**Programme Evaluation: Final Report**
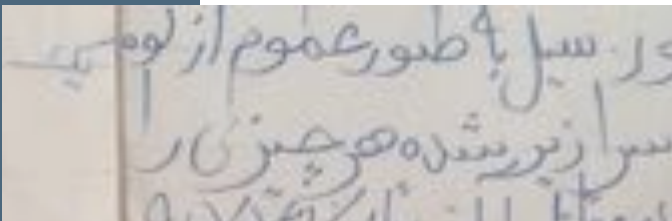
Strengthening Early Childhood Education – Afghanistan (SECE-A)

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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AEPO | Afghan Education Production Organisation |
| AKF-A | Aga Khan Foundation - Afghanistan |
| EC(C)E | Early Childhood (Care and) Education |
| ECD | Early Childhood Development |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| KAP | Knowledge Attitude Practice |
| KII | Key Informant Interview |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicator |
| MENA | Middle East North Africa |
| MoE | Ministry of Education |
| ODK | Open Data Kit |
| OECD-DAC | Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development - Development Assistance Committee |
| SECE-A | Strengthening Early Childhood Education - Afghanistan |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |

# Executive Summary

> "Not only does pre-school education provide children with a better start to their schooling, but […] these effects last and can help alleviate the effects of social disadvantage."[1]

While much progress has been made in the education sector in Afghanistan since the downfall of the Taliban – with over 8 million students in school in 2013, nearly one third of whom were girls – significant barriers to school attendance persist.[1] The early childhood education sector remains particularly underserved: as of 2015, just 40,000 children were enrolled in non-mosque-based private preschools that follow ECCE learning processes.[2] Existing research, however, highlights the long-term impact such programming has on the children involved:

> "Studies in developing countries show that early childhood development (ECD) programmes lead to higher levels of primary school enrolment and educational performance, which in turn positively affect employment opportunities later in life."[1]

In response to this, the Aga Khan Foundation – Afghanistan (AKF-A) partnered with Dubai Cares from 2013 to 2015 to create an early childhood education (ECE) programme that would establish and support pre-schools and create child-friendly environments in early grades in primary school, in line with the many education-related initiatives which Dubai Cares sponsors globally. This project was implemented in three provinces, Baghlan, Bamyan and Badakhshan.

Given growing interest in Afghanistan in early childhood education – the Ministry of Education is developing a policy on the topic and a pre-school unit has been created within it[3] – this evaluation is particularly timely. Its focus on the barriers to sustainability and recommendations will support Aga Khan and Dubai Cares in the establishment and refinement of further programming, and will also provide crucial information to the MoE and other NGOs as they work to implement ECE programming.

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1 USAID (2014). 2014 Education Factsheet for Afghanistan. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1871/Fact%20Sheet%20Education%20Sector%20FINAL%20July%202014.pdf.
2 UNESCO (2015). Afghanistan - Education for All 2015 National Review. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002327/232702e.pdf
3 UNESCO (2015).

The overall goal of this research was conduct an evaluation of the programme considering its effects after conclusion using the OECD-DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability) to inform Dubai Cares' design, development and investment in potential future programme iterations, or similar programming in the Afghan context.

The research team conducted 1225 surveys with parents and children as well as 20 key informant interviews and 40 focus group discussions including also teachers and other community stakeholders, in order to gather statistically significant results and draw out the details of learning environments and behaviours.

The results of this research underline a largely successful programme with strong community involvement. Positive impacts on students, parents and children can clearly be measured. The relevance of the programme is undeniable. Nevertheless, some clear opportunities to inform future programming are also highlighted, particularly in strengthening the impressive community-driven sustainability initiatives.

## Key programme and implementation successes

+ *Highly relevant:* The undeniable relevance of the programming implemented by AKF in these provinces is underlined by the broad community support for it, and the continued existence of parent-funded ECE centres 18 months after the end of the programme. In terms of parent attitudes to the programme, particularly as representative of community views at large and of a 'supportive community', almost all reported ECE as useful or very useful, and were able to identify a wide range of elements that were involved in the programme, from health to literacy.
+ *Key outcomes reached:* Planned programme outcomes – including establishing and building new preschools; providing support to and equipping existing preschools; providing training to preschool teachers; establishing and supporting school shuras; and exploring areas for supporting the establishment of income-generating activities to create sustainable school programmes – were all, over the course of the programme, achieved.
+ *High academic impact on participating children:* Children were assessed across reading, writing and mathematics, as well as social-emotional measures. Overall, beneficiary children outperformed control children (who did not benefit from preschool attendance), and beneficiary children performed above the average across both groups, in both literacy and numeracy. Some differences between provinces can be noted, with Badakhshani children showing the greatest differential between beneficiary children and others in performance.

+ ***Improved at-home and in school learning environments:*** Beneficiary parents were more likely to report engaging with children in positive at-home learning behaviours. Beneficiary teachers showed improved learning environments, with posters and other learning materials posted in the classrooms.

## Programmatic areas for improvement

From a programmatic perspective, only three activities were identified as underperforming:

+ ***Radio programmes:*** The research found low saturation on radio programmes, with few community members familiar with them.
+ ***Parent literacy education:*** A distinction must be drawn between the two types of education provided to parents. While the behavioural education had a measurable impact, encouraging learning-positive activities at home, the literacy rates between beneficiary and non-beneficiary parents were the same, suggesting that that particular aspect of the programme must be re-examined.
+ ***Income-generating activities:*** Almost no schools reported the development of income-generating activities within communities to sustain the schools, and no ongoing successes on this front were found.

## Ensuring sustainability

The key challenge evidenced – and already anticipated in the programme planning – is that of sustainability. It is a testament to the impact of the centres – and community engagement – that eighteen months after the end of the programme, parents are contributing financially to the centres to allow their children's continued attendance, even when their families have little to spare. Both control and beneficiary groups reported willingness to pay for such education, highlighting general buy-in to the importance of ECE.

However, the fact that parents were contributing to the schools like this reflects also on the limited success of the financial sustainability component of the programme, which called for the development of income-generating activities within communities to support the schools, with very few reporting having attempted this, and no ongoing successes. The current willingness of parents to pay for ECE is impressive – but the need for this poses a clear challenge to the sustainability of the ECE centres given the current context in Afghanistan, where the earning potential of many is limited, especially in more remote areas. The need for more financing is also evidenced by some of the problems being reported 18 months post project conclusion, namely:

+ Limited funding for supplies and to support physical premises 18 months after the close of the programme
+ Difficulties in retaining trained staff

## Roadmap for future programming

Across all of the successes and challenges identified through this research, a common theme appears: a focus on programme outputs in standards for evaluation. The primary stated goal of this programme is to improve primary education for children in Afghanistan through creating supportive communities, establishing and supporting good school infrastructure, training teachers, and making these outcomes sustainable. Yet the ultimate desired goal is better educated children – not simply more literate parents or communities who support pre-school education – and in order to measure this the key recommendation of this report is to adopt a **learning approach** for future programming, rather than simply measure a series of elements expected to contribute to this.

This learning approach – which will focus on changes to beneficiaries' lives throughout the duration of the programme, to conduct modifications to the programme as it is ongoing in order to improve it – must be embedded in the planned *monitoring and evaluation*, *programming*, and *sustainability* aspects of the programme. The following thirteen recommendations propose a clear short- and long-term plan to implement this on future iterations of similar ECE programming.

| SHORT TERM | LONG TERM |
|---|---|
| **Monitoring & Evaluation** | |
| + Embed a learning approach in planning<br>+ Measure not only programme outputs but programme impacts | + Undertake regular monitoring of impacts and support implementing partners in monitoring |
| **Programming** | |
| + Provide refresher training for previously trained teachers<br>+ Review parent literacy programming | + Provide ongoing parent education<br>+ Develop mentoring or coaching for teachers and parents<br>+ Expand or diversify the programme |
| **Sustainability** | |
| + Change focus from sustained outputs to sustainable impacts<br>+ Increase sustainability of impacts upon parent & teacher behaviours through expanded and improved capacity building | + Expand programme income generation development<br>+ Consider innovative opportunities for independence from funding<br>+ Invest further in child-friendly environments in primary schools |

# 1. Introduction

Over half of Afghanistan's adult population has never received any schooling, and despite improvements in attendance rates, significant proportions of school-aged children are not receiving any formal education.[4] According to statistics from the United States' Agency for International Development's (USAID), in 2002, approximately 900,000 boys attended schools in the country, while women and girls had almost no access to education. By 2013, over 8 million students were enrolled in school, and 2.5 million of these were girls.[5]

Despite this progress, education in Afghanistan remains a challenging yet critical sector, fraught by the ongoing impacts of a turbulent past, which saw girls banned from schools for nearly a decade, and continuing threats of economic and political insecurity. Improving educational outcomes is a significant ongoing project for government and international donors alike. The persistent intersecting challenges of poverty, insecurity, gender inequality and lack of institutional capacity result in a high number of children not attending school.

According to FHI360's *National Education Profile for Afghanistan 2014 Update*, 36% of school-aged boys and 53% of school-aged girls are out of school. There is also a significant disparity between the poorest and richest children when it comes to primary schooling.[6] Clearly, although the last fifteen years have seen major investments in rebuilding educational capacity, the Afghan education system remains far from achieving "education for all". Moreover, the early childhood education sector is nascent, with some international programming in the area and work by the Ministry of Education and a variety of partners to develop a curriculum ongoing.

In response to this need, and guided by its commitment to "improve children's access to quality primary education in developing countries",[7] Dubai Cares partnered with the Aga Khan Foundation – Afghanistan (AKF-A) to create an early childhood education (ECE) programme that would establish and support pre-schools and create child-friendly environments in early grades in primary school, in line with the many education-related initiatives which Dubai Cares sponsors globally. The Strengthening Early Childhood Education in Afghanistan (SECE-A) programme was implemented between 2013 and 2015 by AKF-A in three northern provinces, Baghlan, Bamyan and Badakhshan. Samuel Hall was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the programme that would consider impacts beyond the life of the programme.

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[4] The Asia Foundation (2015). Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2016. p.86.
5 USAID (2014).
6 FDI360 (2014). Afghanistan: National Education Profile - 2014 Update. http://www.flexlearnstrategies.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/EPDC-NEP_Afghanistan_0.pdf.
7 Dubai Cares (2016). 'Our Vision', Dubai Cares. http://www.dubaicares.ae/en/article/about-us/our-vision.html.

This report draws upon the OECD-DAC Criteria[8] to assess the programme's relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.[9] The SECE-A programme's relevance in the Afghan context, and effectiveness in achieving programme goals, is assessed based on the data collected and with reference to the existing literature on early childhood development and education, and the impacts of SECE-A programming are explored, with specific focus on their sustainability. The evaluation used a mixed methods approach and sought to develop a fulsome and holistic picture of the programme's impacts. As such, field teams gathered both quantitative and qualitative data across a significant sample of respondents, targeting the groups where programme impacts would be expected to be evident, including teachers, parents and children, and also undertook assessments of physical infrastructure and information gathering from school staff. Samuel Hall's team of enumerators visited sites across three provinces, and surveyed and interviewed both beneficiary and control groups.



Using the OECD-DAC criteria and this mixed methods approach, this research suggests that there have indeed been demonstrably positive impacts on beneficiary populations from the core components of the SECE-A programme, for students, parents and teachers. However, there are also a number of lessons that can be learned from the programme, and key shifts in approach that could be made to enhance the programme and to redirect its focus towards the positive change it can create for beneficiaries, children in particular. Primary amongst these is the need for a learning approach in education programming to ensure that impacts, as well as outcomes, are not only monitored but used to inform programming.

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8 OECD-DAC (2002). Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management. OECD: Paris. www.oecd.org/development/peer-reviews/2754804.pdf.
9 Please note that this assessment uses a modified version of the OECD-DAC Criteria adapted to evaluate the SECE-A programme.

## 2. Background

Afghanistan presents a complex environment for programmes to operate in – it is impacted not only by multidimensional poverty, lack of institutional support, ongoing conflict and gender inequality, but the legacy of Taliban-era oppression. It has a largely rural population, with over 75% of the population living in rural areas, and over 40% of its employment engaged in agriculture.

Unemployment and underemployment rates are high, and literacy levels are low. Only 33% of the adult population are literate, and most adults have attended on average only two years of schooling,[10] while at the primary level, 46% of school-aged children do not attend primary school.

The provinces involved in the SECE-A programme are broadly reflective of these trends, with some variations between provinces.

| BADAKHSHAN | BAGHLAN | BAMYAN |
|---|---|---|
| Northern Afghanistan, bordering Tajikistan – remote and mountainous | West of Kabul in central Afghanistan | Northern Afghanistan |
| Largely agricultural – over 90% of population is rural | Almost entirely rural population | Predominantly rural population |
| Very low literacy and education levels for adults | Poverty rates just above the national average | Low literacy rates and education levels in the adult population |
| Poverty rate twice the national average | More than half the adult population are illiterate and have attended on average less than 3 years of school | Poverty rates lower than national average, more non-agricultural economic activity |

**Figure 1:** Province Profiles[11]

The three provinces in the SECE-A programme represent regions that reflect these intersecting challenges – poorer households, low literacy and education levels for parents, and in largely rural settings. Children, parents and teachers in this context are almost certain to experience intersecting vulnerabilities that ECE can potentially address.

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10 World Bank & Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Economy 2014. Afghanistan - Provincial briefs. Kabul, Afghanistan: World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/322031467996718611/Afghanistan-Provincial-briefs.
11 World Bank & Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Economy (2014).

