Ex post evaluation – Afghanistan

**Sector:** Educational facilities and training (11120)

**Project:** Afghanistan: Contribution to "Second Education Quality Improvement Programme" (EQUIP II) as part of the ARTF, Tranche IV-VII


Implementing agency: Ministry of Education

Ex post evaluation report: 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(Planned)</th>
<th>(Actual, June 2016)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investment costs (EQUIP II - total) USD million</td>
<td>460.00</td>
<td>460.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterpart contribution EUR million</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding (tranches IV-VII) USD million</td>
<td>460.00</td>
<td>460.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which BMZ budget funds (tranches IV-VII) EUR million</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>80.00</td>
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*) Project in random sample 2016

**Summary:** The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), a multilateral trust fund administered by the World Bank, is used to fund running costs and priority investments by the Government of Afghanistan. The FC funds evaluated here were applied by the ARTF in four tranches to co-finance the "Second Education Quality Improvement Programme" (EQUIP II). Following a second extension, EQUIP II’s term ran from 2009 to 2016. The programme aimed at improving the basic education and gender equality in particular in the country. The project was implemented on a national scale by Afghanistan’s Ministry of Education. EQUIP II consists of three components: 1) School grants for renovations, construction and equipment; 2) Training and advancement for teachers and head teachers, and 3) Reinforcement of the Ministry of Education’s management, monitoring and evaluation skills.

**Objectives:** The project aimed at the usage of the quantitatively and qualitatively improved educational opportunities in the primary and secondary sector (outcome). With this goal, the programme was designed to contribute to the stabilisation of Afghanistan and to help reduce poverty by improving basic education (dual overarching developmental impact).

**Target group:** The target group was made up of school children, teachers and school managers, as well as representatives from the local community involved in the management of schools.

**Overall rating:** 3 for EQUIP II, tranches IV-VII

**Rationale:** The programme focused on Afghanistan’s huge shortfalls in the areas of educational infrastructure, teacher qualification and educational management. It has made important progress in these fields, which has been reflected in falling illiteracy rates, for example. So far EQUIP II has not been able to make sufficient headway on the consistently poor capacity and inefficient processes at the Ministry of Education. EQUIP II’s positive impact on human development and stability is overshadowed by the poor economic situation and low level of safety.

**Highlights:** The strategy of incorporating communities into the administration of schools is a central factor for the programme’s success in light of the fragile context. School committees perform important tasks for school maintenance and support swift reopening when schools are closed due to low levels of safety. In addition, they help to deal with conflicts by bringing together various groups involved in common educational projects.
Rating according to DAC criteria

Overall rating: 3 (tranches IV-VII)

Given the critical security situation in the programme area, this ex post evaluation (EPE) could not be performed locally and many parts of it are based on the evaluation of relevant programme documents from the multilateral trust fund ARTF and EQUIP financing window, reports, studies, national statistics, and telephone interviews. In order to substantiate the aggregated EQUIP data, a local survey of 18 schools was performed in addition by experts in Afghanistan. Interviews were conducted with the programme’s target groups at selected schools in eight provinces in northern, southern and central Afghanistan. Schools were selected under consideration of primary and secondary schools who received an EQUIP II funding between 2011 and 2015, including both mixed and single sex schools in urban and rural areas. Since the FC tranches IV to VII cannot be separated, the EPE looks at the four tranches in aggregate form.

Breakdown of the German contribution to EQUIP II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tranche</th>
<th>German contribution (Planned)</th>
<th>German contribution (Actual)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>EUR million 20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>EUR million 20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>EUR million 20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>VII</td>
<td>EUR million 20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relevance

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a fragile state and one of the poorest countries in the world. The low level of education is one of the greatest barriers to the country's development. In 2010, just 39% of 15 to 24-year-olds could read and write. These low figures can be explained by looking at the country's history. The Taliban grossly neglected education, particularly for girls: In 2001, just 1.2 million children went to school and a mere 4% of these children were female. Since the start of international intervention, access to education has undergone significant expansion. However, the deficits that existed in the past remain substantial: When the first tranche was disbursed in 2011, 35% of boys and 60% of girls still did not attend school. Only 57% of schools had their own buildings and as few as 28% (2009) of teachers held suitable qualifications.

