolving model include training a core number of ministry staff, advising on appropriate structures and arrangements for planning, securing political will for embarking on sector-wide planning linked to poverty reduction, and developing national institutional capacity around policy processes, policy analysis, planning and programming.

Coincidentally, just as the required working structures and arrangements for strategic planning were put in place to initiate the strategic planning effort, in early 2006 the MoE went through a management change with Hanif Atmar replacing Noor Muhammad Qarqin as Minister of Education. The new minister gave a high priority to strategic planning and set a short deadline of three months to deliver the plan. The decision created a state of urgency because IIEP had anticipated completing the plan in 12 to 16 months to ensure that the planning process was consultative, involving all relevant ministries, the parliamentary commission on education, donors, and the NGOs that were the ministry's implementing partners.

8 Document provided by staff of a UN agency. Dated: 28 January 2006 (Annex 1).

9 Document provided by staff of a UN agency. Dated: 28 January 2006 (Annex 1).

10 IIEP international staffmember, pers. comm, 23 December 2009.

4. Strategic Planning and Working Arrangements

As mentioned above, part of IIEP's initial mission was working with the ministry's management and programme departments to develop structural and working arrangements for strategic planning. Based on these discussions and experience supporting other countries, IIEP proposed a set of decision-making and working structures to move the task of strategic planning ahead.¹¹ The following table illustrates these working structures, members and their specific tasks:

Box 2: Working structure for strategic planning¹²

Name	Composition	Functions
Steering Committee (SC)	Minister of Education as chairman and three deputy ministers, directors of departments and key ministerial advisors as members	Provide guidance throughout strategic planning on policies, objectives, targets and design of resource framework, monitor progress of work, approve reports, make decisions about financial aspects, guide consultations with other ministries, the parliamentary commission, donors, civil society and subnational education management
Strategic Planning Team (SPT)	Director of the Planning Department as coordinator, and coordinators of Thematic Working Groups and Technical Support Teams as members	Communicate between policy and technical levels, ensure systematic exchange of information among Thematic Working Groups and ensure coherence among the proposals made by them

¹¹ Staff member of the Planning Department, 9 December 2009.

¹² The information in the table has been collated from documents provided by staff of a UN agency and personal communication with a range of ministry staff.

Name	Composition	Functions
<p>Thematic Working Groups (TWGs)</p> <p>Eight TWGs in total, of which five worked on specific subsectors including 1) general education, 2) Islamic education, 3) technical vocational education, 4) adult literacy and non-formal education and 5) teacher education and working conditions. Three other TWGs worked on specific cross-cutting areas: 1) school construction and mapping, 2) curriculum development, textbooks and teaching-learning resources and 3) development of management capacities</p>	<p>Deputy Director of relevant department as coordinator of each working group, staff of the ministry's departments and technical advisors as members. Coordinators of each team were assisted by a secretary appointed from amongst the members</p>	<p>Situation analysis of the subsector on priority area of the working group including identifying the main problems and challenges, making the first proposal concerning objectives, targets and priority action programmes and working with the Technical Support Team on revision of proposals in the wake of comments by stakeholders</p>
<p>Technical Support Team (TST)</p> <p>The TST internally organised three subteams on 1) projects, reports and policy documents, 2) statistics and 3) cost and financing</p>	<p>Director of the Planning Department as coordinator and selected staff of the Planning Department and international experts from IIEP members</p>	<p>Provide Thematic Working Groups with baseline statistical data and information, review outputs of Thematic Working Groups and consolidate them into a plan, undertake feasibility testing of the plan and directly prepare the cost and financing components and act as secretariat for consultation meetings and workshops</p>

Although this provided a formal arrangement for strategic planning, it was not followed as anticipated, as one ministry representative explained: “Unfortunately the working arrangements came across some critical challenges of time constraints and lack of technical capacity in the ministry to meet the needs of policymaking.” War and unstable governments during the civil war period had prevented civil servants from keeping up-to-date with contemporary knowledge in their respective fields. At the time of post-Taliban reconstruction, there was an influx of international organisations into Afghanistan and growth of national NGOs in the country. This created a tremendous job market expansion in well paid positions outside government and left the public sector with comparatively fewer resources and less attractive salary scales. As a result, the government sector had difficulty attracting professionals with contemporary knowledge and had a less privileged and less dynamic work force.¹³

¹³ The information in this paragraph is based on interviews with two senior advisors and the Director of the Planning Department, MoE, conducted in November 2009.

The then Minister of Education, Hanif Atmar, responded to these human resource challenges by appointing to the ministry hundreds¹⁴ of national advisors who had work experience with national and international organisations, effectively pulling them into the public sector as private sector employees. A former ministry advisor elaborated: “Atmar brought capacity for the ministry. He appointed professional Afghans in the education system. Atmar had updated knowledge about the sector and clear vision as well as knew how to reach the goals.” The salaries of these national advisors are paid from development funds by different donors, mainly the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), on a different pay scale. The exact number of these advisors has never been known due to a lack of coordination among the donors on the issue and the advisors’ diverse placements in different ministry and provincial directorates. Some informants from donor organisations estimated that the number of technical advisors in the MoE is between 1,200 to 1,400, out of which 700 work in the Curriculum Department. Informants¹⁵ from donor organisations said that by the end of December 2009, the World Bank was funding 488 education advisors, DANIDA was funding 160 and USAID was funding 300, while the figures from other donors could not be obtained.

Reliance on national advisors provided a quick solution to the ministry’s human resource challenges. The national advisors largely assumed the management of ministry programmes and essential activities and at the same time also eased facilitation between the ministry and donors because they could communicate directly in English and understand development terminology. In addition to managing programs—and obtaining increased outputs from these programs¹⁶—the national advisors were also expected to build the capacity of civil servants by working with them.

NESP development was highly affected by the ministry’s reliance on advisors. The NESP represented the first time that the ministry undertook strategic planning and civil servants were unfamiliar with the process. Civil servants were expected to be involved in strategic planning at the Thematic Working Group level, but their lack of experience combined with the tight deadline imposed for completing the plan limited opportunities for civil servants to participate in the activities of the groups and learn from the process. This had the result of driving technical control for NESP programme development into the hands of groups’ Technical Resource Persons, who were national advisors. A senior ministry representative who was involved in the process recalled: “The advisors played an active role in the development of NESP as they understood both the local languages and English and were able to bridge the communication gap.” Although there were consultations through meetings at the department level where inputs were given by civil servants, it was primarily international and national advisors who wrote the draft programmes for the NESP with input from the Technical Support Team,¹⁷ which was comprised of three subteams on 1) projects, reports and policy documents, 2) statistics and 3) cost and financing. The first two subteams were mainly IIEP advisors along with a few staff of the Planning Department while the third team included DANIDA advisors in the ministry’s Finance Department.

IIEP consultants, who came periodically to Afghanistan on different missions as part of

14 MoE, donor organisation and implementing partner staff estimated the number of advisors in the ministry as over 1,000 but none had an exact figure.

15 DANIDA, USAID and World Bank staff, pers. comm., 14 December 2009, 6 January 2010 and 7 January 2010, respectively.

16 According to a senior advisor, MoE, 5 January 2010.

17 Informants from the MoE, 6 and 12 December 2009.

the three-year Strategic Planning and Capacity Development Project, which was jointly implemented with MoE and funded by the Norwegian government, also played key roles in NESP drafting. IIEP consultants prepared the simulation model for the primary and secondary education subsector based on the baseline statistics to produce projections; collected and organised existing policy documents, plans and project documents for policy analysis; and instilled chapters of NESP with technical input.

As mentioned previously, the NESP was the first time that the ministry was planning and budgeting on such a large scale. Until then budget allocations came from the MoF and the MoE would in turn decide how to spend the money, with the majority of funds allocated to salaries and the remainder to development projects. The costing and budgeting for the NESP was therefore conducted by DANIDA's financial advisors in consultation with the Thematic Working Groups, whose members did not have experience in budgeting based on programmes.

Although the Planning Department maintained close cooperation with the Technical Support Team, its main responsibility was as part of the Strategic Planning Team, specifically to coordinate strategic planning activities by ensuring exchange of information among the Thematic Working Groups, Technical Support Team and Steering Committee, and coherence in the proposals of the Thematic Working Groups. Leadership and coordination was also the responsibility of the Steering Committee, which met several times under the chairmanship of the minister and provided guidance throughout strategic planning on policies, objectives, targets and design of resource framework; monitored progress of work; approved reports; and made decisions about financial aspects.

5. Consultative Process for the NESP

As part of the strategic planning process, the ministry formulated a plan for consultation with key stakeholders including representatives of relevant ministries, the parliamentary commission on education, donors, civil society organisations, and the provincial and district administration of the MoE. An international staff member of a donor organisation explained: “The aim was to achieve a national and international consensus on priority targets and programmes, mobilise the full support of partners and obtain information to feed the situation analysis chapter of the plan.”