## 2.1. Early Childhood Education in Afghanistan

Early childhood education is an area with limited support in Afghanistan, though a number of organisations have more recently begun working in this space. Government support has also been limited, though at the time of writing, the Ministry of Education is developing its first pre-school curriculum.[12] This suggests recognition of its importance and of a broader need to improve educational outcomes nationally. However, ECE faces a number of challenges in the Afghan context – not least of these being simply that of capacity. In a context of struggle to ensure children gain even a primary education, diverting valuable resources to early childhood education may seem counter-intuitive.

Yet there is ample and growing evidence - though little derived specifically from the Afghan context given its comparative dearth of this form of education - that early childhood education is an excellent means of improving school retention rates, addressing educational disparities, and narrowing the gaps for more vulnerable children who may otherwise have poorer education outcomes and lower school attendance or retention.

## 2.2. Why Early Childhood Education?

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is a solution that can potentially address poor performance, low attendance and low transition rates from primary to secondary school. It refers to "a range of processes and mechanisms that sustain and support development during the early years of life: it encompasses educational, physical, social and emotional care, intellectual stimulation, healthcare and nutrition."[13] There is a growing literature that suggests that these processes are a critical foundation for later education outcomes.

Studies in a number of countries have shown that children with pre-primary education experience are more likely to complete primary education.[14] Attending and successfully completing a pre-primary education programme provides a solid foundation for primary education and ongoing schooling. In a context like Afghanistan, where currently, school attendance drops as age increases – and at an even faster rate for girls[15] – this could represent a means of narrowing the gap in outcomes, addressing the needs of children experiencing multidimensional and intersecting vulnerabilities and improving their school performance, attendance and retention. Recent studies, for example, have shown that:

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12 Ministry of Education - Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2008). The Development of Education: National Report on the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/ICE_2008/afghanistan_ NR08.pdf.
13 UNESCO & UNICEF (2012). Asia-Pacific End of Decade Notes on Education for All. EFA Goal #1. Early Childhood Care and Education. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002171/217145e.pdf.
14 UNESCO & UNICEF, 2012.
15 CSO & UNICEF (2012). Afghanistan's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey - MICS (2010/11). http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AMICS-Jun24-2012-FINAL..pdf.

+ The impact of ECE programming is greater upon children from poorer households and improves school readiness measures significantly;
+ It is possible to reduce learning and performance gaps between children from different backgrounds through ECE[16], and;
+ ECE attendance improves learning outcomes at school and increases retention rates, resulting in children doing better and staying longer in primary school.[17]

## 2.3. Strengthening Early Childhood Education in Afghanistan

In line with Dubai Cares' mission to "break the cycle of poverty by ensuring all children have access to quality education," the SECE-A programme drew upon the potential of ECE to positively impact the lives of children, targeting four key programme areas.[18]

| | |
|---|---|
| Component 1 | Establishing and supporting pre-school education |
| Component 2 | Creating a child-friendly environment in early primary (Grades 1 and 2) |
| Component 3 | Developing supportive communities |
| Component 4 | Ensuring sustainability and expansion of both existing & newly created ECE centres |

Figure 2. SECE-A Programme Components

With more than 30% of children not even attending primary school in the targeted provinces, there was evidently a need to address school attendance and retention rates. Improved school readiness and performance in school overall has been clearly associated with ECE, and previous reporting on the SECE-A programme demonstrated that students involved in the programme displayed this, and that parents of these children displayed more interest in early learning activities and were engaging more in preventative health practices.[19] Moreover, the SECE-A programme incorporated elements of community engagement and capacity building, which are key contributors for education programming where teachers and parents are critical.

Other successful programmes in this area tend to incorporate similar elements to create more holistic approaches to education, ranging from parent education to resourcing for teachers or health programming in conjunction.

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16 Jung, H. & Hasan, A. (2014). The Impact of Early Childhood Education on Early Achievement Gaps: Evidence from the Indonesia Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) Project. Policy Research Working Papers – The World Bank.
17 Krafft, C. (2015). "Increasing educational attainment in Egypt: The impact of early childhood care and education", Economics of Education Review, vol. 46, pp. 127-143.
18 Dubai Cares (2016).
19 Aboud, F. (2015). Strengthening Early Childhood Education in Afghanistan - Final Report. Dubai Cares.

Parent literacy classes, education programming for parents and teacher capacity building are all examples of good practice in supporting children in ECE that the SECE-A programme incorporated. This evaluation will explore the extent to which these programme elements have created sustainable outcomes beyond the life of the programme's funding in the target communities, and in children's performance in particular.

# 3. Research Methods

## 3.1. Research Objectives

The primary and overarching objective of this evaluation has been to assess programme impacts in order to inform Dubai Cares' design, development and investment in potential future programme iterations, or similar programming in the Afghan context. The questions below, based on OECD-DAC criteria, were used to drive investigation and analysis.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Relevance** | How relevant is the programme in the Afghan context? |
| | How well does the programme tie in with the many other educational programmes active in Afghanistan in recent years? |
| **Effectiveness** | Have the planned objectives of the intervention been achieved? |
| **Impact** | What has been the programme's impact on children, parents, teachers and the community? |
| | What, if any, are the key differentiating factors on results? |
| | What, if any, contextual challenges did the programme face, and how did AKF respond to them? |
| **Sustainability** | What remains of programme outcomes 18 months after cessation of support? |
| | Are the individual outcomes of SECE-A sustainable? |
| | Can any barriers to sustainability be identified and addressed at this point? |
| | What are the prospects for sustainability of the initiative with regards to institutional capacity? |
| | What lessons can be learned for the future of this initiative? |

**Figure 3.** SECE-A Evaluation – Research Questions

## 3.2. Evaluation Methodology

Samuel Hall developed its methodology for this evaluation to harness both qualitative and quantitative data from an appropriately sized sample of beneficiary groups – including teachers, parents, children and other stakeholders – across a cross-section of the programme communities, and to enable comparisons through a control group.[20] Fieldwork teams visited programme locations during the fieldwork phase of the evaluation in November, as outlined in the previous Field Report. The fieldwork team conducted a total of 1225 surveys, 20 key informant interviews and 40 focus group discussions.[21]

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[20] Control groups were interviewed or surveyed for all groups, excepting for site visits and attached key informant interviews with school staff and community members.
21 Final sample sizes resulting from the fieldwork data collection are outlined in *Annex A. Detailed Methodology*.

## 3.3. Research Tools

Research was conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research tools, and collected by enumerators in field locations using Open Data Kit (ODK) for all quantitative tools.

| QUANTITATIVE TOOLS | |
|---|---|
| Child Survey | Assessed both baseline performances for early grade primary school children in Afghanistan who have not attended ECE, and for those children who were beneficiaries in the SECE-A programme and attended ECE centres funded by the programme. |
| Parent Survey | Investigated the parenting behaviours of both beneficiary and non-beneficiary parents, in order to assess the impact of parent education conducted as part of the SECE-A programme, and more broadly, to understand parent attitudes to ECE |
| Site Survey | Captured data on the individual ECE Centres in order to contribute to an understanding of the resources available to students and of the sustainability of the programme. |
| QUALITATIVE TOOLS | |
| Focus Group Discussions | Explored what teachers and parents knew of early childhood education, their attitudes towards the SECE-A programme, what they may have learned from the programme, and what they saw as key impacts on children. |
| Parent & Child Surveys | Incorporated qualitative elements that sought to capture additional data on attitudes to ECE and on the sustainability of programme impacts. Site Observation Surveys also included minor qualitative elements to provide useful context for quantitative analysis. |
| Key Informant Interviews | Conducted where possible with school staff or community members to aid in creating a broader picture of local attitudes to, and support for, ECE programmes. |

**Figure 4.** SECE-A Evaluation – Research Tools

**Focus group discussions** with parents and teachers were intended to draw out greater detail of learning behaviours and environments at home and in the classroom, and along with KIIs with school staff, provided context to the programme's impacts and outcomes.

The quantitative **parent survey** compared attitudes and practices concerning pre-school and primary school education, seeking to shed light on the extent of engagement with young children in daily life, health matters, approaches to education and the SECE-A programming itself.

The **child questionnaire** aimed to assess children in early primary grades – specifically Grades 2 and 3 – in terms of their academic situation, specifically their level of reading, writing and mathematics, but also investigated their social-emotional maturity.

Developed in collaboration with an ECE expert experienced in the Afghan context, it drew upon other standardised forms of testing used to indicate early grade achievement and was contextualised by the use of social-emotional measures which drew from stories and interactions children experienced in everyday life in Afghanistan. This gave indications of how well they read, wrote, spoke, did mathematics, and interacted with their families and other children, all of which are important measures of school readiness that are often attributed to ECE programming.

## 3.4.    Fieldwork Challenges

While no insurmountable challenges were faced by enumerator teams in the field, problem areas and logistical and technological challenges were identified by the field coordinators and project team, including:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Accessibility** | Some locations were inaccessible due to remoteness and weather concerns in the northern province of Badakhshan,[22] whilst others were deemed too insecure[23] for fieldwork by the AKF-A team. |
| **School closures** | As the end of the year was approaching during the fieldwork period, some schools – ECE Centres in particular – were scheduled to be closing. |
| **Locating parents** | Unlike students who could be located through schools, locating parents required the field coordinators to look beyond school or ECE sites. |
| **Control groups** | Compared to beneficiary groups, there is no clear means of identifying control groups, and incentive to participate is less significant. |
| **Connectivity** | Particularly in remote provinces, regular and reliable internet can be difficult to access. |
| **Interviewing children** | Careful balance between gathering sufficient, good quality data, and the shorter attention span and vulnerability of children, needed to be struck by enumerators. |
| **Teacher interference** | Some children felt more comfortable with teachers present in the room during surveys. Teachers generally stayed out of these proceedings but on rare occasions made attempts to guide answers that were observed and gently rebuked. |

**Figure 5:** Fieldwork Challenges

These fieldwork challenges, and other information on the fieldwork phase, are outlined in more detail the previously submitted Field Report.

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22 The district of Ishkashim was not visited as planned by the Badakhshan fieldwork team. See the previous Field Report to Dubai Cares for further detail.
23 Specifically, sites in parts of northern Badakhshan.

# 4. Key Findings: A Stronger Future for Early Childhood Education in Afghanistan?

The SECE-A programme sought to create a foundation for primary school education by investing in the early childhood development of Afghan children in ways that would ensure that they be prepared to stay, and succeed, in schooling.

This research uncovered a variety of positive and sustained impacts in beneficiary populations – better at-home learning behaviours in parents, better performance overall from beneficiary children, reported retained child-friendly behaviours from teachers and school staff, and ECE centres operational beyond the life of programme funding – not to mention high levels of community support for ECE broadly and the programme specifically.

Largely, this evaluation demonstrates that the programme had positive impacts on the communities involved, who reported overwhelmingly positive attitudes to the programme and early childhood education, in addition to improvements in parent, teacher and child performance in education-related areas. However, there were several areas in which impacts were less clear, or where issues could be identified.

Beneficiary children did better overall, but not uniformly, and results appeared to diminish in Grade 3 – perhaps suggesting the often-cited fadeout of ECE impacts, but perhaps also attributable to poor retention of trained teachers, lack of ongoing resourcing and reports of comparably poorer primary school environments.

Parent literacy levels remained low, despite literacy classes, and while there appeared to be impacts from parent education, in terms of social-emotional behaviours at home, beneficiary and control parents were virtually indistinguishable.

Moreover, while many ECE centres have become self-sustaining, some are now closed, and those that are still active often have managed by charging fees or using volunteers, both potentially unsustainable solutions in poor and insecure regions.

Yet, perhaps the most important of these is a focus on outputs over impacts, such that learning during the life of the programme is practically impossible.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Relevance* | How relevant is SECE-A in the Afghan context? | Highly relevant |
| | How well does SECE-A tie in with educational programmes recently active in Afghanistan? | Very well |
| *Effectiveness* | Have the objectives of the intervention as laid out in the planning documents been achieved? | Generally yes (but mixed performance) |
| *Impact* | What has been the programme's impact on children, parents and teachers? | Positive overall |
| *Sustainability* | Does anything remain of programme outcomes 18 months after support ceased? | Yes, to some degree |
| | Have individual outcomes been sustainable? | Some, but not all |
| | Are there significant barriers to sustainability? | Yes |

**Figure 6.** SECE-A Evaluation Outcomes

## 4.1. Demographic Findings

To supplement existing data and provide additional context to the evaluation, surveys collected data regarding respondent households. Parents are largely employed in agricultural sector activities, in line with the general labour profiles of the provinces surveyed, but households also displayed other income types, including teaching, construction, transport, and public administration or government roles. Households were typically large, with an average of four children and one contributor to household income.
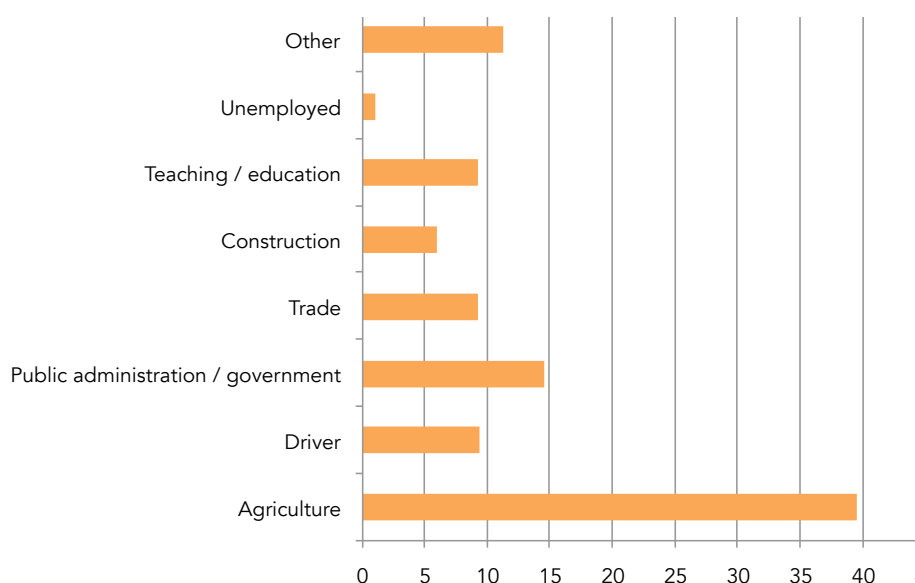
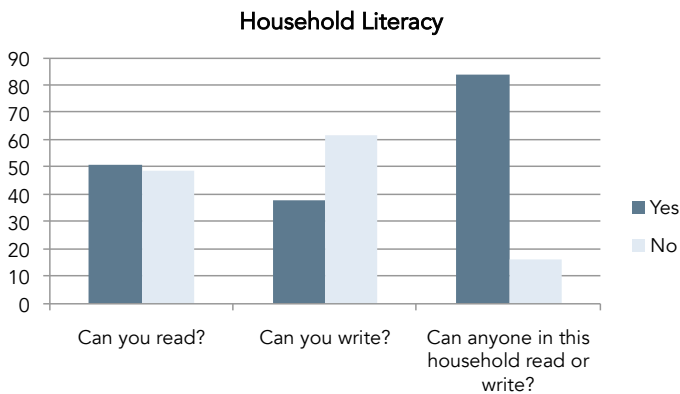