EQUIP II was geared towards these core problems and created important preconditions for development and the alleviation of poverty by focusing on primary education, particularly for girls. The programme was designed to contribute to the stabilisation of Afghanistan and – by improving the quality and quantity of primary education opportunities – to help reduce poverty (dual overarching developmental goal). In general, there is a great deal of proof for the social and economic benefits that result from investment in education. Extended school education tends to reduce birth rates and maternal and child mortality. People who have received an education find it easier to secure a job and have higher incomes. However, the fragile environment may limit the impact of education in some cases. If the population perceives improvements to educational opportunities as an expression of the state's legal capacity, education can help to reinforce the state's legitimacy and have a positive impact on stability.

By investing in school construction and equipment, training measures for teachers and the long-term reinforcement of the Ministry of Education, the programme addressed main requirements in the educational sector. The programme therefore aimed to both increase the quantity of educational opportunities and improve the quality of education. Nevertheless, the individual measures in EQUIP II have so far concentrat-ed primarily on achieving the quantitative goals of providing education for more children and, above all,

1 Out of a population of more than 5 million children eligible to go to school.
girls, and of training more teachers. In light of the low level of education at the start of the first EQUIP phase in 2004, this focus was quite justified. EQUIP II, on the other hand, should have given more priority to the quality of education when designing the programme and monitoring impact. For example, it could have carried out teaching and learning performance analyses and introduced indicators that specifically measure the quality of education (e.g. rate of transition from primary to secondary education).

From today’s perspective, the concept and programme activities should have been adapted better to the security situation and the substantial regional differences in access to education. The evaluation did not detect any efforts to systematically ensure that remote regions and unsafe border regions were better addressed by programme activities. Furthermore, standardised budgets for building measures made it more difficult to effectively build infrastructure in more remote regions where prices tend to be higher.

One of the main dilemmas in working with fragile countries is that stabilisation requires funding to be allocated to state institutions, who have only a limited impact and sometimes can only be relied on and trusted to a certain extent. Implementing EQUIP through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) was a suitable solution for addressing this challenge: Like other projects under the ARTF, EQUIP funds were taken into account in the Afghan government’s budget but managed and disbursed by the ARTF. However, the Ministry of Education used national systems when implementing the project (for example, for financial management and procurement). Under this approach, the ARTF’s control mechanisms were to be used to reduce fiduciary risks using third-party monitoring and systems of controls in the financial management, for instance. Furthermore, the project aimed to improve the Ministry of Education’s management, monitoring and evaluation skills.

In light of the importance of education in development policy and the situation that prevailed a mere ten years ago, support for this sector remains as relevant as ever. Applying the sensitivity needed for the fragile conditions, the project sought to make visible improvements by implementing activities across the country and incorporating them into national structures. However, the heavy focus on quantity should have been complemented by more measures to improve the quality of education. Although the programme’s approach of involving communities in school administration presented a good decentralised concept in itself, the challenges of providing access to education in remote and unsafe regions should have been better addressed. Despite room for improvement in terms of its concept, EQUIP II tranches IV-VII are rated as good.

**Effectiveness**

With regard to the fulfilment of the goal regarding utilisation of the qualitatively and quantitatively improved educational opportunities in the primary and secondary sector – particularly in relation to access for girls – the success of the project is impressive given the fragile context. The targets for 2016 are also making good progress:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of school children registered (million)</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of female school children registered (million)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of female school children (%)</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of school children per classroom</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of extra qualified teachers (thousand)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The number of registered school children (used as a proxy for assessing utilisation) increased from 6.1 million in 2009 to 8.5 million in 2015 and 8.7 million in July 2016. It stands to reason that this positive trend will continue until the end of 2016 and the number of registered school children may lie within range of the target for 2016 (9 million). The goal to provide education for 3.0 million girls by 2014 has been surpassed. Despite this, the project is likely to miss its goal for 2016 of 3.8 million girls, meaning that it will also just miss out on its target ratio of boys to girls. However, the figures for the number of registered school children must be considered with the caveat that many children who are forced to interrupt their schooling due to violent conflict and migration remain registered for up to three years. This makes it easier for them to return to the school system later on. Given the situation at the turn of the century (see Relevance) and the fragile circumstances, the results listed above are all the more impressive. This immense progress is also substantiated by the local survey: The number of school children and the ratio of female pupils has increased at all of the schools visited and both the learning environment and quality of education have improved at least slightly.