Consultation with ministries, donors and NGOs was initially planned to be conducted through the consultative group on education that was part of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy process and was therefore an existing mechanism for sector level consultation. It was suggested that the consultative group would organise small internal working groups matching the NESP Thematic Working Groups set up by MoE. Consultations would then be held through formal meetings at critical moments in the planning process.¹⁸ However, the Education Consultative Group could not be organised until about the time when the NESP was released.¹⁹ The consultations therefore took the form of sharing drafts of the NESP through email to obtain the comments of concerned stakeholders as well as obtaining feedback through a few meetings of the consultative group that were eventually held. Despite these efforts to create consensus and mobilise support for the plan, some stakeholders²⁰ were concerned about the vagueness of the integration of their comments into the strategic plan.

Another planned mechanism of consultation was designed for the provincial level administrators of the ministry. It was to consist of short two to three-day workshops at the early stages of strategic planning that would enable the Strategic Planning Team, led by the ministry’s Planning Department, to collect inputs from local level administrators for its diagnostic work. Additionally, another workshop planned for the end of the strategic planning process was intended to provide a forum for sharing targets and priority action programmes with the same administrators to translate the national sector plan into provincial and district plans.²¹ The MoE, with support from IIEP, organised a consultative workshop with local level administrators in August 2006 and they were consulted on some educational policies and priorities.²² However, informants from international NGOs and donors mentioned that some aspects of the consultative plan were not implemented as designed. An informant from an international NGO said: “Rather than decentralised consultation, the formulated plan was shared with the local level administrators of the Ministry of Education at the end of process.”

18 Document provided by staff of a UN agency, 28 January 2006 (p. 8).

19 IIEP international staffmember, pers. comm, 25 March 2010.

20 Informants from national and international NGOs, 13 November and 17 December 2009.

21 Document shared by staff of a UN agency, 28 January 2006 (p. 8).

22 IIEP international staffmember, pers. comm, 25 March 2010.

6. The Teacher Education Programme (TEP) as a Specific Case of NESP Formulation

Teacher education is being used in the study as a specific case example of NESP development. Before presenting findings on its NESP development process, it is important to understand the background of teacher education activities in recent history in Afghanistan, as it underlines some factors that influenced the programme's strategic plan.

6.1 Background to teacher education

Teacher education was the second high priority area, after curriculum reforms, in which donors showed a keen interest to invest. A senior advisor to the Minister of Education recalled: "In 2005, the donors' education and technical experts met with the ministry's key executive on a weekly basis to negotiate on policy, programmes and funding; eventually the second investment parallel to curriculum reforms started on a programme called the Teacher Education Programme [TEP]." He explained that in contrast to other programmes, in the TEP a different modality for implementation was introduced that did not start from the ministry's existing Teacher Education Department but from a newly created secretariat led by national advisors, thereby creating a parallel unit within the department that took control of activities and decisions. The TEP initially focused on in-service teacher training with the Teacher Education Department taking the lead in implementation. However, programme implementation ran into serious challenges due primarily to government's complicated financial system that hampered the transfer of funds from the capital to the provinces. An informant from the Teacher Education Department said: "The Teacher Education Department had trainers, stationary and other materials ready for distribution but Mastofiats²³ tended not to release funds in time. Frustrations with these implementation delays soured the ministry's management and they decided to outsource the programme." The outsourcing of programmes started with USAID's programme, Building Education Support Systems for Teachers (BESST).

BESST is a USAID-funded US\$93 million programme managed by Creative Associates International and implemented through seven national and international NGOs²⁴ in 11 provinces.²⁵ The programme was devised as a response to ministry need and the original contract was signed with then Minister Noor Muhammad Qarqin on 6 February 2006. The agreement with the ministry was to implement the programme through local NGOs, in view of their stronger presence in communities, and to develop a system to build capacity of teachers, rather than to deliver direct teacher training. Soon after this agreement, Hanif Atmar was appointed as minister. Representatives from the MoE and several international organisations mentioned that Atmar did not agree with the BESST programme model for several reasons: 1) the MoE wanted more financial control of the programme, 2) the MoE wanted a shift of approach from systems development for teacher education to direct teacher training and 3) the ministry wanted fuller partnership in the program to counter the impression that it had been imposed on the ministry. Differences in ideas about the programme model were further aggravated by personal disagreements between the minister and head of the lead implementing partner,²⁶ which led to delayed implementation for one and half years. During this period the leadership

23 The Provincial Revenue Offices and branches of Ministry of Finance in the provinces

24 Building Education Support Systems for Teachers, Annual Report, 1 October 2008-30 September 2009.

25 The programme is implemented in 11 provinces: Balkh, Daikundi, Ghazni, Herat, Jawzjan, Kandahar, Khost, Nangarhar, Panjshir, Sar-i-Pul and Wardak.

26 International informants, pers. comm., 3 and 6 December 2009.

of Creative Associates International changed and the new manager was more amenable to incorporating the changes that the minister wanted. Agreement was finally reached with Minister Atmar on August 2007 and programme implementation started.

Prior to the NESP, some other donors were also contributing to teacher education in Afghanistan. The German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) started its Basic Education Programme for Afghanistan (BEPA) in May 2005 with a main focus on pre-service teacher education. The first phase of this programme ended in 2007 and the second phase, which started in 2008, is ongoing, while a third phase has been planned to start in 2011. Under the programme, GTZ advises the ministry on teacher education, transfers information from provinces where it operates to the ministry for policy decisions, promotes using female teachers to augment girls' education, and endeavours to frame all efforts according to the poverty reduction strategy.²⁷ GTZ's main focus is in the north, specifically Kunduz and Takhar Provinces, where the German army is stationed and civil society programmes are operated.

The UN organisations UNESCO and UNICEF have been extending technical and financial assistance to the Teacher Education Department. UNICEF, under its Quality Education interventions, supports both in-service and pre-service components of teacher education in terms of funding teacher education curriculum development, organising trainings, hiring consultants and capacity building.

JICA started its support to the Teacher Education Department in 2004 with a programme called Strengthening Teacher Education Programme (STEP), with the key activity of developing a Teacher's Guide in cooperation with the Curriculum Department of the ministry. Japanese professors provided guidance to the technical members of Curriculum Department to develop the guide. Under the first phase of project, which ended in 2007, the Teacher's Guide for grades 1-3 was developed and approved while under the second phase of the project a guide for grades 4-6 was developed and sent for printing in early December 2009. The programme also has capacity building components, under which teachers from teacher training colleges are sent to Japan for short-term training.

6.2 Development of the NESP's Teacher Education Programme

The donor interventions supporting the Teacher Education Department had already generated some inputs for the NESP's Teacher Education Programme. As part of formal NESP process, the Thematic Working Group on teacher education was led by the deputy director of the Teacher Education Department and its technical resource person was an advisor to the minister. The members were advisors and staff of the Teacher Education Department, donors and international organisations, including GTZ, the World Bank, UNICEF, the BESST programme, UNESCO, JICA, Care International and Save the Children (USA). The group's tasks were to define the programme vision, objectives, strategy for achieving objectives, key activities and some costing.

This group divided itself further into six sub groups, which were: 1) research, 2) education administration, 3) in-service, 4) pre-service, 5) distance education and 6) standards and curriculum. The advisors associated with donors and international organisations each lead subgroups related to the topic of their interventions. For example, GTZ took the lead for the pre-service subgroup, BESST took the lead for the in-service subgroup, and JICA and UNICEF contributed to standards and curriculum, and research subgroups. A

²⁷ The head of BEPA, pers. comm., 13 November 2009.

senior staffmember of the department recalled: “We had the challenge of a very short deadline to prepare the Teacher Education Programme for NESP while at the same time to have it in English first and also include the department staff so that their voices are heard. So we formed our group mixed of nationals and internationals and then divided ourselves into six categories.”

Civil servants were not very involved in the Thematic Working Group, for reasons generally having to do with the timetable. Group members felt pressure to deliver on their programme activities and had little time to spare for strategic planning. Also due to time constraints, drafts were written in English, which most civil servants did not understand and as a result they were less able to give input. However, a senior staffmember of the Teacher Education Department said civil servants were involved in some discussions for programme development. “Those who were English speakers, it was good. If they were not then we would translate the points of discussions and get their feedback. That is how the first draft of the document was formulated.” In addition to time constraints, the working group’s efficiency was also affected by management challenges that caused some irregular meetings and low participation of members. An international informant recalled her experience in the Thematic Working Group meetings, saying: “There were a couple of days when I showed up for meeting and I was the only one sitting in a room.”