**Figure 7.** Main source of household income

Figure 8. Household literacy

Household literacy levels were above average for Afghanistan, perhaps to some degree reflective of the literacy programmes attached to the SECE-A programme, but possibly also linked to the higher likelihood that educated parents will send their children to school.
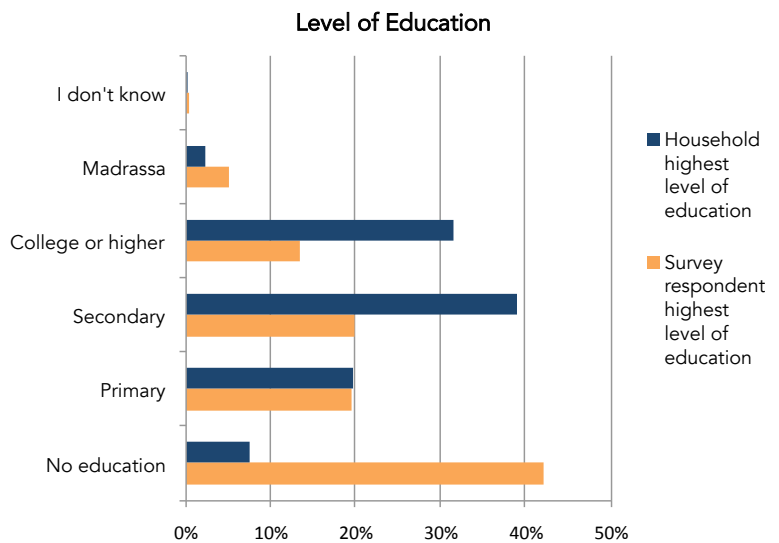
Education levels for survey respondents were low, with over 40% of respondents having received no formal education, though many households had members with higher than average levels of education.



Figure 9. Level of education

## 4.2. Relevance & Effectiveness

Early childhood education has growing support as a means of improving educational outcomes. However, not all programmes are appropriate for every context. This evaluation therefore gathered data allow Samuel Hall to evaluate not only how well the SECE-A programme had worked, but also how well suited the programme was to the Afghan context.

Prior assessments of the programme, both those conducted internally by AKF-A as part of their monitoring processes and those carried out externally, have suggested positive outcomes from the programme; however these did not specifically consider its intended outcomes, outlined in the figure following.[24]

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[24] Please see Annex E for a full list of program outcomes and KPIs.

| COMPONENT | ACTIVITY | PLANNED OUTCOME |
|---|---|---|
| Establishing & Supporting Pre-schools | *Establish and support new pre- schools, undertaking essential rehabilitation and WASH requirements* <br><br> *Equip and support existing pre schools* <br><br> *Provide training to pre-school teachers* <br><br> *Establish and support ECD school shuras* <br><br> *Income generation possibilities explored and established* | Children in remote areas have increased access to education |
| Create Conducive & Effective Learning Environments Grades 1-2 | *School makes physical and organisation changes to create learner-conducive and child friendly environments* <br><br> *Teachers, school management, school inspectors and wider community receive training in child- friendly techniques and concepts* <br><br> *Teachers trained in methodologies to teach literacy and numeracy are more effective* | Children in early primary grades (1-2) in government schools receive a solid foundation in literacy and numeracy in a welcoming and learner-conducive environment. |
| Developing Supportive Communities | *Adult literacy and numeracy classes take place in pre- school communities* <br><br> *Parenting classes arranged in communities with pre-schools* <br><br> *Radio programmes designed and broadcast to support the learning of children and their parents* | The development of literate communities in which education and learning is encouraged within the whole community is supported |
| Ensuring Sustainability & Expansion | *Establish ECD Resource Centres* <br><br> *Impact study conducted on impact of pre-schools in child learning and development* <br><br> *Teacher training programme designed for potential pre-school teachers in rural areas* | Learning from the programme is institutionalized to enable the learning to be sustained and expanded to others |

Figure 10. SECE-A Evaluation – Research Tools

### 4.2.1. Strengthening early childhood education in the Afghan context

Prior to considering the success or lasting impacts of a programme, it is important to consider the extent to which it is relevant in its contextual environment. As has already been noted, Afghanistan is a country facing complex challenges that programmes implemented here must address in order to be successful. The SECE-A programme sought to create positive change in an area where support and improvement is undoubtedly needed, for, as this report has previously identified, school attendance and retention are an ongoing challenge in Afghanistan.

Should the promise of early childhood education programming in improving school attendance, performance and retention that has been suggested by previous programmes worldwide and in the education literature prove to be applicable in this context – as this report will go on to assess in outlining programme impacts – then the SECE-A programme is certainly relevant in the Afghan context.

Moreover, the data collected during this evaluation's fieldwork very broadly suggests that beneficiary groups display more positive behaviours in terms of childhood education and development than those surveyed in control groups.

### *4.2.2. Achieving programme outcomes*

The SECE-A programme, over the course of two years, provided considerable support to a range of beneficiaries, including teachers, parents, children and schools. Previous programme evaluations measuring the programme's performance against its targeted outcomes were positive – the programme either met, or reached outcomes close to, the key performance indicators (KPIs) used to measure programme progress.

These included the establishment of ECE Centres, successful teacher training programmes and parent classes, provision or construction of physical infrastructure and learning resources and establishment of school shuras (see Annex E for detail of programme KPIs and AKF-A internal monitoring of success against these). This section will review to what extent the objectives of the intervention as laid out in the planning documents can be identified eighteen months after the programme has come to a close.

#### *Establishing and supporting pre-schools*

The SECE-A programme's first component was to establish and support preschools through providing equipment, training, establishing shuras and creating means of income generation, in order to ensure that **children in remote areas have increased access to education**. To do so, it planned to:

+ Set out to establish and support new preschools;
+ Provide support to and equip existing preschools;
+ Provide training to preschool teachers;
+ Establish and support school shuras; and
+ Explore and establish where possible income generation opportunities to create sustainable school programmes.

It is clear that the SECE-A programme successfully established and supported preschools across Bamyan, Baghlan and Badakhshan throughout the two-year life of the programme: the Samuel Hall fieldwork teams visited seventeen preschools either established or supported by the SECE-A programme which, more than eighteen months on from the end of programme funding, are still active.

*Generally good conditions but limited facilities*

Site visit surveys conducted by enumerators at these preschools with members of school staff to assess the condition of the physical infrastructure and learning materials available primarily identified the provision of material and equipment assistance when asked about support provided by the programme. Some also noted improvements made to school buildings.

+ The majority of these preschools were characterised by school staff or teachers who were interviewed as taking place in private buildings such as houses, rather than in public buildings, and reported approximately twenty (20) students enrolled in their classes currently.
+ Conditions overall were reported by field teams as good, though not excellent. None of the ECE centres visited by the fieldwork team had no learning materials at all – most had paper, pens, notebooks, crayons and books for students to use in classes, though a few reported a lack of notebooks, pens and crayons.
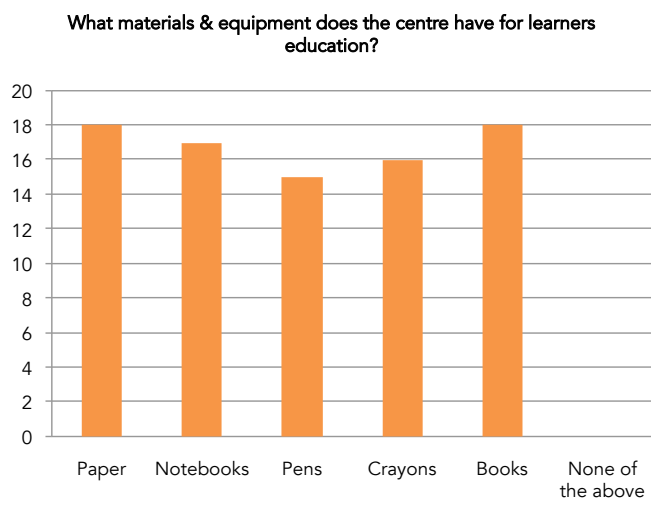
**What materials & equipment does the centre have for learners education?**



**Figure 10:** ECE Centre Overall Conditions

+ In terms of key infrastructure and facilities, they also performed relatively well, and the majority of ECE Centres had a usable blackboard, posters or charts on the walls, toys, a playground, and critical structural elements such as doors, surrounding walls, windows and a functional toilet, though what they were least likely to have available was playgrounds and toys.

Almost all ECEs were well rated by enumerators in terms of their overall condition – 55% as good, and a further 39% as very good. Conditions varied by site, identifying challenges such as insecurity in the area, lack of playgrounds or toys, or simply poor or dilapidated condition in some instances. In fact, ECE Centres were rated comparably better to the primary school sites visited.

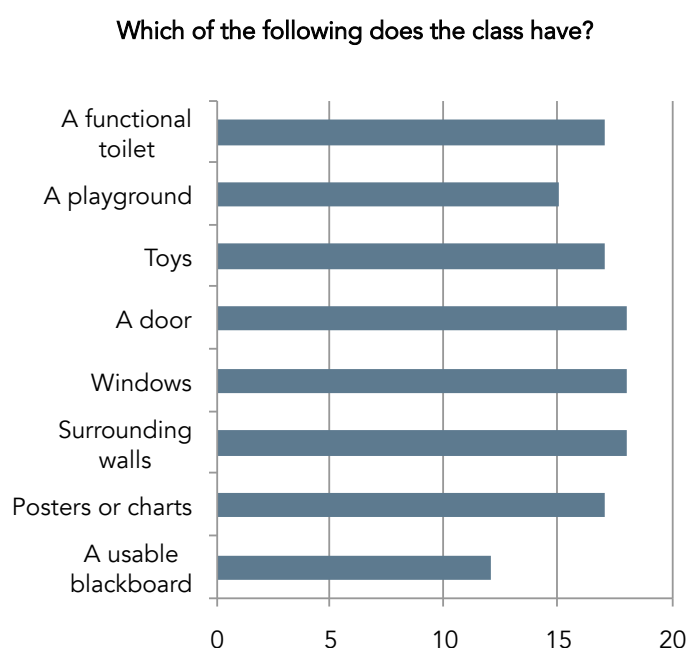**Which of the following does the class have?**



Figure 12. ECE Centre classroom features

However, a commonly noted point in site visit surveys and interviews with school staff that not all of the currently running ECE centres have sufficient stationery supplies. Interviews suggested this was because centres which did have funds were diverting them to teacher salaries or other key resources. Additionally, some parents noted in focus groups that access to ECE Centres was a challenge – reaching ECEs when they were across a river, difficult terrain, or simply far away, was flagged as challenge for their children and a concern for parents.

> My daughter doesn't go to school because the way is very far.
> – Non-beneficiary parent FGD, Badakhshan

*Teachers have good understanding but low retention rates*

Teacher feedback on the training from focus group discussions was largely very positive, and non-beneficiary teachers interviewed regularly expressed a desire for this training. Beneficiary teachers expressed a much higher degree of understanding of the importance of employing student-centred methods with younger kids, as well as doing group-work and the use of flashcards for vocabulary instruction.



**Figure 13.** Classroom charts & posters at ECE Centres

The use of charts and posters on classroom walls is considerably higher among beneficiary teachers who through the trainings were taught about the advantages of so doing.

However, both parents and teachers noted in the FGDs that the teachers who currently taught at schools or ECE Centres were not always necessarily those who had received training some years ago. These retention issues mean that even schools whose teachers had been trained may now have "relapsed" on that front.

A common answer from respondents who offered their thoughts on possible improvements to the programme was to suggest more training for teachers, or "better" teachers. This could mean teachers with more qualifications or training, but it could also be an indication that teacher-training elements of the programme have not been as sustainable due to changes in staffing or difficulty retaining staff in schools and preschools.

*Teachers have good understanding but low retention rates*

However, it is worth noting that feedback from parents regarding teachers often did not differentiate between those in ECE Centres and in primary schools, so this feedback may also be more applicable to teachers in primary schools who may have received less training compared to preschool teachers. Additionally, while teachers were very aware of teacher training programmes, it was less commonly mentioned by school staff in site visit surveys or by parents when asked to describe the SECE-A programme.

*Improving learning environments in early primary grades*

The second component of the programme focused on learning environments in early primary grades, where students of ECE programming would be channelled into upon graduation from preschool, to ensure that **children in Grades 1 and 2 in government schools receive a solid foundation in literacy & numeracy in welcoming and learner-conducive environments.** The programme identified physical and organisational changes, along with child-friendly training for school staff, and especially teachers who would also focus on literacy and numeracy education methodologies, as key to achieving this outcome.