The following indicators listed in the table above provide insight into the quality of education: The targets for "Number of school children per classroom" were fulfilled as early as 2015. The data suggests that this trend has not been reversed in 2016, meaning that the target for 2016 is likely to be met. Nevertheless, it is important to note for this indicator that, at around 66 school children per classroom, this figure is still very high.

While the proxy indicators "Number of extra qualified teachers" and "Proportion of teachers with a professional qualification" rose significantly from 37,000 and 28% in 2009 to around 278,000 and 49% in 2015 respectively and the relevant targets were met, there are still shortfalls affecting the quality of lessons according to the evaluation of the EQUIP II teacher training components. According to the evaluation, teacher training provides participants very little pedagogical knowledge. Furthermore, teachers have difficulties transferring the methods they have learned into their lessons. It also remains open as to whether the extra qualified teachers are actually employed (see Efficiency).

One positive aspect to point out is the improvement to the quantity of educational opportunities and the learning environment: The number of primary and secondary schools in the country increased from 10,541 in 2011 at the start of EQUIP II to a total of 15,081 (2016). EQUIP II contributed to over 1,000 of these new schools. By providing grants for the improvement of physical conditions at schools, EQUIP II has also helped to improve the learning environment. Nevertheless, 415 of the new schools still lacked essential facilities in 2016, such as toilets, access to drinking water, desks and chairs. Particularly in view of the persistently high demand for school construction (41% of schools hold lessons in tents, empty buildings or outside), it is regrettable that the goals related to school construction – namely physical improvements to schools through infrastructure and better equipment – were not achieved.

Overall, effectiveness is rated as satisfactory. While huge progress has been made in terms of quantitative improvements to educational opportunities and their utilization, particularly for girls, the measures for improving the quality of education have yet to make a notable impact in schools.

**Effectiveness rating: 3 (tranches IV-VII)**

**Efficiency**

The financing of EQUIP through the ARTF (a multilateral trust fund) leads in principal to efficiency gains and lower transactions costs for the partner and its ministries and for the donors. This is because the approach allowed concepts to be developed jointly, sponsors' contributions to be pooled, and implementation and reporting methods to be standardised. In the case of EQUIP however, this approach was to the detriment of the depth and quality of information for the donors. The Ministry of Education provided only very cursory reports from July 2013 to December 2015 and last minute announcements made it difficult to
take part in joint sectoral missions. Further deficits in the area of production efficiency stem primarily from the implementing agency's insufficient processes, even though one third of the EQUIP II funds were allocated to the Ministry for the reinforcement of skills. Implementation suffered from partly inefficient project coordination both within the Ministry of Education and between the Ministries of Finance and Education. The EQUIP coordination unit still appears weak and has trouble coordinating the EQUIP measures implemented by the various departments at the Ministry of Education. According to an evaluation of the programme published by the World Bank in 2015, some purchases may require over 100 signatures in order to receive approval. The approval of payments by the Finance department also often involved long delays. In some specific cases, building companies were required to wait over two years to be paid. A total of 1,800 schools were planned to be built under EQUIP II by the end of 2016. In July 2016, only 1,128 schools had been constructed. In addition, these schools lacked essential equipment (see Effectiveness). Construction delays were one of the main reasons why EQUIP II has already been extended twice since 2014 without any additional funding. The programme is now set to run until the end of 2017.