Eventually, the subgroups developed the specific components of the Teacher Education Programme and their work was compiled into an overall programme draft at the Thematic Working Group level. The draft was later sent to the Technical Support Team, led by the ministry’s Planning Department, which had the responsibility of collecting drafts from all the working groups and compiling them into the NESP. The draft Teacher Education Programme included monitoring indicators, while drafts of the other Thematic Working Groups were missing this component, which meant that other groups were using a different format for strategic planning development. A senior staffmember of the Teacher Education Department explained how the format for their own work came about: “A senior advisor of the minister drew it on a board. ‘That this is how we are going to do it. We are going to have objectives, targets, detailed activities and implementing strategies.’ So we came up with a format. We don’t know how others developed their format.”

The Technical Support Team edited the working group’s draft and, to the disappointment of the working group, removed the monitoring indicators in order to create consistency in the subprogrammes’ format for the NESP. A member of the teacher education working group recalled: “We developed a very detailed strategy with targets, indicators and specific subcomponents of the Teacher Education Programme and submitted our draft before the deadline. When it came back to us, very little was reflected and something that was of great concern, we did not have monitoring indicators.” The edited version of the draft therefore was not completely satisfactory to the teacher education working group members as they considered monitoring an important part of the plan. However, given the tight deadline for completion of the strategic planning process, they accepted the draft. As recounted by a working group member: “We were not very pleased with the strategic plan but accepted it so that at least we have a strategic plan.” Time constraints also led to the budgeting of the programme being conducted mainly by the international members of the working group. According to a senior staffmember of the department: “Because the target was three days for the budgeting of the programme, we involved the internationals mainly and prepared the budget.”

7. Completion of the NESP and Implementation Challenges

The strategic planning that started in the MoE in early 2006 lasted 12 months, instead of three months, and was completed in February 2007. By this time other ministries had started developing their respective strategies as part of the ANDS and the NESP also fulfilled the ANDS requirements for the MoE. The Norwegian government funded the Strategic Planning and Capacity Development Project in the MoE for over three years (late 2006-early 2010).

The NESP process had some discernible outcomes and provided a learning opportunity for the MoE, especially for the Planning Department. The department has had an MOU with IIEP since 2007,²⁸ committing the IIEP to training a group of eight national technical assistants along with the civil servants of the department in different skills regarding planning. This group was financially supported through the MoE-IIEP project. The basic idea was to transfer skills from international advisors to national-level staff and to train them to become the ministry's trainers, who would then become civil servants at a later stage. The project and the strategic planning process provided an important opportunity for this group of technical assistants as they were intrinsically involved and tasked during the process. All through the planning process, IIEP also appointed a national coordinator of activities at the Planning Department.

Another outcome of the NESP process was that the document itself, to some extent, also provided a framework to guide operations and facilitate coordination between the ministry and donors. A senior staffmember of the Planning Department contended: "The eight programmes of the NESP had its impact on almost all activities in the ministry and even some donors tried to align their programmes with the strategic plan. The Government of Denmark had some funds and they decided not to be selective and asked from us to specify where they can spend the money." Relatedly, NESP set the stage for initiating a Sector Wide Approach (SWA),²⁹ for which a strategic plan is one condition. A senior advisor at the ministry said: "The donors mainly have had a project mode of development cooperation towards supporting the education sector. The MoE has had a strategic plan for the last few years, which aimed at facilitating SWA. These are the preliminary steps taken by the ministry, which will enable it to receive funds from donors in a flexible shape, not for specific projects but to implement the strategic plan."

The MoE also organised the Education Development Forum in February 2008, aiming for aid effectiveness in the education sector through better coordination and to persuade donors to channel aid money through the core budget. "Our core budget has been improving and now half of the funds are through core and half are through the external budget, but the external budget is a bit fragmented which is why it is difficult to get the exact figures," said a senior staffmember of the Planning Department, adding: "Earlier, the construction work was taking place mostly through the external budget through NGOs and private companies but now we are managing construction infrastructure projects from the core development budget."

28 Staff of the Planning Department, MoE, validation workshop, 4 March 2010.

29 An SWA is defined as: "All significant funding for the sector supports a single sector policy and expenditure program, under Government leadership, adopting common approaches across the sector, and progressing towards relying on Government procedures to disburse and account for all funds." Definition from Toumas Takala, "Making and Implementing Education Policy in the Context of External Support to Sector Development Programs: The Case of Mozambique with Comparisons," in *Nordic Voices: Teaching and Researching Comparative and International Education in the Nordic Countries*, eds. Holmarsdottir, H. and O'Dowd, M., 239-256 (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2009).

Despite these outcomes of the NESP process, successful implementation of the plan remained elusive for two main reasons: 1) the ambitious nature of the document and related shortage of necessary funds, and 2) the ministry's capacity to undertake programmes and spend its development budget. Most of the informants of this study believed that the NESP was developed as an overly ambitious plan. An informant involved in the process of the NESP's development recalled that a thorough situation analysis of the subsector, ministry's needs and existing structures did not take place due to the unavailability of required information. Although this can be seen as a weakness of the document, it is also an outcome of the commitment to letting the abundant needs in the sector drive the programmes. A number of informants recalled that, as minister, Hanif Atmar was confident—and perhaps overconfident—that he would be able to find funds for NESP programmes. The overall result was a needs-based plan that was not constrained by predetermined ideas about what could feasibly be funded or implemented.

The total financing requirement for the implementation of the NESP over five years was calculated to be \$2,345 million, out of which \$1,512 million was required through development budget channels and \$833 million was required for annual operating costs.³⁰ The ministry was totally dependent on donor assistance for the development projects. According to a senior advisor at the ministry, 91 percent of the funds that are transferred from the MoF to the MoE are for the salaries of 216,000 staff and only nine percent of the remaining funds are for services. This shows that the GoA did not have the capacity to fund the NESP and its implementation depended almost entirely on donor assistance. Donors did show interest in funding the NESP but only specific programmes³¹ and projects, primarily curriculum development, teacher education and general education. Other NESP programmes, according to a senior staffmember of the ministry, were totally underfunded, including Islamic education and technical and vocational education.

Similarly, some donors gave special preference to specific regions where their respective countries have a military presence in order to augment security priorities with development programmes. For example, besides contributing to the World Bank's multi-donor-funded programme EQUIP (Education Quality Improvement Project), the *Canadian International Development Agency* (CIDA) and DANIDA have infrastructure projects in Kandahar and Helmand, respectively, where they have military missions.³² In contrast, some parts of the country were comparatively neglected, as described by an informant from the MoE: "In Daikundi Province, people built 16 schools from their own resources but no one paid any attention to equip these schools."

In addition to the ambitiousness of the plan and the lack of funding, the NESP's implementation was affected by unsatisfactory operational capacity at the MoE, including in actually spending allocated funds. As described by an informant: "The poor performance of the ministry on spending the development budget somehow breached donors' confidence to channel their funds through the government budget, which affected the implementation of the strategic plan." During the fiscal year 1387-88 (2008-09), the total development funds of the ministry from the core budget were \$159 million, out of which the ministry spent only \$40 million,³³ with a big portion of this amount being advisors' salaries. Ministry representatives described using a complicated system of financing that appears to compromise disbursement of development funds. One example involving delays in the release of funds for an outsourced programme

30 Ministry of Education, "National Education Strategic Plan for Afghanistan (1385-1389)," 94.

31 Senior advisor to Ministry of Education, 5 January 2010.

32 Embassy staffmembers, 14 and 23 December 2009.

33 The information on budget figures was obtained from the Budget Department of MoF, 6 May 2009.

illustrates the issue. The MoE signed a contract with national NGOs in January 2009 to implement the the National In-service Teacher Training Programme (NITTP) in some parts of the country with World Bank funds. The NGOs established offices and recruited staff but they had not received funds even five months after signing the contract, and eventually closed their provincial offices. In the sixth month the minister called the concerned NGOs and renewed their contracts from June 2009. The minister also directed the Teacher Education Department to arrange money for the partners but still the funds were not released. Finally, the funds were received in September 2009 and the NGOs started their operations.

Ministry representatives also contend that the system for approving the government's budget is quite lengthy and does not allow sufficient time for project implementation. A senior advisor in the ministry explained that the budget approval for fiscal year 1387-1388 (March 2009-March 2010) came in the month of May 2009. Since the ministry did not know its allocation for the fiscal year before the approval of the budget it was prevented from initiating the process of contracting for projects until the budget was announced. The contracting process for projects takes three to four months, which leaves little time for implementation, particularly for construction projects in cold areas of Afghanistan. Additionally, requirements for donor approval during different stages of procurement further delay ability to actually spend development funds. For example, international bidding must use World Bank procedures, which take a very long time, as a senior ministry staffmember explained: "The Ministry of Education had 55 million dollars allocated under the teacher training programme during 2008 which was supposed to be contracted to international NGOs for implementation, and it took the whole year to sign the contract."