Primary school conditions

While the primary schools visited were still generally rated as 'good' or 'very good' (41% and 29%, respectively), they received overall lower feedback in terms of conditions and equipment. This suggests that improvements to primary school or efforts to equip and maintain them may have been either initially less successful or have deteriorated more rapidly following the end of programme funding.
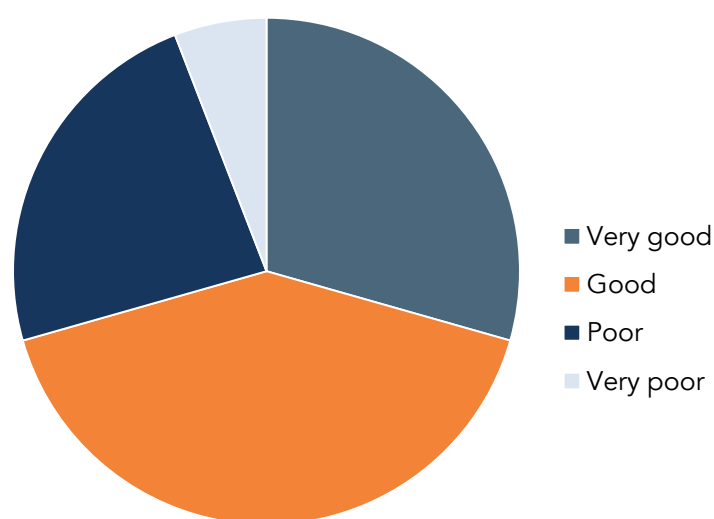


Figure 14. Primary school conditions

<u>Training and child-friendly environments</u>

Positive impressions of the school environment suggest that training for other school staff in child-friendly techniques and concepts has been retained or institutionalised to some degree, and positive and ongoing impacts on students in these environments are indicative of some success on this front.

Beneficiary teachers displayed good teaching behaviours, and even non-beneficiary teachers generally were able to demonstrate knowledge of child-friendly behaviours, and were positive about ECE for children. This may mean that beneficiary teachers were able to pass on learnings from their training, or that the existing curriculum prompts them to use the kinds of playful and holistic methods supported by the SECE-A programme.

> "We have lesson plans annually, monthly, weekly and daily. We teach according to our lesson plans. A plan is a regular timetable that leads teacher and students to their goal. The students of first, second and third classes have storytime on Thursdays and also, we tell some stories that are related to their lessons. We tell stories to attract the attention of the children, to teach them to respect others, know the rights of children and adults [...] Mathematics is taught practically; the students learn from the practical method more than the theoretical method."
>
> - Beneficiary teacher FGD, Badakhshan

However, there was feedback from parents and school staff that suggests that retaining teachers is a challenge, and thus the effects are not necessarily sustainable. In addition, it was reported by local AKF staff that teacher training was not undertaken in Shibar district in Bamyan, suggesting that teacher training may not have reached teachers in all areas.

### *Developing supportive communities*

<u>Parenting behaviours and attitudes</u>

SECE-A also identified the need for community support, both broadly and specifically from parents in the home, in order to **create literate communities that support and encourage education and learning**. To facilitate this, the programme involved adult literacy and numeracy classes as well as parenting classes that addressed early childhood development activities such as health, nutrition, discipline and learning at home. In addition, radio programmes designed to inform parents and support them in encouraging children to learn both in school and at home supplemented these trainings and were broadcast across communities involved in the SECE-A programmes.

Education provided for parents under the SECE-A programme had two clear streams – parent education, targeted primarily at mothers, teaching parents to engage their children around the home without their involvement in heavy work activities, to teach their children through play, and to read through simple story books with their children. The final element worked with simple materials with limited text, but for those parents who were not able to read at all, a second stream of education was available, with the programme providing literacy classes in addition. These classes were based on the Ministry of Education's existing curriculum. Parent education and literacy classes were conducted in most areas where ECE centres for the programme were located.

Parent education programming, both literacy classes and parenting classes, had excellent feedback from beneficiary groups (and high levels of interest from control groups surveyed).

> The lessons I learnt at the training course are very useful for me and for my children. Whatever I learnt at the course I shared with my children and taught them.
> - Beneficiary Parent FGD, Bamyan

The majority of parents were aware of parent education programmes and beneficiary parents who had attended overwhelmingly (98% of respondents), found it useful or very useful. When discussed in focus groups, parents reported a wide range of key learnings, including hygiene and health, positive treatment of children (for example, treating children kindly, encouraging children, and not physically punishing children), and more broadly, the importance of education and studying for children.

Beneficiary parents reported making more efforts to support learning at home through things like reading to children, looking at picture books with them, looking at homework, and at least, for illiterate parents, making sure kids have a comfortable space to do their homework.

However, literacy rates were very similar among control and beneficiary parents – reported attendance at parent education classes did not increase the likelihood of parent ability to read and write among the beneficiary respondents surveyed. This may suggest that while parent education classes were effective, the additional literacy stream was less so.

Parent engagement with SECE-A

In terms of parent attitudes to the programme, particularly as representative of community views at large and of a 'supportive community', almost all reported ECE as useful or very useful, and were able to identify a wide range of elements that were involved in the programme, from health to literacy.

Though many simply identified it as a preschool programme, and not all noted the parent education when asked to describe it, there was very little negative feedback. What negative feedback there was primarily took the form of constructive criticism or suggestions when asked what they would change about the programme.

In response to this question, parents identified a range of changes or additional elements they would like, often in the form of physical supplies such as heaters, toys or provision of food, but also in terms of larger or better spaces for the ECE Centres – a very common piece of feedback. A need for financial support was also noted, to pay teachers in the programme and/or to make the programme long-term or wider in its reach, and continue during winter months.

Many also identified more or better teachers in their suggestions. However, there was also much concrete positive feedback about having an ECE Centre in the community, as parents identified children's education and literacy, but also safety – being in school and not on the streets – and health as reasons they supported preschools in their community.

The SECE-A programme also involved radio programming – however, while the majority of parents who had heard radio programmes found them useful (whether they had had children in ECE or participated in parent education or not), only 64% of respondents had heard the programmes. Even among beneficiary parents, only 42% had heard the radio programmes. Radio programmes were mentioned a few times in responses to the parent survey, but when directly asked about the radio programmes few respondents were aware of them, and saturation levels for the programme appear to be low.

### *Ensuring sustainability and expansion*

Parents are making up the ECE funding gap

The SECE-A programme was designed to, over the two-year life of the programme, support schools financially by working with communities to develop income-generating activities that could provide funding for schools when Dubai Cares support ended. The programme was not specific on what these activities might look like. However, for them to be sustainable options, they would need to independently generate revenue that could go to paying salaries, providing food and resources, and maintaining the physical infrastructure.

The AKF-A team, given their budget, chose to focus on implementing smaller-scale income-generating activities, and worked with communities to identify opportunities for complementary income-generating activities which were, based on resources available, unable to sustain teacher salaries and school needs on their own.

Communities suggested activities such as kitchen gardens, where the land would be provided for the community and then parents could manage it, with the yields then sold to pay teachers and support classes, or the purchase of livestock. These were reportedly implemented in locations across the three programme provinces. This form of sustainability supporting activity was somewhat unique in AKF-A's programming, which generally gives individual grants or support cooperatives. The small-scale nature of this project largely proved to be insufficient to meet the needs of the ECE centres and could not match teacher salaries in most places.

The majority of school staff and parents, when asked how ECE centres were still open, reported that either:

+ Parents were paying for their children to attend the centre, or;
+ Volunteer teachers were being used to provide classes.

Income-generating activities were not readily apparent in any schools, with only one or two reporting attempts made at such activities and in little detail, and no ongoing successes. Answers regarding sustainability of the programming indicated that most active centres had either been able to recruit volunteer teachers, or create a system of payment in order to keep schools open, with costs between 50 and 200 Afghanis cited by parents interviewed.

Though focus group discussions with parents included questions regarding how some centres had been able to sustain their activity, few respondents identified profit-making activity to support the school. Rather, what came out of the field research was overwhelmingly positive attitudes to ECE and a clear willingness on the part of parents to pay for ECE for their children.

A great indicator of this is the payment of a monthly fee, however small an amount, by parents who can barely make ends meet with their household expenditures. Parents displayed overwhelmingly positive attitudes to ECE, both control and beneficiary groups, and indicated a willingness to pay for ECE that was even higher among beneficiary parents, who have experienced the value of ECE programmes.
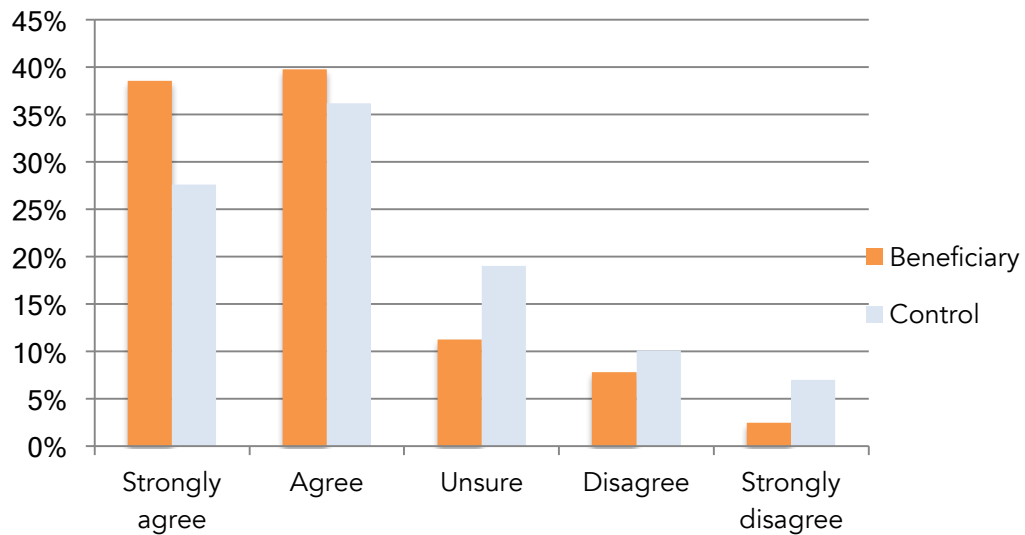
**Figure 15.** Parent willingness to pay for ECE

In fact, a few respondents said they, or their communities, were prepared to sell their crops in order to support the centre, suggesting that where households have the means, financial support for the programme would be a possibility. The fact that parents are willing to pay for this service is crucial, and an excellent indicator of community support. It also highlights the impact that the programme has had on communities more broadly, and suggests that in terms of the stated goal of developing supportive communities, the programme has had a great degree of success.

However, it is also in some ways problematic in terms of sustainability, as it does imply that continued ECE in these communities will require continued willingness, and more importantly, ability, to pay. For communities in insecure, poor regions, ability to pay may fluctuate, or easily decline due to external shocks. In some such communities, the focus group discussions demonstrated that despite several meetings and gatherings at the village level, communities were not able to agree over a fixed small amount of money to keep the centre running, which ended up in closure of those centres. Moreover, school staff when interviewed during site visits also regularly requested continued assistance or support for their preschool.

Teacher training & TRCs

The programme's final component was targeted towards creating lasting impacts, aiming to create a programme where **learning is institutionalised to enable it to be sustained and expanded**. The establishment of ECD Teacher Resource Centres (TRCs) and the provision of teacher training programmes in rural areas was central to efforts to achieve sustainable and transferable learning from the programme.

It has already been noted that training of teachers, while positively regarded, has not always yielded sustainable results. Though beneficiary teachers interviewed did report continuing to use what they have learned and displayed positive impacts from training in interviews, and teacher training programming was positively regarded by beneficiaries, feedback from parents regarding desires for better teachers or more training for teachers, and commentary on high teacher turnover in schools.

In addition, the TRCs as an element of the programme were fairly small-scale and awareness of them – and more importantly, reported use of them – was fairly low amongst teachers interviewed. Both TRCs were identified as still being active and in good condition, in large part due to ongoing support from AKF-A – the TRCs are still available to teachers in the district, though our enumerators were not able to visit the TRC in Badakhshan.[25]

Some teachers did report visiting the TRCs and borrowing books from them, and TRC staff reported good attendance at the centres, with between 15 and 20 teachers visiting each week to borrow books or study. They also reported that parents and teachers alike still visit the centres. Both TRCs said they are able to send books out to teachers who cannot reach the centre. They also previously ran both adult education classes and teacher trainings, though now post-programme these activities were reported as having declined in number or stopped despite ongoing AKF support.

Regardless, the small number of TRCs and the difficulties teachers may have had accessing them even if they were aware of them – some are far from school communities, given they are based in more central areas of the districts – suggests that while these may be positive they lack the reach required to be a valuable contribution to sustaining the programme's outcomes. The TRCs also flagged with interviewers a need for more resources, including books and Internet, despite ongoing support from AKF, and for increased community awareness of the centre.

## 4.3. Sustainable Impacts

The SECE-A programme was completed eighteen months ago, and as such, any impacts this evaluation finds have been to some degree sustainable. This evaluation assessed children now in primary school, and spoke to parents and teachers whose involvement with the programme ended over a year ago, though some still had access to resources established by the programme.

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25 Key Informant Interviews were conducted over the phone with staff at both TRCs.

For some older children their experience may have been as long as three years ago, depending on when they entered the programme and then transitioned to primary school classes.