With regard to the funds used, the allocation efficiency is rated as critical based on the qualitative improvements to education, despite the progress made in terms of the utilisation of educational opportunities. EQUIP II's contribution to teacher training has made only limited improvements to the quality of education at this time. This is reflected in the poor results from a learning performance study conducted in 2013 (see Impact). The fact that the Afghan government only employs a portion of the teachers trained is indicative of the issue: Under EQUIP II, 30% of graduates from the Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) were not employed. In 2014, not a single graduate went into employment. This problem stems primarily from the Ministry of Education's recruitment policy, which does not require teachers to hold a TTC degree and therefore does not favour TTC graduates. At the same time, Afghanistan's limited state budget makes it difficult to create new teaching positions. Given that the donors also subsidise running costs, including teachers' salaries, through the ARTF, this aspect is particularly regrettable. The high utilisation of the teacher training institutions and schools available is deemed positive in terms of allocation efficiency.

Due to the clear inefficiencies in coordinating and implementing the programme and the poor results for improvements to the quality of education, efficiency is rated as unsatisfactory overall.

Efficiency rating: 4 (tranches IV-VII)

Impact

The overall development goal of EQUIP II used as a basis for this EPE is to contribute to the stabilisation of Afghanistan and to help alleviate poverty by improving education (dual objectives).

The "Proportion of young people who are illiterate" fell from 61% in 2010 to 42% in 2015 and the "Number of children who graduate from secondary school" increased from 60,000 (2009) to 240,000 (2015). However, this positive development in education standards is not reflected in the youth unemployment rate, which has increased slightly from 17.7% (2010) to 18.3% (2016). The significance of this official data, however, is limited in countries like Afghanistan as it does not include under-employment and high levels of employment in the informal sector. Furthermore, the youth unemployment rate is heavily influenced by stagnating economic growth and the country's fragile state. The proportion of the population living below the national poverty line rose from 36.3% in 2007 to 39.1% in 2015. In relation to primary education, a learning performance study conducted of year six students from 13 provinces in 2013 showed that children's reading, writing and arithmetic skills remain weak. Due to the lack of further learning performance studies useful for comparison, no conclusions can be drawn as to whether primary education has improved since then.

The overall development objective indicator "Reduction of birth rate per woman" reveals a negative correlation between an increasing level of education among women and a lower birth rate, which has been verified in empirical studies². This indicator is on a positive trajectory. Birth rates have dropped from 6.0 births per woman (2011) to 4.8 (2014) and are therefore moving in the opposite direction to increasing literacy rates among the young population.


Rating according to DAC criteria | 4
In view of the overall development goal of stabilisation, it appears plausible that EQUIP II has contributed to the stability of Afghanistan to a certain extent by supporting the Ministry of Education’s legal capacity and improving the range of educational opportunities, thus reinforcing the legitimacy of the state – insofar as stability can be or is interpreted as reinforcing the government’s legitimacy. A local study of 18 schools reveals that the progress in the field of education is attributed as a success by the government (and EQUIP) in the eyes of the population. In contrast to other state services, such as justice or security, the population looks to the Afghan government for the provision of education in many areas instead of relying on anti-government groups. It stands to reason that EQUIP II has made a positive yet unquantifiable contribution to the fact that a constant figure of around 75% of the population were satisfied with the government’s fulfilment of its duties over the period under review. The aforementioned local study also shows how much of a priority the improvement of educational opportunities is to the country’s population: Community representatives, teachers and pupils described the huge impact that better education has on their lives and the respect they have for others.

In light of the enormous efforts made in the field of education in this fragile country – currently only reflected in literacy rates and falling birth rates but not in unemployment figures and poverty levels – and the project’s contribution to stability, the programme is still deemed to be satisfactory.

Impact rating: 3 (tranches IV-VII)

Sustainability

In principle, the ARTF’s plan to hand over an increasing number of duties from EQUIP II to the Ministry of Education is an essential factor in the sustainable use and maintenance of the infrastructure created. However, capacities at the Ministry still have to be improved for this to happen.

EQUIP II involves major sustainability risks: The country’s security situation and instability have intensified since the departure of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The strengthening of anti-government groups and an increase in violent conflicts threaten to undo important achievements in the field of education, particularly for girls. This tendency could also damage the new infrastructure and capacities, meaning their utilisation may be limited. Despite the critical state of security, some communities have stood behind their schools. A number of closed schools could be reopened again after a short period. The local study shows that the school committees set up by EQUIP II play a key role here, as they work hard to ensure the safety of school children and make sure closed schools are reopened again quickly.