8. Motivations to Revise the NESP

At the end of 2008, the MoE initiated a revision of the NESP. Although motivations for revising the NESP were caused by different factors relating to the latest statistics on education, structural changes in the ministry, new education targets committed to at the Paris Conference of 2008, and perceived weaknesses in the NESP, the foremost reason was the ministry's intention to join the EFA FTI global partnership.

In 2007, just after the completion of the initial NESP, the MoE conducted its first education survey through its Education Management and Information System (EMIS), according to representatives of the Planning Department. Survey teams were sent to all corners of the country and collected up-to-date information regarding schools, teachers, students, enrolment levels, etc. The EMIS system provided up-to-date statistics for primary and secondary education that the MoE thought should inform the programmes and policies of the NESP. Other informants from the ministry related the motivation to revise the NESP to structural changes that occurred in the ministry during 2008, most notably the increase in number of deputy ministers from three to five, which was intended to improve management and administration. Revising the NESP was seen as a way to increase ownership among programme departments that were not feeling ownership due to disconnects between programmes and the ministry's structure.³⁴ Additionally, at the Paris Conference in June 2008 the international community and GoA made some new commitments that changed some targets in the ANDS for the education sector, mainly in terms of timeline. Some of the ANDS targets for 2010 were extended to 2013, although the NESP covered only up to 2010. These elements generated the need to update the ministry's strategic plan in line with the new targets. Additionally, after two years of NESP implementation (2007-8), weaknesses were identified and according to a senior advisor, the ministry wanted to fix these gaps. Foremost, however, as described in detail below, the ministry intended to seek membership in the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (EFA FTI) in order to increase available funds for primary education.

8.1 Education for All Fast Track Initiative

The EFA FTI is a global partnership to assist poor countries in meeting the primary and secondary education MDGs and ensuring that all children complete a full cycle of primary education by 2015.³⁵ The MDG target dates for Afghanistan have been extended to 2020 due to its specific context. The World Bank launched the partnership in 2002 in collaboration with other donors and hosts the FTI Secretariat. The World Bank has set collaboration with developing countries and country level donor partners as well as global level donors as a high priority for realising the promise of FTI. Under the FTI agreement, member countries commit to design and implement sound education plans, while donor partners commit to align and harmonise additional support around these plans. The funding is channeled through bilateral and multilateral channels and through the FTI Catalytic Fund, which supports countries with insufficient resources to implement their sector plans. To receive FTI endorsement a country must have a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and an education sector plan that is endorsed by in-country donors. These donors lead the endorsement process through a coordination forum, with one donor acting as the lead coordinating agency with responsibility for organising the assessment of the country's programmes, using FTI appraisal guidelines and an indicative framework. In Afghanistan, the coordination forum of in-country donors is called the Education Development Board.

34 Staff of Planning Department, MoE, 10 November and 12 December 2009.

35 For more details on the EFA FTI, see <http://www.educationfasttrack.org>.

8.2 The Education Development Board

Though the FTI requirements necessitate the establishment of a coordination forum for donors, several MoE staff also attributed the establishment of this forum to Minister Hanif Atmar. As a result of his experience of developing and implementing the NESP, he determined that a mechanism for coordinating policies and programmes as well as improving donor-ministry relations should exist. This idea was proposed to the donors and the minister asked CIDA to play a leading role in establishing a development board for education, initially known as the Education Development Board (EDB).³⁶ It took CIDA six to seven months to prepare the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Board and it eventually held its first meeting in December 2008. The ToR describes the objectives of the EDB as: 1) Support leadership and oversight of education programmes, 2) Provide a platform for policy dialogue between the ministry and donors, 3) Support establishment of effective policy frameworks, 4) Strengthen alignment and harmonisation of development activities in the education sector, and 5) Advocate for aid coordination.³⁷ The EDB has recently become the Human Resources Development Board (HRDB) and this paper covers the period before EDB became HRDB.

The EDB had a steering committee and five working groups, in addition to a secretariat located in the MoE. The steering committee, which consists of 18 members from the MoE, education sector donors and NGO implementing partners, meets every month to discuss current issues. The chair of the EDB was a senior staffmember of the MoE who is designated by the minister on an annual basis, while the co-chair is selected from donor agencies and is currently filled by CIDA. The selection of the co-chair is made through consultation between the minister and donors.

The purpose of the EDB working groups was to address issues that affect specific programmes and provide recommendations to the steering committee for action. The EDB working groups were established based on the five programmes of the revised strategic plan, which are 1) teacher education, 2) general education, 3) literacy, 4) education administration and 5) technical and vocational education. The members of the working groups are from the ministry, key donors and implementing partners for the specific programmes. The working groups were each led by a deputy minister or his alternate, the director of programmes. Only the leadership of the technical and vocational education working group was with United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), due to the fact that the group covers other ministries, such as the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled and the Ministry of Higher Education.

8.3 Formal application for the FTI partnership

Minister Atmar had just taken the preparatory measures to formally apply for FTI membership during 2009 and initiated the planned revision of the NESP when he received notice of his appointment as Minister of Interior. With Atmar's movement in October 2008 and the takeover of a new Education Minister, the process took some time to gain momentum. The new minister, Farooq Wardak, did not take the revision of the NESP and the promotion and strengthening of EDB as priorities until he realised the acute shortage of funds for development programmes in primary and secondary education. As an informant from a donor organisation recounted, the MoE at the time presented an extremely high projection for fiscal year 1388 (March 2009–March 2010) and the donors' commitment did not match the demand: "In a meeting with the country manager of the World Bank in early 2009, Minister Farooq Wardak explained the vision and programmes

36 International staffmember of CIDA, pers. comm., 23 December 2009.

37 ToR of the Afghanistan Education Development Board, 16 February 2009, p. 1.

of the ministry and complained about the unavailability of funds for the implementation of these programmes. The World Bank country manager informed the minister about the funds of the Fast Track Initiative as another means of funding.” Later, the World Bank also conducted a presentation on the FTI at the EDB meeting in February 2009.³⁸ Minister Wardak became intrigued with the idea of increased funding through FTI membership and ordered the ministry’s concerned staff to make the full preparation in this regard. Specific efforts started for promotion of the EDB and revision of the NESP also came under the spotlight. The MoE formally applied for FTI membership in May 2009.³⁹

38 International staff of a donor organisation, pers. comm., 23 December 2009.

39 Senior advisor at the MoE, pers. comm., 5 January 2010.

9. Process of Revising the NESP

For the revised NESP, the MoE decided to reduce the number of programmes from eight to five. Informants from the ministry mentioned that the changes were made to ensure effective management of and linkages among the programmes in light of the new five deputy ministers' offices. (As mentioned earlier in this report, as a result of the restructuring of the ministry's management, the number of deputy ministers was increased from three to five.) Thus, each of the five deputy ministers was assigned the responsibility of managing one of the five programmes. Ministry informants also pointed out that the demand for decreasing the number of programmes also came from the MoF, which reasoned that fewer programmes would reduce its management burden and increase effectiveness in terms of fund dispersal.

Meanwhile, the ministry's Planning Department was confident that it had gained much experience from the previous strategic planning process and its technical team, which was supported and trained by IIEP, was ready to take the initiative to lead the revision process. The department also successfully gained the confidence and support of the minister by convincing him that it had the capability to undertake and lead the revision process.⁴⁰ The director of the Planning Department said in an interview: "We had technical people in the ministry and decided to revise the NESP with the involvement of nationals in the Dari language first and then translate it into English and consult with IIEP only if we needed." The decision to write the revised NESP in Dari first and later translate the drafts into English for comments by donors and implementing partners was aimed at inculcating the maximum sense of ownership in terms of steering the process of strategic planning and deciding upon the national priorities for primary and secondary education as well as to ensure participation of the civil servants in the process of revision.⁴¹ Although the Planning Department was confident to lead the revision process, it was also aware of a dearth of capacity in certain areas, so it decided to consult with IIEP on technical issues, such as projections for the subsector, budgeting and costing, and checking education policies with international targets, but act itself as the steering force for the revision process.

The working structures for the revision of the NESP were quite different from those in place during initial NESP development. This time a formal steering committee was not established, and instead the process was led by the Planning Department, which would organise a leadership meeting when needed for directions, comments and approval. Instead of a steering committee, the five deputy ministers supervised the process of revision. Initially, it was decided that the programme departments would themselves revise their respective programmes and the Planning Department would take responsibility for coordinating the process. This decision came in view of programme departments' experience with developing their respective programmes during the first NESP process in 2006. The Thematic Working Groups constituted for the development of programmes in 2006 were transformed into the Programme Management Unit (PMU) after the strategic planning, which encompassed the management of the eight programmes of the first NESP. The PMU was basically responsible for the implementation of NESP programmes.