Prior reporting and evaluations of this programme had largely positive, if qualified, findings regarding the impacts on children involved and on programme elements around capacity building and resourcing. This evaluation, then, has sought to ascertain how children who attended ECE centres are now performing in school, particularly in comparison to their peers, what knowledge and behaviours have been retained by teachers and parents, and what resources are still available to children, parents and teachers as a result of the SECE-A programme. Moreover, it has sought to assess these impacts with an understanding of the contextual challenges the programme faced, from the poor and remote regions involved, the low literacy levels of parents and the lack of resources available both in the household and educational contexts.

### 4.3.1. Sustainable impacts through early childhood education

*A visible, positive impact on beneficiary children*

Children were assessed across reading, writing and mathematics, as well as social-emotional measures. Overall, beneficiary children outperformed control children (who did not benefit from preschool attendance), and beneficiary children performed above the average across both groups, in both literacy and numeracy.
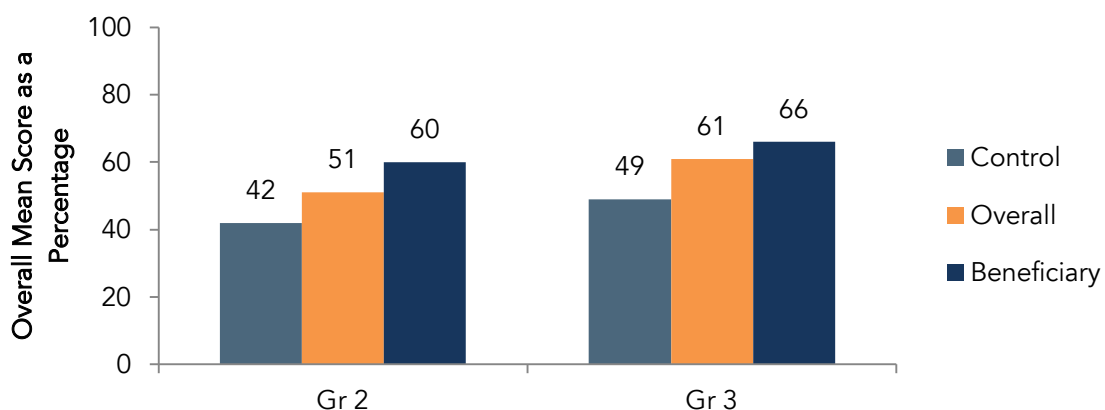


**Figure 16.** Child performance in Grades 2 & 3 – Overall Assessment Score

This difference diminishes over time: Grade 2 and Grade 3 children's performance was considered separately to ensure that a more accurate measure and to account for differences in scores between older and younger students. Grade 3 students did not uniformly perform significantly better Grade 2 children, which may suggest some fadeout of the preschool impact at this level.

However, given strong results in Grade 2, this could also indicate structural and quality issues with the schools that they attend when they graduate from preschool and decline in commitment to, or understanding of, child-friendly environments in the schools they now attend.
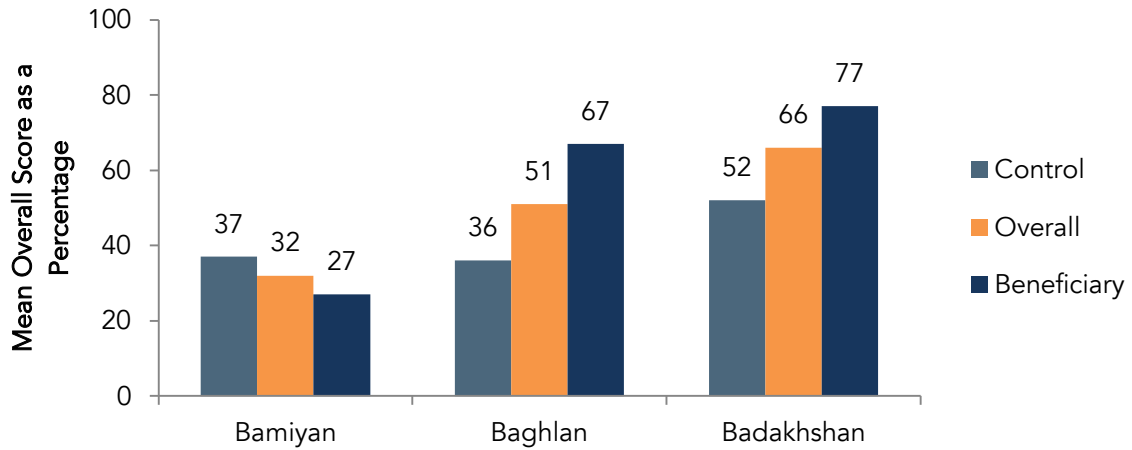


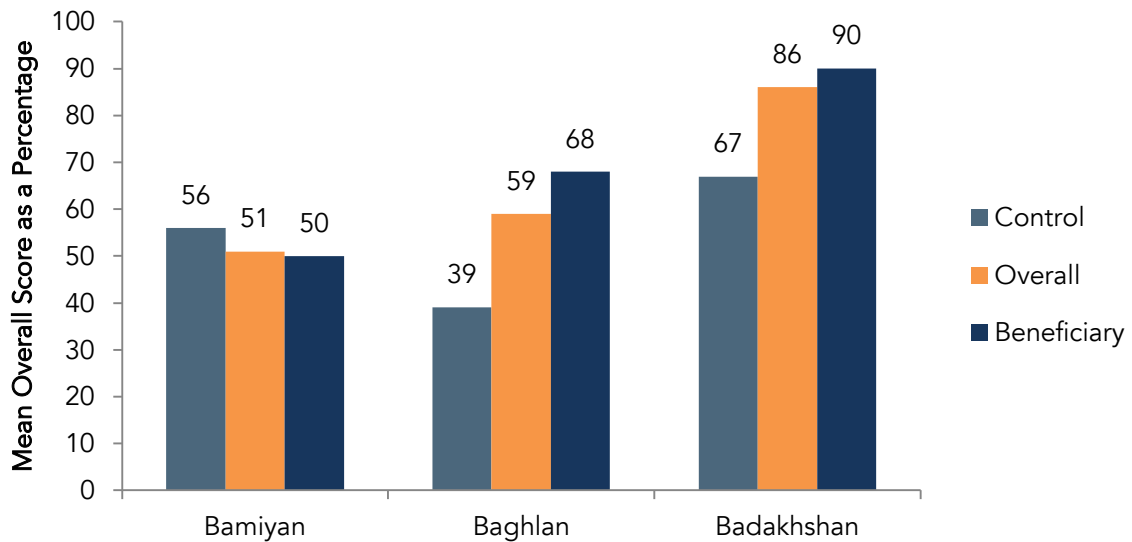**Figure 17.** Child performance by province – Overall Score for Grade 2



**Figure 18.** Child performance by province – Overall Score for Grade 3

Boys and girls displayed fairly similar performances. The most noticeable difference between boy and girl student performance was at the Grade 3 level, where girls performed significantly better than boys in both maths and literacy testing.
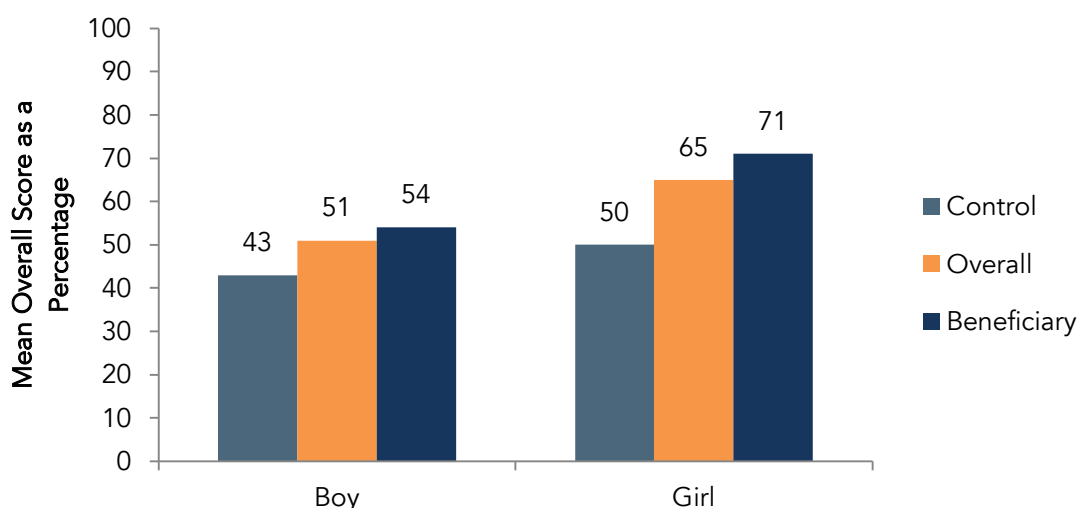
**Figure 19.** Child performance by gender – Overall Score for Grade 3

Examining the data by region highlights significant differences between provinces. While generally beneficiary children still outperformed control group children, Badakhshani children across both grades and subject areas (math and literacy), performed the best, followed by Baghlani children.

However, children from Bamyan performed quite poorly in both Grades 2 and 3 – they were generally lower on average, and in addition, beneficiary children performed poorly compared to control group children in both Grades 2 & 3, and in both literacy and math, though worse in literacy.

For all social-emotional measures, there were no significant differences between the beneficiary and control groups surveyed. All children reported positive attitudes to school, and said that they liked going to school. Most indicated that they read outside of school, and have someone that reads to them at home – interestingly, and relevant to parent outcomes, this is far more often a literate sibling than a parent. There was also an indication from children regarding their responses to negative emotions – the question "What makes you sad?" – that these are closely tied to forms of violence, though these are derived from qualitative responses that alluded to a broader sense of insecurity as well as physical violence at school or at home.

*More engaged parents*

The surveys of parents undertaken for this evaluation particularly investigated at-home learning behaviours that parents were engaging in with their children. These included play activities, like singing a song or telling a story, as well as learning or education activities like looking at homework, looking at a storybook, or counting together.
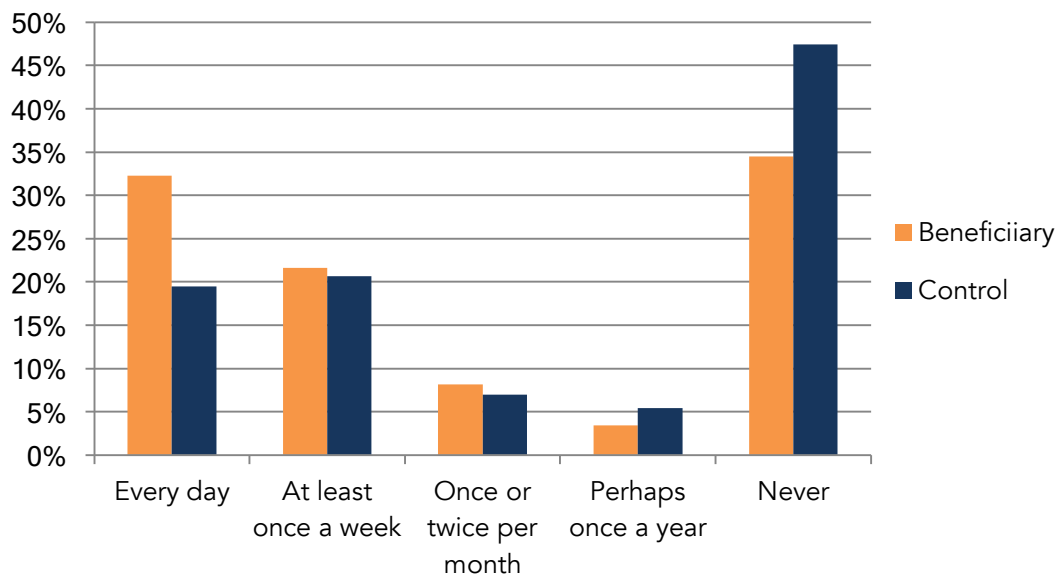
**Figure 20.** Reading at home by parents: Beneficiary v. Control

Beneficiary parents were almost always more likely to have engaged in positive at-home learning behaviours with their children, on almost every measure used. The only significant outlier in this sense was in terms of reading to children at home.
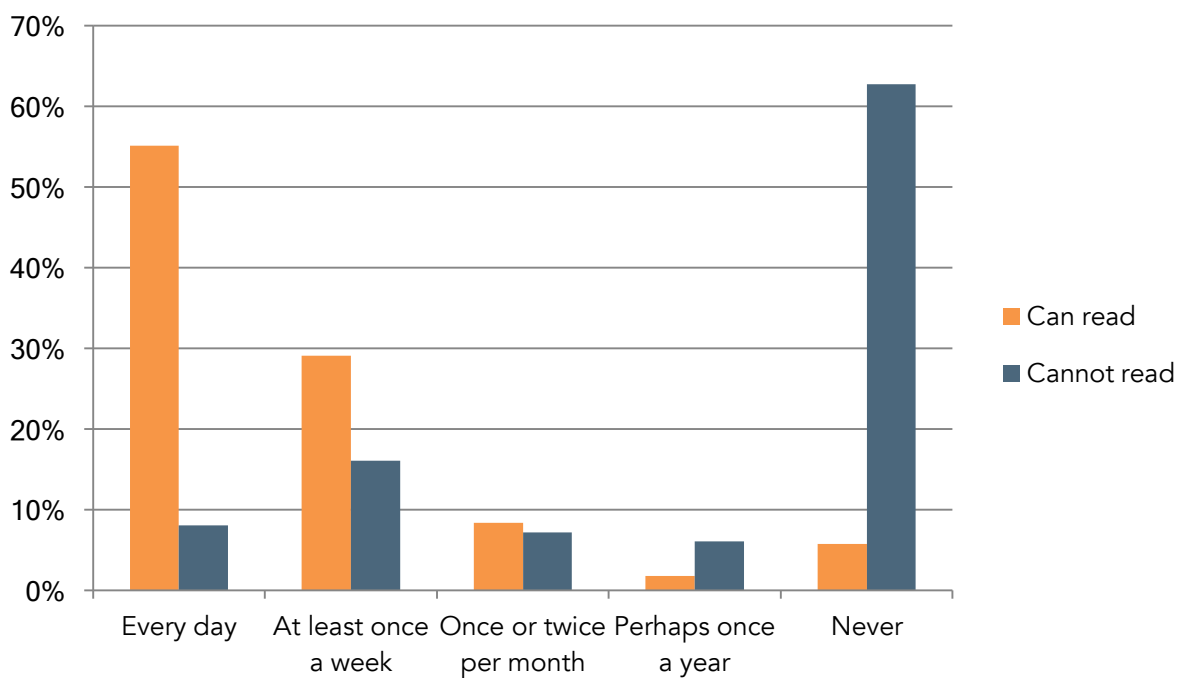


**Figure 21.** Reading at home by parents: Literate v. Illiterate

The survey found that what most strongly indicated if parents read to children was not in fact their beneficiary or control status, though beneficiary parents were more likely to look at books with their children everyday. Instead, and unsurprisingly, the strongest indicator was whether they were able to read. Ability to read and write is virtually the same between control and beneficiary groups, which suggests that while parent education classes may have had strong impacts on their willingness to engage with at-home learning, including tasks involving reading and writing, it did not have a significant impact on parent literacy. Interestingly, this finding was also supported by many children reporting that they were read to by their siblings, and usually children who reported being read to by parents also mentioned that their older brothers or sisters would read to them too.