The low government revenue combined with growing expenditure for security poses a further sustainability risk. Even now, the Afghan government is only able to provide the money for running the education system thanks to extensive international support. Despite low national revenues, the high share of the budget still allocated to education (consistently 13% to 19% of the Afghan budget since 2011) reflects the Afghan government’s strong commitment to education. However, should donors’ contributions start to fall or revenues fail to increase, the new infrastructure may not be able to be run and maintained over the long term. To counteract this risk, the Ministry of Education became the first ministry to become actively involved in the development of an operations and maintenance facility under the ARTF. However, the facility has only been able to look after 500 schools so far and is therefore not developed enough to run and maintain the ever-growing portfolio of infrastructure.

In view of these risks, the strengthening of local communities’ own responsibility has proven to be a successful way of guaranteeing at least a certain amount of sustainability in the fragile situation. According to the Ministry of Education in 2015, 53% of school committees were completely involved from the application process and beyond and supported the running and maintenance of schools. As little as 14% were completely inactive. The results of the local survey also underline the significance of the school committees for operation and maintenance. They take on an organisational and supervisory role as well as mobilising funds for smaller maintenance jobs and external support where more help is required.

Due to the lack of funds for operation and maintenance and the poor security situation, the sustainability of the programme is only guaranteed to a limited extent. In the context of the (post) conflict situation, the...
EQUIP II tranches studied in this report were checked using the FC/TC emergency procedure for natural catastrophes, crises and conflicts with limited sustainability requirements already applied. Here, sustainability requirements must be assessed primarily in terms of how the project can be integrated with further measures. Given this state of affairs and in view of the sustainability-promoting structures currently under construction, the EQUIP II tranches evaluated here are rated as satisfactory despite the sustainability risks described above.

**Sustainability rating: 3 (tranches IV-VII)**
Notes on the methods used to evaluate project success (project rating)

Projects (and programmes) are evaluated on a six-point scale, the criteria being relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and overarching developmental impact. The ratings are also used to arrive at a final assessment of a project’s overall developmental efficacy. The scale is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good result that clearly exceeds expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Good result, fully in line with expectations and without any significant shortcomings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Satisfactory result – project falls short of expectations but the positive results dominate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory result – significantly below expectations, with negative results dominating despite discernible positive results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clearly inadequate result – despite some positive partial results, the negative results clearly dominate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The project has no impact or the situation has actually deteriorated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rating levels 1-3 denote a positive assessment or successful project while rating levels 4-6 denote a negative assessment.

Sustainability is evaluated according to the following four-point scale:

Sustainability level 1 (very good sustainability): The developmental efficacy of the project (positive to date) is very likely to continue undiminished or even increase.

Sustainability level 2 (good sustainability): The developmental efficacy of the project (positive to date) is very likely to decline only minimally but remain positive overall. (This is what can normally be expected).

Sustainability level 3 (satisfactory sustainability): The developmental efficacy of the project (positive to date) is very likely to decline significantly but remain positive overall. This rating is also assigned if the sustainability of a project is considered inadequate up to the time of the ex post evaluation but is very likely to evolve positively so that the project will ultimately achieve positive developmental efficacy.

Sustainability level 4 (inadequate sustainability): The developmental efficacy of the project is inadequate up to the time of the ex post evaluation and is very unlikely to improve. This rating is also assigned if the sustainability that has been positively evaluated to date is very likely to deteriorate severely and no longer meet the level 3 criteria.

The overall rating on the six-point scale is compiled from a weighting of all five individual criteria as appropriate to the project in question. Rating levels 1-3 of the overall rating denote a “successful” project while rating levels 4-6 denote an “unsuccessful” project. It should be noted that a project can generally be considered developmentally “successful” only if the achievement of the project objective (“effectiveness”), the impact on the overall objective (“overarching developmental impact”) and the sustainability are rated at least “satisfactory” (level 3).