The Planning Department developed a log-frame template and asked the programmes to complete the template in a month. However, the programme departments appeared to have been preoccupied with their responsibilities for programme implementation and routine management and were not able to spare much time for strategic planning.

40 Former staffmember of the Planning Department, 7 January 2010.

41 Director of the Planning Department, 10 November 2009.

A Planning Department representative recounted: “In the beginning we did not receive much cooperation from the programme departments, which made us think that they were not taking direct responsibility for revision of programmes.” Faced with the departments’ slow response, the Planning Department took the responsibility for the actual programme revisions by filling in the log-frame template, in addition to its primary role of coordinating the process.

A technical team of three members, two from the Planning Department and another senior ministry advisor, was assigned to meet with the authorities in the programmes and obtain the required information according to the log-frame template. This team developed drafts based on the template information and sent drafts to the programme departments and associated deputy ministers for comments and feedback. The drafts went back and forth until a consensus was reached between programme departments and the technical team. The programme authorities approved the finalised drafts with their signatures. The drafts were primarily developed in Dari and then translated into English to obtain comments from international partners. The drafts were later grammatically and technically edited by the IIEP to bring coherence.

Despite previous experience with the NESP, technical capacity⁴² in the MoE to develop the simulation model and budgeting and costing of the programmes was insufficient. In the first NESP, these technical tasks were undertaken by the Technical Support Team, which consisted of IIEP consultants for the simulation model while the costing and budgeting was carried out with the assistance of DANIDA advisors and the support of ministry staff and advisors. For the revision, IIEP again developed the simulation model for the subsector and reviewed programmes against national and international targets, and DANIDA advisors in the Finance Department helped with costing and budgeting of the programmes. A key difference, however, in developing the simulation model for the revised NESP was that the Planning Department provided education statistics from its EMIS system and the department’s staff took an active role in shaping the development of the model by providing essential information on its structure, specifics and unit costs.⁴³

42 Staffmember of the Planning Department and an IIEP international staffmember, 10 November and 23 December 2009, respectively.

43 International staffmember of a UN agency, pers. comm., 23 December 2009.

10. Consultations for the Revision of the NESP

Consultations were conducted on various levels at the ministry and with donors and implementing partners for the revision of the NESP. The major difference from the first strategic planning process was the development of drafts in Dari, which most informants from the ministry believed provided better opportunities for civil servants to read, understand and comment on.⁴⁴

As part of the consultations with staff of the ministry, the Planning Department organised three workshops at the departmental level during different stages of the revision of the strategic plan. The final workshop was attended by all the deputy ministers, programme directors and other ministry staff, and programme staff presented their drafts, received comments and defended them against criticism. Two workshops were also organised to consult with provincial education directors. In the first workshop on 31 May 2009, their comments and inputs were received on the priorities of the programmes and how these could best be implemented in the provinces, while in the second workshop draft plans were shared.

The EDB provided a mechanism for consultations with donors and implementing partners on the drafts of the revised NESP. At least five different drafts were shared with the EDB's steering committee and their comments were received. Some consultations also took place at the EDB's working group level and the chairmen of the working groups, who were the directors of programme departments, shared the programmes with the groups during their meetings and received comments through email. Informants from the ministry asserted that the ministry also received conflicting comments from donors and it maintained authority to integrate or reject any comment. A senior advisor at the ministry elaborated: "We would argue and give reasons in the EDB meetings to the donors if they had conflicting comments on an issue and convince them that for certain reasons some comments are not accepted."

44 MoE staff, interviews during November and December 2009.

11. The TEP as a Specific Case

This study used the process of revising the strategic plan for the Teacher Education Programme as a specific case in the overall revision of the NESP. The aim was to gain a thorough understanding of the programme revision process so that a comparison of processes in the development of both of the NESPs could be made.

11.1 Process of revision of the Teacher Education Programme

Time constraints were a critical issue in the NESP's revision, which was initially planned to be undertaken by the programme departments. However, due to high demands from programme implementation and management activities, some delays took place in the strategic planning work and because of this the Planning Department took over the role of leading programme revision, with cooperation from the programme departments.

This general pattern was the case with the Teacher Education Department, which is one of the busiest departments of the MoE and is generally over-burdened with development activities. A senior advisor in the department described the situation: "In our department more development activities take place and the staff are busy in the units. Our department is sometimes like an emergency section of the hospital where a patient comes and everybody runs."

In the Teacher Education Department, the revision of the programme started with the delegation of responsibility to some senior individuals to interact with the technical team of the Planning Department and help them in filling in the log-frame template. This log-frame template was developed by the Planning Department and remained the main process of programme revision. There were, however, some concerns over the quality of the log-frame template. A senior ministry staffmember, describing the log-frame template, said: "They took the old strategic plan and budget format for which they had some indicators and made the format. There was clear direction that no one can make any changes because the format was agreed with the MoF." The same informant also complained about the hasty nature of the work and unorganised process, recalling that: "The whole revision process was already planned by the Planning Department and we were invited to a *majlis-i-rehbari* (leadership meeting), an afternoon session where policy and its development process were explained through a power-point presentation. Later we were provided a log-frame template and three days to fill them in, while three other meetings were simultaneously being held for preparation and budgeting."

Generally, in contrast to the process of the first NESP, in which the teacher education Thematic Working Group formed six further subgroups to work on different components of programme, during the revision the technical team of the Planning Department interacted with an advisor, deputy director and some other staff of the department to obtain statistical data and obtain comments and feedback on different drafts of the plan. The technical team of the Planning Department worked out the final draft of the Teacher Education Programme for the revised NESP in collaboration with the delegated individuals in the Teacher Education Department and obtained their approval on the final draft of the programme. In the meantime, although the EDB working group on teacher education met on a monthly basis and the director of Teacher Education Department chaired the meeting, its agenda was usually dominated by issues related to programme implementation and problem-solving.⁴⁵ The revision of the teacher education as part

45 Senior staffmember of the Teacher Education Department, 10 December 2009.

of strategic planning did not dominate discussions and the group appeared not to have focused on policy issues in its discussions or on giving suggestions to the EDB steering committee.⁴⁶

In an ensuing workshop, which was organised under a special directive of the minister to share the final drafts of the programmes with the ministry staff in the presence of all deputy ministers and directors of programmes, all the programme departments presented their revised programmes. During the presentation of the revised Teacher Education Plan some differences emerged among the management of the Teacher Education Department on certain points of the programme.⁴⁷ An informant recalled: “The management of the Teacher Education Department disagreed on certain points during the presentation of the draft Teacher Education Programme. A senior member of the department believed some views were not integrated in the draft programme.” This incident depicts the apparent lack of communication within the department and between the departments and possible implications of the absence of working group teams in the revision of the strategic plan.

In addition to finding the timing of the process challenging, the Teacher Education Department representatives were not entirely satisfied with the accuracy of data compiled by the Planning Department. The Teacher Education Department claimed that the situation analysis for the Teacher Education Programme was sent to the Planning Department several times. However, when the file came back, it did not reflect their input.⁴⁸ The department’s discontent with quality of its programme in the revised strategic plan has diluted its sense of ownership of the plan. As far as progress on teacher education is concerned, it will likely be achieved through implementation of ongoing programmes like BESST, NITTP⁴⁹ and other activities, but may not be aligned with the revised NESP.

46 This information is based on interviews conducted with the members of EDB’s working group and staff of a donor organisation, 18 November and 23 December 2009.

47 Based on interviews with MoE staff, 29 December 2009 and 7 January 2010.

48 Senior management staff of the Teacher Education Department, pers. comm., 10 December 2009.

49 BESST is funded by USAID and is implemented in 11 provinces, while the World Bank-funded NITTP is being implemented by NGOs in the remaining 23 provinces.

12. Finalisation of the Revised NESP

By January 2010, five different drafts of the revised NESP had been shared with the HRDB and the ministry had endeavoured to address the donors' comments. However, at the time of writing this paper, the approval of the plan by the HRDB was still awaiting. Apparently, the ministry needs to wait until the FTI assessment of the education sector is complete and a further revision of the NESP takes place so the recommendations of the assessment can be integrated into the document, which will then make Afghanistan eligible for possible support from FTI funds. The assessment is a critical condition for acquiring FTI membership. DANIDA, CIDA and USAID⁵⁰ pooled funds to hire a consultancy to undertake the assessment based on FTI guidelines and requirements. The FTI assessment was supposed to start in September 2009 and then in December 2009 but the donors ran into problems contracting the assignment with a firm that has FTI experience in other countries. Finally, a team of international consultants came at the end of February 2010 and was conducting the assessment at the time of writing this report. FTI membership requires that in-country donors, which is the HRDB, endorse an education strategic plan. It is possible that donors are unwilling to endorse the revised NESP before the FTI assessment takes place, despite the ministry's optimism that donors were part of the process of revision and their comments have been addressed. Some donors are concerned about the quality of the revised NESP. An informant from a donor organisation said: "The revised NESP is highly ambitious and the ministry's implementation capacity is poor. The revised NESP misses links between its strategy and the strategic plans of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled." Some donors are hoping that the FTI assessment will address these concerns to a large extent. Additionally, the mechanism of endorsement has not yet been decided but would be most likely be in the form of a letter by the donors endorsing transparency in the process of developing the NESP and the integration of their comments.⁵¹

A general understanding prevails that FTI membership will give Afghanistan's strategic plan global recognition and credibility for its commitment to EFA goals, and will, as a consequence, allow the government to gain more resources for its education programmes. From the interviews with senior ministry representatives, it appears that the ministry considers FTI partnership to be a solution to the issue of lack of funding for implementation of the strategic plan. However, a member of the FTI assessment team explained FTI membership a bit differently. He elaborated: "FTI is a club of so far 36 developing countries, which has a catalytic fund but it is mainly about the discourse on EFA goals in the club. The revised NESP is costing 8 billion US dollars for over four years, which is two billion dollars per year, while the biggest single grant from the FTI funds today is to Kenya which is over 150 million US dollars for three years."