In terms of social-emotional behaviours at home, activities do not seem to have had much impact. Parents performed similarly in control and beneficiary groups. These included questions regarding structure and routine, discipline at home and their interactions with their children, praising their children, nutrition provided at home, and other similar positive behaviours. The only significant difference noted here was in terms of sanitation and hygiene, with beneficiary parents performing about 7% higher in terms of good defecation practices.

It is also worth noting that beneficiary parents were more willing to pay for preschool for their children, but given that this figure was also high for control group parents, it is likely that community attitudes may already have been positive to the programme – though it is also possible that the observation of good performance and impacts in children attending ECE in the community may account for this high level across both groups.

*Improved teaching practices supported by materials provided*

The programme seems to have positively impacted teaching practices of beneficiary teachers. Interviewed beneficiary teachers reported learning new methods of teaching (e.g. group-work, student-centred instruction) as well as better classroom management (e.g. well-organized sessions, smooth activity flow). In addition, beneficiary teachers reported that having learned how to teach and deal with younger kids they were able to attract students' attention to a much higher degree than they were possibly able to before the training.

In terms of learning environments, in general beneficiary teachers had learning materials (i.e. posters, charts, students' works, and pictures) posted on their classroom walls more often than non-beneficiary teachers, who generally reported a lack of learning materials displayed on their classroom walls. Beneficiary teachers were aware of the advantages of posting learning materials on the classroom walls.

> *"Yes, we display learning materials on classroom walls since it encourages students to study and learn easily. This is the best method for attracting students' attention. Before this we didn't know what to do to attract their attention."*
>
> – Beneficiary Teacher FGD

The focus group discussions also found that compared to non-beneficiary teachers, beneficiary teachers invested more time in preparing child-friendly learning materials (e.g. charts, flashcards, and drawings) and using those during their classroom activities. Reading children stories was reported very high among beneficiary teachers in order to grasp kids' attention and make sure they do not get bored.

Beneficiary teachers also more frequently mentioned the value of doing group work with younger children and reported using this approach more often than not. The focus group discussions found that beneficiary teachers employed more group-work with younger children in order to make sure "all students participate".[26] Whereas beneficiary teachers reported application of a considerable amount of student-centred methods, non-beneficiary teachers still seemed to be following traditional teacher-fronted setting with little student participation, mainly through reading aloud or repetition.

### 4.3.2. Looking ahead

The SECE-A programme's impacts appear to have been sustained in many instances. In particular, the comparably better performance of beneficiary groups in surveys suggests that both parents and children have retained learning from the programme nearly two years after its completion. The continued existence of many ECE Centres and the TRCs is also a positive indication, as it reflects overwhelmingly positive community sentiments towards the programme.

Beneficiary children generally performed better academically, beneficiary parents displayed better at-home learning behaviours, and beneficiary teachers demonstrated better knowledge of child-friendly practices. However, social emotional measures for children, and in parenting attitudes, showed little difference between control and beneficiary groups, and teacher retention was often cited as a challenge. Indeed, the findings of the evaluation do not indicate sustainable outcomes across the board. While there were seventeen active ECE Centres, five centres were found inactive by enumerators (please see annexes for further details), with communities unable to bear the financial burden of preschool education, and many report under-resourcing.

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[26] Beneficiary Teacher FGD.

Similarly, many primary schools report under-resourcing. It is also clear that while teachers in primary schools have benefited from their learning on child-friendly environments that these outcomes are more likely to be unsustainable given the reported challenges of retaining teachers and need for further resources reported by TRC staff. Though beneficiary teachers did report more of these behaviours in FGDs, the performance of Grade 3 students compared to those only a year younger along with feedback from parents on quality of teachers suggests that capacity at primary schools in particular may be lower than needed to sustain the programme's outcomes more than one or two years beyond the student's transition to primary school.

### *Barriers to sustainability*

There are a numbers of issues that could be better addressed by any future iterations of the programme in light of this evaluation's findings, in order to improve the sustainability of the programme's outcomes for all beneficiary groups. Key among these are those related to the capacity of communities – including parents and local schools – to continue to support, both in terms of finance and educational expertise, the ECE Centres in their communities and the primary schools that children then transition into.

**Parent literacy** is the most significant indicator that a parent will engage with child learning at home through reading and helping with homework is literacy. While reporting of at-home learning behaviours was much higher in beneficiary groups, literacy levels were very similar for beneficiary and control groups. This is a strong finding that suggests that, as noted earlier, literacy programming was not as effective as parent education elements of the programme, and that moreover, to increase reading at-home behaviours further may require a new approach. More resources could be diverted into this element of the programme, or alternatively the focus could be shifted in part towards siblings who were routinely reported by children as one of (and sometimes the only) family member who would read to them at home.

The **financial situation of parents**, who in the survey almost always reported a willingness to pay for ECE for their children, but who may not always able to given the insecurity and poverty of the regions involved in the programme, remains a barrier to sustainability for the programme's centres. Not all communities proved able to support the centres when parents were required to pay, suggesting that while this has been a successful option in some communities, simply relying on this as a strategy for continued provision of ECE beyond the life of SECE-A limits the programme's potential for sustainability.

Income-generating projects were rarely mentioned in parent surveys and focus groups, and this element of the programme does not seem to have had much lasting success in providing sustainable financing options. While it is extremely promising that many centres have been able to survive beyond the life of the programme, it is potentially problematic that they have done so not through income-generating activities which may support long-term impacts but through more unreliable approaches.

**Parents displayed limited understanding of social-emotional aspects of child development.** While parents demonstrated good retention of at-home education behaviours and there were clear differences between beneficiary and control groups, on social emotional aspects of child development neither control nor beneficiary groups displayed deeper understandings or particularly high levels of positive behaviours. An increased focus on this element of parent education may therefore be worthwhile, and what did exist in the initial classes has proven insufficient.

**Insufficient teacher training and difficulty retaining trained staff** also appears to be a barrier to sustainable impacts, and a critical one, given how crucial the role of teachers in ECE is. Teacher training has been unevenly successful based on the findings of this evaluation. While beneficiary teachers reported more child-friendly behaviours and more knowledge of the teaching methods that SECE-A training would have imparted, it is not certain to what degree this training is then deployed in the classroom as there is no monitoring of teacher performance, or student performance by teacher. There were also a number of indications that parents considered teacher quality to be poor, and doubts from teachers, staff and parents regarding the retention of teachers – so even teachers trained in the programme may no longer be a resource, as they may have married and ceased working, moved away for study, or stopped working in teaching for whatever reason.

Finally, the **environments and resources of the primary schools** into which children transition have the potential for extreme impacts on sustainability of outcomes for children. The lower than expected difference in performance between Grade 2 and 3 children may be symptomatic of poor school structures and environments, and may exacerbate the problem of fadeout of ECE impacts.

# 5. Recommendations

The SECE-A programme has had a variety of positive and sustainable impacts on the beneficiary parents, children and teachers involved, as detailed in the previous section of this report. However, this first iteration of the SECE-A programme in the Afghan context does offer opportunities for learning for future programming.

## 5.1.  Lessons learned

**Attitudes to ECE** from parents were very positive in communities where positive impacts have been seen, even from those who did not participate in the programme, so focusing on building capacity rather than engagement may be a worthwhile shift. **The programme itself creates engagement.**

**Parent education** appears to have successfully increased adult engagement in at-home learning. This represents a programme element that could be expanded and built upon in any future programming. Conversely, there was no evidence that **parent literacy classes** had an impact on parents, with literacy levels comparable between beneficiary and control parent groups, suggesting that the approach to these should be revised.

**Distance and geography** were a challenge identified by many parents in focus groups – reaching ECEs when they were across a river or faraway was flagged multiple times as a serious challenge for their children and a concern for parents.  More numerous, smaller ECEs to increase reach may help in these provinces, particularly those where geography may be challenging.

**Radio programmes** were very well received when they had been heard, but had very low levels of reach – few beneficiaries or control groups parents or teachers had any knowledge of the programmes. Work to raise community awareness of these programmes, and to ensure that community members connect them with the SECE-A programme, would clearly be needed to improve upon the outcomes of this programme element.

The seventeen ECE centres that were still active reported a **need for more resources**, particularly stationery, as those centres which had managed to self-finance had rarely been able to divert funds to this type of expenditure when teacher salaries needed to be paid. This under-resourcing would directly impact the learning outcomes of children who attend these centres.

**Teacher Resource Centres** seem to have been fairly successful and are in good condition due to ongoing funding from AKF-A, but not all teachers were aware of them, and TRC staff themselves identified a need for greater community awareness as well as better reach to teachers. Sustainable outcomes will require the ongoing support for teacher and parent capacity that TRCs can contribute to.

**Children** who attended ECE Centres are doing better academically based on this, and previous, testing. Teachers also reported they were smarter and better students. However, improved ongoing monitoring during the life of any future programme would enable better determination of why children in some provinces appear to be underperforming, and to assess the decline in performance in Grade 3 children demonstrated, and should be integrated into any future programming.

## 5.2.  Recommendations for future programming

As the *Key Findings* section has demonstrated, the SECE-A programme has had important positive impacts on the beneficiary community involved, and overall, suggests that ECE programming in Afghanistan, while new, is a valuable and promising endeavour. However, the previous section also identified a number of challenges and lessons that should inform any future work in the early childhood space in Afghanistan, and any future iterations of the SECE-A programme. **Across all of the issues identified, there is a common theme that is the foundation for this report's key recommendation – a focus on programme outputs over programme impacts in terms of both programme design and its monitoring and evaluation.**

Dubai Cares' goal in implementing this programme was to improve primary education for children in Afghanistan by creating supportive communities, establishing and supporting good school infrastructure, and making these outcomes sustainable. Yet the ultimate desired outcome is not a supportive community or a trained teacher, though these are important enablers, but rather an educated child. What this programme measures is not impact on children's education, but a complex series of elements, which may contribute to this, but which also, may not. As such, the primary recommendation of this report is that future programming be designed, monitored and evaluated using a **learning approach**.
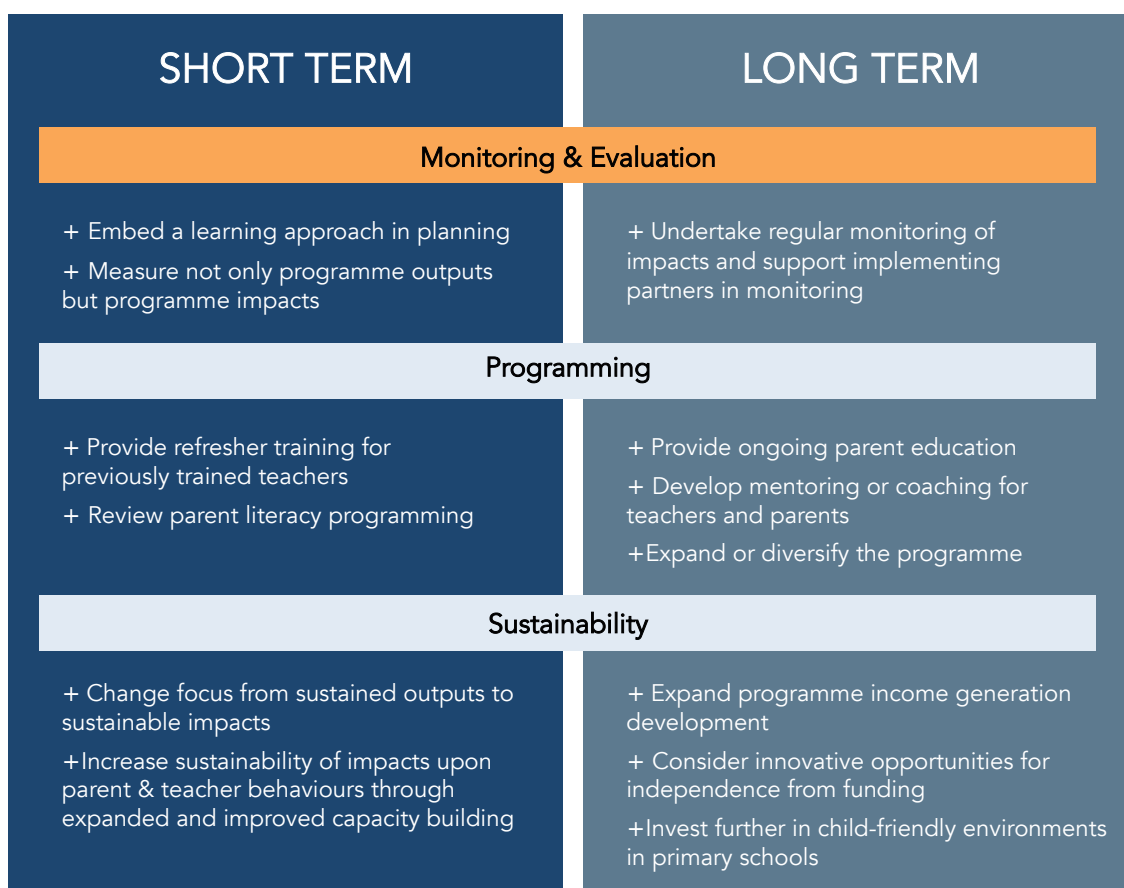
| SHORT TERM | LONG TERM |
|---|---|
| **Monitoring & Evaluation** | |
| + Embed a learning approach in planning<br>+ Measure not only programme outputs but programme impacts | + Undertake regular monitoring of impacts and support implementing partners in monitoring |
| **Programming** | |
| + Provide refresher training for previously trained teachers<br>+ Review parent literacy programming | + Provide ongoing parent education<br>+ Develop mentoring or coaching for teachers and parents<br>+Expand or diversify the programme |
| **Sustainability** | |
| + Change focus from sustained outputs to sustainable impacts<br>+Increase sustainability of impacts upon parent & teacher behaviours through expanded and improved capacity building | + Expand programme income generation development<br>+ Consider innovative opportunities for independence from funding<br>+Invest further in child-friendly environments in primary schools |