50 DANIDA and CIDA international staff, pers. comm., 14 and 23 December 2009.

51 Ministry representative, pers. comm., 12 January 2010.

13. Understanding Capacity and the Dilemma of Technical Assistance

This study, besides focusing on the process of policymaking in primary and secondary education, has also endeavoured to understand capacity and capacity building from the point of view of respondents from the MoE, donors and implementing partners. Although respondents gave different definitions of capacity, several common themes were evident related to the efficiency of system and structure and the ability of the workforce to achieve the mandate of an institution. A senior advisor said: “To perform different works effectively and economically, an institution needs human resources and systems, which definitely inherit certain components that are the structure of an organisation, division of responsibilities, rules and procedures. Thus, people who are working and the system in an organisation are important.” Similarly, another respondent from a donor organisation, expressing his views about capacity, said: “To define capacity you need to relate it to the mandate of a particular organisational unit. You need to have a structure which is well defined with clear mandates and clarify this against programmes as well as structure and people with identified job description; then you can measure capacity by reference to what outputs they are supposed to develop.” Another donor respondent said: “Capacity can be defined as the capability of planning, steering, controlling and evaluating the programme implementation.” A former ministry staffmember said: “Capacity means that the ministry has the ability to reach their targets.”

Given these definitions, the issue of capacity needs to be examined on both organisational and human resource terms. Most informants focused on building the right systems and improving the skills of staff, emphasising the need to diagnose and identify the difficulties and needs of staff in performing their duties as an approach to build their capacity. As one international informant contended: “Capacity building is not something you do to someone. It is a mutual process. It should be to find out where staff are in terms of their performance and what they need, what works for them and what does not work.” An international NGO staffmember expressed a similar view, saying: “One needs to find out what the needs of a person are and then you can build the capacity through different ways, the best of which is on-the-job training.” A senior ministry staffmember expressed different ideas about capacity building, emphasising the need for mentoring and skills transfer: “Capacity building takes a long time and the ministry needs to invest in the people. To build the capacity of civil servants, they should be paired up with international experts so that they work together for the long term and the transfer of skills takes place.”

The MoE dealt with the issue of capacity a bit differently. The ministry has been faced with huge demand for education from Afghan society during the past nine years. According to the respondents from the Planning Department, the demand emerged out of increased awareness among Afghan communities of the importance of education after the Taliban regime and the international community’s agenda to educate a new generations of Afghans. To respond to these needs, the ministry needed to adopt new knowledge, systems, policies and programmes, for which international organisations provided support through their technical and financial assistance. The modernisation of the ministry’s systems also needed a capable workforce to run them. Unfortunately, the workforce of the ministry was not able to fulfil the requirements due largely to two challenges: 1) the language of modernisation, which has been English; and 2) the technology of modernisation, which involves basic computer skills. Lack of expertise in these areas appeared to create a gap in capacity between the system and much of the

workforce in the MoE.⁵² Beginning in 2006, the ministry's management sought to fill this gap through technical assistance and appointed hundreds of national experts who are paid from development funds by different donors. A senior advisor at the ministry said: "This infusion of experts with English language, computer and other skills was a way to increase programme outputs while also building the capacity of civil servants through their paired working."

National advisors took over most essential activities and began making many key decisions. The generosity of donors in funding the programmes and technical assistance resulted in considerable achievements by the MoE. By 2009, school enrolment increased from 0.9 million in 2003 to seven million children. Similarly, the number of teachers grew from 20,700 to 170,000 over the same period, including over 28 percent being female, while 7,600 new schools were established and 4,500 school buildings constructed with community involvement. Teacher Training Centres have increased from four to 42 overall, with at least one centre located in each province. A total of 73 District Teacher Training Resource Centres were established to train new and existing teachers. Some other achievements include increasing the number of Technical Vocational Education and Training schools to 60 with 20,000 students, 250,000 adults attending a nine-month literacy course every year since 2003, and establishment of 8,500 school *shuras* (councils) for promoting ownership of education systems by communities.⁵³

In the meantime, the negative impacts of relying on national experts paid from development funds surfaced in the shape of a parallel system within the ministry. Many informants of this study believed that civil servants felt sidelined in decision-making and the managing of vital programme activities, and remained confined largely to the role of signatory authority, which created a sense of marginalisation and demoralisation. It was not only the denial of official responsibilities that troubled civil servants but also the disparities between the salaries of advisors, which are in dollars, and those of civil servants, which are in Afghanis. These salary level differences created an environment of jealousy and non-cooperation in the ministry's working environment. As one civil servant put it: "Advisors get salaries in dollars so they should do the work." In addition, some informants viewed reliance on national experts as setting a trend of individualism, with control aggregated in the hands of a few individuals rather than encouraging the development of strong teams and systems through which roles and responsibilities could be delegated.

Donors have started becoming impatient with the continuation of relying on national experts for education sectors progress. Firstly, placing national experts in the ministry is highly expensive, costing millions of dollars annually to the donors. An exact figure for the total of technical assistance for the MoE is not available due to the fragmentation of sources and absence of coordination. An international informant described the wage bill for technical advisors as approximately \$30 million, whereas the wage bill for the 216,000 civil servants is \$20 million. Secondly, there has been no end date set for this form of technical assistance and no exit strategy. And although the donors' impatience is increasing over the issue, the ministry is demanding more technical assistance through national experts for a longer time. The MoE believes that the technical assistance it receives is not sufficient for the amount of services it provides. As a senior advisor argued: "The services provided by Ministry of Education shapes 67 percent of the government's

52 The information in this paragraph came out of various discussions with the ministry staff, particularly the staff of Planning Department.

53 Figures from Ministry of Education, "A Glimmer of Hope in Afghanistan: The Journey of Education" [Date not available].

overall services in Afghanistan while the rest of the ministries are delivering the remaining 33 percent. Thus an assessment of technical assistance in the face of the amount of its services will justify the need for more technical assistance.” Thirdly, placing national experts in the ministry lacked a strategy under which the transfer of knowledge and skills flowed from advisors to civil servants. There is a general fear that civil servants are not yet ready to run the affairs of the ministry and if technical assistance through national advisors discontinues due to donors reducing funds, the systems in the primary and secondary subsector will collapse. Another important factor that is driving donors’ annoyance is lack of transparency in the appointments of the advisors due to political affiliations and nepotism.⁵⁴ There has not been a check on the performance of the advisors and some of them showed extremely poor performance during their service period. A national informant referring to an evaluation conducted by the ministry on the performance of advisors mentioned that one advisor in the Curriculum Department wrote a 20-page document during his one year of service, which cost \$6,000 per page.

On both the ministry’s and donors’ sides, reliance on national experts appears to relate to a desire to achieve results quickly, even if this is at the expense of creating an institutional system that can sustain those results. An informant from an international organisation considered that relying on technical assistance through national advisors represented a spontaneous style of decision-making by the ministry’s management that downplayed issues of sustainability and long-term practicality in favour of quick solutions. The situation similarly indicates that donors have prioritised achieving program results over building institutional capacity as well as an apparent neglect of evaluating the impact of decisions before providing funds.

The frustration with the continuation of technical assistance through funding advisors’ salaries became more prominent with the submission of a concept paper by DANIDA to the HRDB in the last quarter of 2009. It argues that the current technical assistance regime should be reviewed and possibly replaced with something different. It further suggests mapping the national advisors to determine where people are and how much they are earning in order to rationalise salaries against established criteria⁵⁵ with the aim of reforming the current ad hoc system. The paper argues for devising a single mechanism for funding technical assistance through pooling resources within the framework of a capacity-building strategy with a specific timeframe.

The donors have decided to resolve the issue through the Aid Coordination Department of the MoF. The MoF is supposed to lead the Civilian Technical Assistance Plan and donors will contribute money so that the government allocates technical assistance as needed in the ministries.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the MoE has circulated DANIDA’s concept note internally and decided to conduct an assessment on the issue of technical assistance within the framework of the HRDB. The ministry will conduct this assessment to come up with justifications for continuing technical assistance by funding national advisors from development funds.

Interviews with ministry staff indicated that the leadership of the MoE has also begun to question the expense and sustainability of advisors. The management of Minister Farooq Wardak had established a Technical Assistance Commission (TAC) by the end of 2008, which is headed by one of the deputy ministers and charged with evaluating the

54 This was observed in several interviews with staff of different donor organisations, December 2009 and January 2010.

55 International staffmember, DANIDA, pers. comm., 14 December 2009.

56 International staffmember, CIDA, pers. comm., 23 December 2009.

performance of technical advisors. This commission carried out evaluations, particularly in the Curriculum Department where the majority of technical advisors were placed, and its report showed that the performance of some advisors was extremely poor.⁵⁷ The ministry's leadership tried to reduce the number of technical advisors by ending the contract with a few of those poorly performing technical advisors. An informant from the World Bank said that the MoE reduced the number of technical advisors from 700 to 500 in the Curriculum Department during 2009 and has taken some necessary steps to further reduce the number to 350 during 2010.

Another issue concerning technical advisors is that many are not under ministerial authority and instead report to their respective donors, which creates parallel administration in the ministry. An informant from an international organisation said that the ministry's management was not using technical advisors provided by some donors. "The ministerial body would not even sit in the interview panel for recruitment of technical advisors." She suggested that the appointment of technical advisors should be done through the Civil Service Commission so that they have the same level of training, appraisal and evaluation as other ministry staff, while all major agencies should sign up to the declaration in that spirit.

57 Staffmember of the MoE, pers. comm., 9 December 2009.

14. Discussions and Analysis

The following analysis, which summarises findings presented in this paper, compares differences in the policymaking processes for the original NESP and its revised version. It highlights some areas for discussion and further study.

Box 3: Comparison of the original NESP and the revised NESP processes

	Original NESP	Revised NESP	Analysis
Key motivation for strategic planning	The idea of developing a strategic plan for the primary and secondary education subsector originated primarily from the MoE's commitment to achieve the EFA FTI targets in Afghanistan. At the same time the ministry wanted to switch its approach from programming based on the budget received from the MoF to programming based on needs in the subsector. It thus forged an agreement with the IIEP to obtain their technical assistance for the development of a strategic plan.	The revision of the NESP was primarily driven by the ministry's intention to join the global FTI partnership, for which a country seeking membership should develop a sound Education Sector Strategic Plan that has been approved by in-country donors. In addition, there were other factors that motivated the revision. The ministry: 1) wanted to update its strategic plan with the latest statistics on education it collated through the EMIS, 2) wanted the strategy to match its new structure after structural changes were made, 3) wanted to align its strategic plan with the changes in the education targets of the ANDS and renewed commitments of donors after the Paris Conference in 2008, and 4) learned some lessons during the implementation of first NESP and identified some gaps that needed to be addressed through revision.	The development of both NESPs was primarily for external factors such as the government's commitment to achieve the EFA targets and acquiring membership of the FTI partnership for increased funding. However, the internal factors of switching from programming based on budget to programming based on needs, structural changes and fixing gaps added to the importance of such decisions and provided a window of opportunity for better programming and planning for the subsector.
Working arrangements	A formal working structure was put in place that included a supervisory and decision-making body, coordination team and Thematic working groups. The working structure reflected IIEP's evolving model, based on experience acquired by IIEP with its partner countries while developing their respective education sector strategic plans.	The working arrangements remained informal and unstructured. The Planning Department and its technical team provided the main working structure for revision of the strategic plan. Unlike the steering committee, the five deputy ministers supervised the process of revision and their meetings were organised by the Planning Department for directives and policy guidance.	The working structures and arrangements for the original NESP appeared effective in facilitating the systematic flow of work despite time constraints that did not allow full pursuance of the designed model. The working arrangements for revision of NESP were less systematic and the work flowed mainly in the Planning Department.

	Original NESP	Revised NESP	Analysis
Key actors and process	<p>The IIEP assisted the MoE in designing and leading the process of strategic planning.</p> <p>Many international and national advisors were involved at all levels of developing the strategic plan while the participation of civil servants employed directly by the ministry remained limited.</p> <p>The IIEP developed the simulation model and compiled and edited the draft of the strategic plan while DANIDA advisors helped the Thematic Working Groups in costing and budgeting programmes.</p>	<p>The Planning Department designed and led the revision process with some consultations from IIEP.</p> <p>National advisors played central roles at the programme-development level with the participation of civil servants in the revision process.</p> <p>Again IIEP developed the simulation model but the Planning Department provided essential information on the structure of the model, specifics, unit costs, etc. DANIDA advisors in the Finance Department of the ministry again helped with costing and budgeting programmes.</p>	<p>The original NESP process was designed and implemented with the assistance of international and national advisors while in the revision process, the Planning Department of the ministry demonstrated an increased ownership in designing and leading the process. International advisors had a presence at all levels of work in the original NESP, while in the revision process, the majority of work, particularly programme development, moved to national advisors and civil servants. Thus a transition of centrality of work shifted from international advisors to nationals.</p>
Consultations	<p>Consultations were planned to take place through the Education Consultative Group as part of the ANDS process but these groups could not be formed until about the time when the NESP was released. Actual consultations took place instead in the form of sharing drafts with donors and other stakeholders through email.</p> <p>Decentralised consultations could not be implemented as planned due to time constraints and the formulated plan was shared with local-level administrators rather than created in consultation with them.</p>	<p>The EDB, which was established as a coordination forum of donors to fulfill FTI conditions, provided a mechanism for consultations on different drafts of the NESP. Additionally, the drafts were sent for comments from all stakeholders through email.</p> <p>Since the drafts were first developed in the Dari language, it provided a better opportunity for civil servants to participate in the process of strategic planning and give feedback. In addition, three department-level workshops were organised by the Planning Department to obtain staff feedback while two consultative workshops were organised for consultation with the local-level administrators of the MoE.</p>	<p>The original NESP was less consultative given the pressure of deadlines to finish the strategic planning work. The revision process involved sufficient time and consultations at various levels. The EDB provided a mechanism for consultation and coordination among stakeholders during the strategic planning process. Similarly, the initiative of drafting the revised NESP in Dari provided the civil servants better opportunities for participating in the process and giving feedback on various drafts.</p>

	Original NESP	Revised NESP	Analysis
Programme development (Teacher Education Programme)	<p>The Teacher Education Programme was developed through an organised process by the Thematic Working Group that was composed of international and national advisors and civil servants of the ministry. The group divided itself into six subgroups and each subgroup worked on one of the components of programme.</p> <p>The international and national advisors wrote the draft of the programme, which was later edited and compiled by the Technical Support Team to bring alignment with other programmes in the strategic plan.</p>	<p>The strategic plan revision was carried out by a technical team in the Planning Department that filled out a log-frame template in cooperation with the designated staff of the Teacher Education Department.</p> <p>Busy schedules and program implementation concerns preoccupied the Teacher Education Department. The process did not allow sufficient time for its management to participate fully in the revision process and this affected the alignment of the plan with the department's work.</p> <p>The EDB working group met regularly but focused on programme management and implementation issues and was less involved in strategic plan revision.</p>	<p>The process of programme development for the original NESP was quite systematic and better designed, and went through an inclusive process that involved donors and ministry advisors and civil servants to some extent. For the revised NESP, the programme revision was done mainly by filling in the log-frame template. The busyness of the Teacher Education Department caused less coordination and dialogue which resulted in poor quality of programmes.</p>

14.1 Decisions about policies and setting priorities

The MoE, through its Planning Department, demonstrated a certain level of ownership in the process of revising the NESP, but the FTI membership conditions of an external assessment of the subsector, the revised NESP and its approval by the donors' coordination forum (EDB) appears to have complicated the ministry's determination of its contents. The EDB, besides its provision for coordination of programmes and activities in the subsector and mechanisms for consultation, also strengthened the position of donors to jointly influence the revised NESP in favour of EFA targets by withholding the approval of strategic plan until the FTI assessment is finalised. The EFA targets are apparently the strongest example of external influence on national policymaking in the sector, obliging the MoE to build its education policies and sector plans around EFA targets and their implications.

This will presumably leave the MoE with less freedom to exercise beyond the policy framework agreed upon with the donors and give the donors more leverage on external funding. This is paradoxical to the emphasis placed in donors' discourses in the Paris Declaration of 2005, the Paris Conference of 2008 and the London Conference of January 2010 for increased ownership of the Afghan government on policies and funds control.