**Figure 22.** Short-term & Long-term Recommendations

A learning approach allows evaluations to inform programming during the life of the programme – compared to a more traditional, outcomes-focused monitoring and evaluation it is a holistic methodology for program design, monitoring and evaluation which shifts programming to be impact-focused rather than output-focused. As this report's findings demonstrate, measuring the number of parent literacy classes held is not a reliable indicator of parent literacy; despite these, parent literacy levels remained comparable between beneficiary and control groups.  Moreover, without shifting focus to measure impact rather than output, it is difficult to ascertain the causes of particular behaviours – for example, this report's Key Findings note that beneficiary children in Bamyan performed comparably poorly to the control group tested. Without testing of children or teachers during the life of the programme, it is impossible to know why this might be. A learning approach, however, might have discovered this at an earlier stage, and thus investigated and potentially remedied the problem, resulting in better outcomes. Additionally, a particular strength of the learning approach is also its ability to contextualise the programme – to discover, in this example, that perhaps performance in Bamyan is poorer because many teachers in that district were unable to attend training. Essentially, it allows the programme to be more responsive and to better account for the varying needs and environments of beneficiaries.

This approach will enable greater ability to ensure long-term impacts beyond the life of the programming.  A key consideration for Dubai Cares' future programming in this space should be to consider the ways in which the lessons of the SECE-A programme can be leveraged to improve not only understanding of what can be effective in early childhood education and the Afghan context, but how programming in this area can be used to provide beneficiary communities – parents, teachers and children – with a foundation for ongoing achievement in education.

### Monitoring & Evaluation

Building a monitoring and evaluation system into programme design that both measures impact and allows for the integration of learning from ongoing monitoring provides the foundation for life-changing programmes.

SHORT TERM:

+ *Embed a learning approach in the planning stages of any future iterations of the project.*

It is difficult to create opportunities to change programming in response to monitoring results when they are not enshrined in the programme life cycle – for example, identifying 'review and adapt' periods post-monitoring as a required internal process.

+ *Ensure that indicators exist to measure not only programme outputs but programme impacts and that these are part of the programme's measurement of success.*

The SECE-A programme could only indicate, for example, that radio programmes had been deployed – they did not investigate whether these changed behaviours. The programme could instead develop and deploy one episode of a programme, gather feedback on the episode, and then use it to tailor future programmes and to ensure that they have appropriate reach to target audiences.

LONG TERM:

+ *Undertake regular monitoring of impacts in any future iteration of the programme, and support implementing partners in doing so where necessary.*

Ensure that monitoring is undertaken regularly and comprehensively, and that implementing partners understand that the goal of monitoring and evaluation is to uncover important context and to look for successes to expand upon and failures to adapt, rather than to meet donor requirements.

*Programming*

There are a number of programme elements that could be amended or adapted in future iterations on the basis of this report's findings.

SHORT TERM:

+ *Provide refresher training for already trained teachers to support continued practice of child-friendly principles.*

Teacher training was clearly identified as a perceived problem area by parents and school staff alike, though in different ways – parents saw teachers as needing further training, while teachers requested further support and school staff and teachers alike noted that retention of teachers, and thus knowledge of the programme's teacher training, had been poor.

+ *Review the parent literacy programming included in SECE-A.*

The results of parent surveys suggest that literacy classes, despite positive attitudes, were not very successful, given the lack of difference in literacy levels between beneficiary and control parent groups. Investigation of why this might have been the case, or perhaps a review to improve or expand this element of programming, would be appropriate. AKF-A deployed the Ministry of Education's standard adult literacy curriculum; given the limited impact in this instance, this suggests that a new approach to the literacy programming, drawing on other or additional resources, may be useful. Alternatively, focus could be shifted to encouraging siblings to read to younger children, or after-school reading programmes, harnessing the apparent trend in findings that children were often read to at home but usually by another child.

LONG TERM:

+ *Create ongoing parent education in communities, using ECE Centres or TRCs.*

Parent education appeared to have had very positive impacts on beneficiary parents given the at-home learning behaviours they reported in comparison to control groups. The high impact of, and positive attitudes to, this programming suggests further impacts may be possible, or that these impacts could be expanded if focus in these classes was shifted to social-emotional development aspects where beneficiary and control parents displayed similar behaviours.

**+** *Develop mentoring or coaching for teachers and parents.*

Further to aims to focus on impact rather than outputs, mentoring or coaching for teachers and parents – though evidently with different focuses – could be a way to not only build upon existing learning in these groups from previous programming rather than repeating previous training, but also a means of monitoring behaviours in these groups in a way that provides ongoing opportunities for learning.

**+** *Expand or diversify the programme rather than simply renewing it.*

Expansion or diversification rather than replication should be considered a strong option for future iterations of SECE-A. Parents in a number of areas identified accessibility as an issue, suggesting there may be call for expanding reach by building new ECEs and bring child-friendly environments to new primary schools. However, diversifying the programme, possibly through some of the recommendations made within this section of the report such as new methods of community support and capacity building, would also be beneficial. Essentially, the programme can seek to build upon the stronger programme elements and the impacts that have been sustained, and also potentially to take these to new locations whilst simultaneously improving upon identified issues.

### *Sustainability*

First and foremost, drawing upon the key recommendations regarding a change in approach to programme design, monitoring and evaluation, thinking about sustainability can be shifted to include not only sustainable outcomes but also sustainable impacts. In addition, however, there are a number of areas (see also the earlier section on 'Barriers to Sustainability') that, if addressed, have the potential to increase programme sustainability.

**SHORT TERM:**

**+** *Change focus from sustained outputs to sustainable impacts.*

Support the use of a learning approach by shifting to considering the sustainability of programme impacts – for example, how much better is the performance of students who complete ECE before primary school? – rather than programme outputs.

+ *Improve the sustainability of impacts upon parent and teacher behaviours through expanded and improved capacity building.*

A focus on teachers and parents as enablers of improvements in student performance and retention can enable sustainable impacts not only for the children involved in the programme, but more broadly for communities whose children will be raised or taught by parents who received training, mentoring, coaching or other forms of education and support. Changes in attitude to child development, particularly for young parents or early-career teachers, could result in positive impacts that last as long as a teacher's career or are passed down to children.

LONG TERM:

+ *Expand programme elements that sought to create income generation opportunities and clarify their expected capacity to support future programming*

While it was a stated outcome of the SECE-A programme, little evidence of income generation schemes was found in the course of research for this report. While the continued activity of many ECE Centres and the willingness to finance this on the part of parents is positive, reliance on the ability of parents to pay for ECE could become a considerable vulnerability of the programme, particularly in poor, rural areas like those involved in SECE-A where a lean harvest or abnormally cold winter could significantly diminish families' capacity to pay. Moreover, AKF-A noted that the low budget for these activities in comparison to the costs of two teacher salaries in each ECE centre was a challenge, and it may be that further consideration of the level of investment needed for an income-generating activity able to support two teacher salaries on an ongoing basis is required to ensure that the project's resources are appropriate to the goal.

+ *Consider innovative opportunities for independence from donor or government funding.*

Given the current climate of uncertainty regarding aid and development funding, and Afghanistan's ongoing economic and political insecurity, the more independence ECE Centres have in terms of funding, the more likely they may be to survive.

Highly positive attitudes to ECE in communities visited and strong reported willingness to pay for schools, and in some instances the ability of communities to source and support volunteer teachers, suggest that working to give communities tools to fund ECE Centres independently should be a priority and could be a great success

+ *Invest further in child-friendly environments in primary schools.*

If poor resourcing at schools is diminishing continued performance, then this is an important enabler of the long-term goal of improved school performance and moreover, completion of primary school and retention to secondary level.

# 6. Conclusion

This report demonstrates that the Dubai Care's Strengthening Early Childhood Education – Afghanistan (SECE-A) programme has had positive and sustained impacts on the communities involved, in Bamyan, Baghlan and Badakhshan, and in particular for child performance in primary school and parent adoption of at-home learning and early childhood development behaviours. The programme, which over two years provided funding for the establishment of sustainable ECE Centres, the development of supportive communities and the creation of child-friendly environments in schools, was able to perform well against planned outcomes during its life, and evaluation nearly two years after programme end suggests that many of those outcomes were sustainable. In Afghanistan's challenging context, where education remains an area of focus where continued and growing support is needed, these findings are a valuable addition to the understanding of ECE, and its potential to improve outcomes for Afghan children could be powerful, as growing recognition of its importance is becoming evident in communities and at government level.

However, there are lessons to be learned for the future of ECE programming, or any further iteration of the SECE-A project. First, a move towards impact-focused learning approach to programme design, monitoring and evaluation would greatly benefit future programming. In order to deeply understand and thereby increase the positive impacts that ECE can have on children, the focus for future programming must shift to looking to impacts rather than outputs as measure of programme success. Outputs remain an important element of programme design, but impacts – an educated parent or a child still in school – must be central. In addition, these impacts must be monitored during the life of the programme in a way that allows for adaptation, correction and improvement where challenges, or opportunities, are discovered. Moreover, future ECE programming would benefit from looking to review and adapt elements of the SECE-A which were less successful – for example, looking to retain and support teachers throughout and after the programme, or engaging with communities to ensure awareness of radio programmes – and to potentially expand programme elements that clearly had positive impacts, such as parent education classes.

The SECE-A programme is a promising foundation for future ECE programming in Afghanistan. Taking into account the findings and recommendations of this report would enable Dubai Cares to build upon SECE-A to create more sustainable programming with even greater impacts, and thereby support Afghan children through improved access to quality education.

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# Annexes

## Annex A: Website Details

Samuel Hall has created a <u>Dubai Cares SECE-A Evaluation website</u>, as agreed, to act as an online repository of information for the evaluation data and tools. The website will belong to Dubai Cares and may be shared as deemed appropriate.



It can be found at the following link:

<u>https://sites.google.com/a/samuelhall.org/sece-a/</u>

## Annex B: Detailed Methodology

Samuel Hall developed its methodology for this evaluation to harness both qualitative and quantitative data from an appropriately sized sample of beneficiary groups - including teachers, parents, children and other community stakeholders - across a cross-section of the communities where programmes were implemented, and to enable comparisons through the use of a control group.[27] Enumerators were trained in the use of research tools in sessions in both Kabul and in Badakhshan, to ensure enumerators understood the programme and our methodology before taking tools into the field. Pilot testing was also conducted both in Kabul and in Fayzabad to ensure the team's familiarity with the research tools in a practical setting and to identify any potential issues before the deployment of teams to the field.[28] Fieldwork teams visited the following locations during the fieldwork phase of the evaluation in late November, as outlined in the previous Field Report.

| | | ECD Centres[29] | "Hub" primary schools |
|---|---|---|---|
| BADAKHSHAN | Baharak | Toghak | Dasht-e-Ferakh GHS |
| | | Ko-e-Daraz | Baharak GHS |
| | | Panjeryan | |
| | Jurm | Sar-e-Chawk | Sayeed Ahmad Mushtaq |
| | | Dashtak-e-Bala | Ghayasi HS |
| | | Naw-e-Jurm Bala | Sayed Mazari MHS |
| BAGHLAN | Doshi | Mahtab | Doshi GS |
| | | Sadaad | Hazrat Ali |
| | | Sadaf | Ustad Aaynudin HS |
| | Khinjan | Zuhal / Mushtary | Khinjan GS |
| | | Zohra | |
| | Pul-e-Khomri | Dunya | Fatemat-ul-Zahra |
| | | Etifaq | Bibi Ayesha |
| | | Frogh | Khorasan |
| BAMYAN | Bamyan | Gorvana | Bamyan Centre GHS |
| | | Deh Paian Sayed Abad | Haidar Abad HS |
| | | Now Abad Lalakhil | Molayan HS |
| | | Zer Mazar Lalakhil | Tiboti HS |
| | | | Lala Khil |
| | Shibar | Sangag | Gharghara GHS |
| | | Qalay Gholi | Eraq BMS |
| | | Della | Eraq GMS |
| | | Zay Mahmood | Sar-e-shibar MMS |
| | | Bibi Khajida | |

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[27] Control groups were interviewed or surveyed for all groups, excepting for site visits and attached key informant interviews with school staff and community members.