There are two key factors that contributed to the ambitiousness of the NESP. Firstly, policy choices were more political than technical as some donor agencies had the agenda to meet EFA targets through Afghanistan's education sector strategic plan. As a result, the ministry's dependence on external funds for implementation of the strategic plan sets the ground for compromise on some technical aspects of policies that relate to the feasibility and implementation of the plan. Secondly, the implementation of the plan

also becomes difficult due to the ministry's efforts to show greater needs and letting the needs drive the programmes for the plan, which sets the trend in the document for what "should be" rather than what "can be" done. Both selecting upon political choices and letting needs drive policies and programmes contributes to the ambitiousness of strategic planning, which then represents an ideal scenario rather than a more feasible and likely scenario. The ministry required \$2,345 million for the development budget and operating costs for five years (2006-2010)⁵⁸ but remained underfunded, and the draft revised NESP is costed at approximately \$8 billion,⁵⁹ for which there is apparently no additional commitment by the donors except for FTI's catalytic fund as a potential additional source.

There is a different understanding of FTI partnership by the ministry's leadership who are perhaps attaching much too expectation in terms of funding. The ministry appears to consider FTI to be a source of funding that would fill the financial gap between the strategic plan and its implementation. In fact, FTI partnership is primarily about demonstrating commitments by the government of a country to achieve the targets of FTI EFA and, secondarily, supporting the country from its catalytic fund for this purpose. What the FTI catalytic fund can offer in case its conditions are fulfilled by the GoA may not be enough for the implementation of even one of the programmes of the draft revised NESP. So far the biggest single expenditure of FTI funds has been in Kenya, which was over \$150 million for three years,⁶⁰ while the financial demand presented in the revised NESP is gigantic.

In the absence of additional funding commitments for implementation of the revised NESP and without any noticeable improvement in its implementation capacity, the ministry is apparently giving less attention to "how to accomplish the what."

There is a wide gap between policy aspiration and implementation practices. The performance of the ministry in spending maximum development funds has not been satisfactory, which is generally affected by complications in financing and government bureaucracy. The government financing system does not allow sufficient time for project implementation during the fiscal year and most of the time is wasted in the approval of the budget and the bureaucratic process of fulfilling the contracting requirements of project. Less spending of the core development budget by the ministry has been a big reason for donors to reduce their confidence to channel maximum development funds through government channels, preventing the ministry getting more control on external development funds. Despite some structural changes in the ministry with the aim of better linking programmes with departments for their better management, there has not been any significant improvement in the finance system and bureaucracy of the ministry that would improve its capacity for spending more development funds from the core budget. The processes and procedures are still complicated.

14.2 Capacity and its technical assistance needs

Capacity development is a long term process, particularly in the context of Afghanistan. The MoE has come a long way to improve its capacity both at the organisational and human resource levels but yet it has to achieve substantially more. A transition is taking place that is driving the management of programmes, policymaking and planning processes from the international advisors to the national advisors and key ministry staff.

58 "National Education Strategic Plan," 94.

59 Member of FTI assessment team, validation workshop, 4 March 2010.

60 Member of the FTI assessment team, validation workshop, 4 March 2010.

The Planning Department has demonstrated ownership over the process of strategic planning by designing and implementing the revision of the plan. However, in general, the ministry's capacity for both policymaking and implementation of programmes has depended on the skills of national advisors, which has raised critical questions concerning the sustainability of the ministry's structure and system. The increased leverage technical advisors exerted on programmes and decisions marginalised the civil servants by confining their actual roles in programmes, which was exacerbated by substantial differences in salaries and incentives.

English language and computer skills have been the biggest differences in capacity between the civil servants and national technical advisors. The ability to speak English also gave better access and opportunities to participate in policy dialogues with the international partners of the ministry as well as access the up-to-date information on the education system.

Although the technical assistance in terms of funding the national technical advisors has helped in achieving programme objectives it has not helped much in systems development. Progress made on programmes overwhelmingly relied on the performance of individual advisors rather than teams and the system. Centralised decision-making and management at the programme level is effectively enforced and little power sharing and delegation of authority has taken place at the middle level of management.

As a whole, capacity building through induction of technical advisors in the education system lacked a strategy under which the technical advisors would transfer their skills to civil servants. In addition, the trainings that were provided were short term without a proper system for the civil servants to be able to apply the learnt skills to their jobs. Apparently, the system and trainings provided did not have much connection in practice.

There are significantly different perceptions between the ministry and some donors on the current pattern of technical assistance in terms of funding national advisors for the long term without any exit strategy. The current situation with technical assistance is dilemmatic as the ministry considers the continuation of national advisors' services to be a pivotal need for the primary and secondary education subsector to grow while donors are seeking a replacement of the current pattern of technical support with something more sustainable and less expensive.

15. Conclusion

In the primary and secondary education subsector in Afghanistan, the strategic planning was not only politically driven but also replete with the trend of showing greater needs to secure greater financial support. The draft revised NESP, which costs over \$8 billion, and the ministry's unsatisfactory performance spending its development funds clearly shows a wide gap in policy aspirations and implementation practices. The aspect of feasibility and practicality is seemingly ignored in the document.

Despite continuing capacity needs, there are also some noticeable improvements in terms of technical dependency given the role of national technical advisors in the MoE; however, its continuation relies on the flow of development aid and the sustainability of this approach is becoming a contentious issue.

The process of revising the NESP has not ended yet. Its existing draft will likely go through another round of revisions after the FTI team finishes the assessment and presents their recommendations. Some donor organisations hope that the assessment will identify the weaknesses of the strategic plan and help in fixing the gaps. In contrast, the MoE believes⁶¹ that the FTI assessment may not suggest big changes since it has already addressed most of comments of the donors in the document.

We must wait to see what the findings of the FTI assessment are and what changes they suggest. How might the suggested changes bring better politically informed technical choices for making the document more realistic and practical in terms of objectives and implementation? How will the MoE react to the changes and how will it compromise on its needs-driven strategic plan against the suggested changes for increased funding? All eyes are on the FTI assessment team, which is undertaking very difficult work. The team has to manage the expectations of the ministry and donors and also give the country a good strategic plan for education—one that will not only fulfil the criteria for increased funding from donors and through FTI partnership, but is also informed by contextual realities and is practical in terms of implementation.

61 Senior advisor, MoE, pers. comm., 5 January 2010.

Recent Publications from AREU

- June 2010 The Wolesi Jirga in 2010: Pre-election Politics and the Appearance of Opposition, by M. Hassan Wafaey with Anna Larson
- June 2010 #Corrupting the State or State-Crafted Corruption? Exploring the Nexus between Corruption and Subnational Governance, by Manija Gardizi, Karen Hussman and Yama Torabi
- May 2010 Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Sar-i-Pul, by Tom Shaw
- May 2010 Connecting with Kabul: The Importance of the Wolesi Jirga Election and Local Political Networks in Afghanistan, by Noah Coburn
- May 2010 #Where Have all the Flowers Gone? Assessing the Sustainability of Current Reductions in Opium Production in Afghanistan, by David Mansfield
- May 2010 #Speaking from the Evidence: Governance, Justice and Development (Policy Notes Prepared for the Kabul Conference)
- May 2010 #Afghanistan Research Newsletter 25
- April 2010 #Declining Opium Poppy Cultivation: Reasons and Effects, by Jay Lamey
- April 2010 #Reflections on the Paris Declaration and Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan (Policy Note Edition), by Rebecca Roberts
- April 2010 #The State of Transitional Justice in Afghanistan (Policy Note Edition), by Emily Winterbotham
- April 2010 #Improving Efforts to Achieve Equitable Growth and Reduce Poverty, by Paula Kantor
- April 2010 Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Kandahar, by Adam Pain
- April 2010 #The State of Transitional Justice in Afghanistan: Actors, Approaches and Challenges, by Emily Winterbotham
- March 2010 #Democratisation and Elections, by Anna Larson
- March 2010 Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Badakhshan, by Adam Pain
- March 2010 #The 2010 A-Z Guide to Afghanistan Assistance (Eighth Edition)
- Feb 2010 #Between Patronage and Rebellion: Student Politics in Afghanistan, by Antonio Giustozzi

Indicates that the publication or a summary is or will be available in Dari and Pashto.

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research institute based in Kabul. AREU's mission is to inform and influence policy and practice through conducting high-quality, policy-relevant research and actively disseminating the results, and to promote a culture of research and learning. To achieve its mission AREU engages with policymakers, civil society, researchers and students to promote their use of AREU's research and its library, to strengthen their research capacity, and to create opportunities for analysis, reflection and debate.

All AREU publications are available for download at www.areu.org.af and in hardcopy from the AREU office:

Flower Street (corner of Street 2), Shahr-i-Naw, Kabul

phone: +93 (0)799 608 548 website: www.areu.org.af email: publications@areu.org.af