28 For further detail on the pilot testing, please see the Pilot Report.

29 ECE Centres highlighted in red were found to be inactive by field teams.

Samuel Hall collaborated closely with implementing partners Aga Khan Foundation Afghanistan (AKF-A) to develop a list of locations where active ECE Centres established by the SECE-A programme could be visited, and of attached hub schools where children who had previously attended these ECE Centres could be located to be interviewed and assessed.

**Research Tools**

Research was conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research tools to both provide clear performance assessments using survey tools, but also valuable context through focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs).

<u>Quantitative Research Tools</u>

All quantitative data was collected by enumerators in field locations using Open Data Kit (ODK), entered on smartphones and regularly uploaded for review and analysis by the project team in Kabul.

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent Survey | Investigating the parenting behaviours of both beneficiary and non-beneficiary parents, in order to assess the impact of parent education conducted as part of the SECE-A programme, and more broadly, to understand parent attitudes to ECE |
| Child Survey | Assessing both baseline performances for early grade primary school children in Afghanistan who have not attended ECE, and for those children who were beneficiaries in the SECE-A programme and attended ECE centres funded by the programme. |
| Site Survey | Capturing data on the individual ECE Centres in order to contribute to an understanding of the resources available to students and of the sustainability of the programme. |

<u>Qualitative Research Tools</u>

Qualitative data was collected by enumerators in the field during visits to ECE centres and hub school villages, as outlined in the Field Report.

| | |
|---|---|
| Focus Group Discussions | Explored what teachers and parents knew of early childhood education, their attitudes towards the SECE-A programme, what they may have learned from the programme, and what they saw as key impacts on children. |
| Parent & Child Surveys | Incorporated qualitative elements that sought to capture additional data on attitudes to ECE and on the sustainability of programme impacts. Site Observation Surveys also included minor qualitative elements to provide useful context for quantitative analysis. |
| Key Informant Interviews | Conducted where possible with school staff or community members to aid in creating a broader picture of local attitudes to, and support for, ECE programmes. |

## Research Sampling

As noted earlier in this report, sampling plans were devised in order to ensure both sufficient base for comparison between beneficiary and control groups, and to provide a cross-section of the communities involved in the SECE-A programme by visiting all accessible active locations. The fieldwork team conducted a total of 1225 surveys, 20 key informant interviews and 40 focus group discussions.

Quantitative parent and child survey final sample sizes resulting from the fieldwork data collection are outlined in the tables following.  Fieldwork teams interviewed 576 parents and 610 children, including both beneficiary and control respondents across Badakhshan, Baghlan and Bamyan. Child survey sampling plan targets were met overall, though parent survey numbers were slightly below targets.

Final Child & Parent Survey Sample

| | Parent Surveys | | | Child Surveys | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Beneficiary | Non-beneficiary | Total | Beneficiary | Non-beneficiary | Total |
| **BADAKHSHAN** | 85 | 78 | 179 | 118 | 81 | 199 |
| Baharak | 50 | 60 | 110 | 60 | 40 | 100 |
| Jurm | 35 | 33 | 68 | 58 | 41 | 99 |
| **BAGHLAN** | 120 | 86 | 206 | 121 | 86 | 208 |
| Pul-e-Khumri | 52 | 38 | 90 | 53 | 36 | 90 |
| Doshi | 51 | 36 | 87 | 52 | 37 | 89 |
| Khinjan | 17 | 12 | 29 | 16 | 13 | 29 |
| **BAMYAN** | 114 | 78 | 192 | 121 | 82 | 203 |
| Bamiyan | 55 | 37 | 92 | 62 | 42 | 104 |
| Shibar | 59 | 41 | 100 | 59 | 40 | 99 |

Quantitative site observation survey final sample sizes resulting from the fieldwork data collection are as shown below.

**Final Site Visit Survey Sample**

|  | ECE Centre | Primary School | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **BADAKHSHAN** | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| Baharak | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Jurm | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| **BAGHLAN** | 8 | 7 | 15 |
| Doshi | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| Khinjan | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Pul-e-Khumri | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| **BAMYAN** | 10 | 5 | 15 |
| Bamiyan | 6 | 4 | 10 |
| Shibar | 4 | 1 | 5 |

Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were conducted by field teams across the provinces in order to gather information on community attitudes and to provide qualitative data from teachers, parents and other school staff and community members on the SECE-A programme and its outcomes.

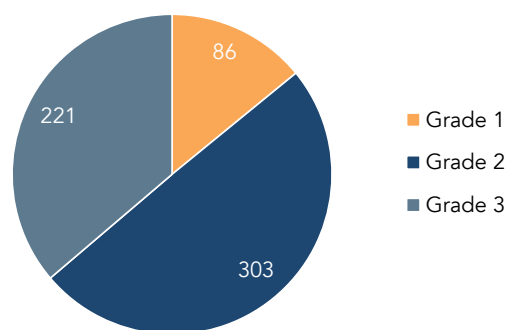**Final Focus Group Discussions & Key Informant Interviews**

|  | Beneficiary parents | Non-beneficiary parents | Beneficiary teachers | Non-beneficiary teachers | Key informant interviews |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Badakhshan | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 8 |
| Baghlan | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 6 |
| Bamyan | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 6 |
| TOTAL | 10 | 10 | 12 | 8 | 20 |

# Annex C. Respondent Profiling

## Respondents: Children

610 children were surveyed across the three provinces, including 249 control group children and 360 beneficiary children.[30] 34% of children surveyed were male, and 66% were female. The majority were aged 8 years old and were attending Grade 2 at the time of the survey.

**School grade of child survey respondents**
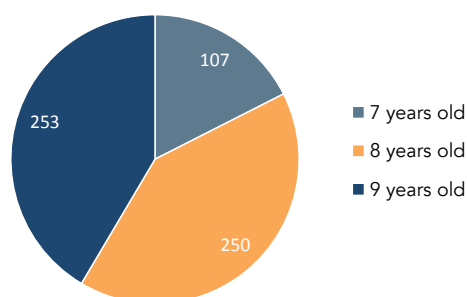


It was also noted that 9% of children surveyed had repeated Grade 1 of school. Almost all spoke Dari at home, with a very small number – less than 1% – speaking other languages, including Pashto. Most reported reading activities at home, with parents or siblings reading to them.
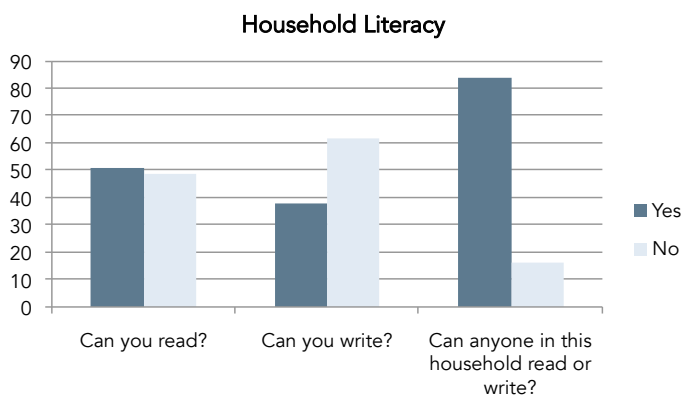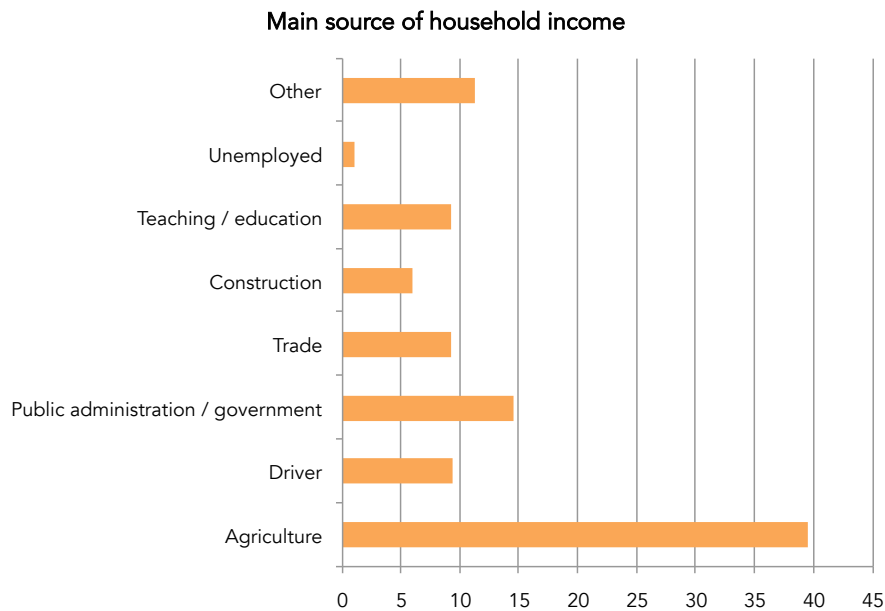
**Age of child survey respondents**



## 3.3. Respondents: Parents

577 parents were surveyed across the programme locations in Badakhshan, Baghlan and Bamyan, including 319 beneficiary respondents and 242 control respondents.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Average age of parent survey respondents* | 35 |
| *Average number of children under 18 living in the household* | 4 |
| *Average number of people living in the household* | 7 |
| *Average number of people contributing to household income* | 1 |

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[30] Please note that in some cases numbers for child interview responses may not equal the total number surveyed, as for almost all questions respondents were given the option to refuse to answer.

Parents were largely employed in agricultural sector activities, in line with the general labour profiles of the rural provinces surveyed, but households also displayed a range of other income types, including teaching, construction, transport, and public administration or government roles.

**Main source of household income**



Household literacy levels were above average for Afghanistan, perhaps to some degree reflective of the literacy programmes attached to the SECE-A programme, but possibly also linked to the higher likelihood that educated parents will send their children to school.

**Household Literacy**



Education levels for survey respondents were low, with over 40% of respondents having received no formal education, though many households had members with higher than average levels of education.

**Level of Education**

## Annex D: Research Questions

| Criteria | Questions | Sources of verification |
|---|---|---|
| *Relevance* | ● How relevant is the programme in the Afghan context, especially given its focus on gender equality? How do the outcomes compare to the effort expended / inputs needed?<br>● How well does the programme tie in with the many other educational programmes active in Afghanistan in recent years? | Desk Review, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). |
| *Effectiveness* | ● Have the objectives of the intervention as laid out in the planning documents been achieved, and *can outcomes still be ascertained eighteen months after the programme has come to a close*?<br>  o Establishing and supporting pre-schools through equipment, facilitator training, shura establishment and income generation;<br>  o Creating conducive and effective learning environments in early primary grades through training of teachers, school management staff and wider community stakeholders;<br>  o Developing supportive communities through adult literacy and numeracy classes, parenting classes and radio programmes;<br>  o Ensuring sustainability and expansion through ECE Teacher Resource centres and income-generating activities designed to sustain ECE centres beyond the duration of direct financial assistance. | KIIs, ECE centre and school observations, parent, teacher and child questionnaires. |
| *Impact after 18 months* | ● What has been the overall impact of the intervention on the beneficiary children in terms of academic achievement and behaviours / attitudes compared to a control group?<br>● What has been the programme's effect on the parents, both those benefiting from additional support (such as literacy and parenting classes, those exposed to radio programming) and those who did not? In particular, what was the programme's effect on parents' attitudes towards their children's educational needs?<br>● What has been the effect on the teachers, both at pre-school and early primary level? Are they sensitive to the emotional and learning needs of young students? How do they compare to peers who did not benefit from the programme on key skills / teaching approaches taught by SECE-A?<br>● What has been the effect of engaging with CDCs and community volunteers for planning, implementation and management?<br>● What, if any are the key differentiating factors on results?<br>● What, if any, contextual challenges did the programme face, and how did AKF respond to them? | KIIs, background research, site observations, qualitative and quantitative interrogations of both beneficiaries (parents, teachers, children) and a control group of non-beneficiaries. |
| *Sustainability after 18 months* | ● What remains of the programme's outcomes 18 months after cessation of donor support? Do parents, teachers and children who benefited from SECE-A still retain and use the acquired skills?<br>● What are the prospects for sustainability of the initiative with regards to institutional capacity? | KIIs, background research, site observations, qualitative and quantitative |

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| • Are the individual outcomes of SECE-A sustainable?<br>• Can any barriers to sustainability be identified and addressed at this point?<br>• What lessons can be learned for the future of this initiative? | interrogations of both beneficiaries (parents, teachers, children) and a control group of non-beneficiaries. |

# Annex E: SECE-A Programme Outcomes

| Component | Activity | Outcome | KPIs (Dec 2013) | Impact | KPIs (Jan 2015) | Impact |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Establishing & Supporting Pre-schools** | Establish and support new preschools, undertaking essential rehabilitation and WASH requirements | Children in remote areas have increased access to education | 45 of the 45 New Preschools Established | Too early to report | 45 of 45 new ECDs established | 1. Communities/parents see the "global" benefits of education- to be reported in the final report. |
| | Equip and support existing preschools | | 55 of the 55 Existing pre-schools supported | | 55 of 55 existing ECDs supported | |
| | | | Target: 3,200 (1,600 girls) To date: 2,227 children of which 1,219 are girls | | To date 4,294 children (1,658 girls) or 3,200 children (1,600 girls) attend new pre-schools. | 2. Higher enrolment rate at primary schools- to be reported in the final report. |
| | Provide training to pre-school teachers | | 90 of the 200 required pre-school teachers have been trained. | | 200 of 200 pre-school teachers have received training | |
| | Establish and support ECD school shuras | | 42 of 45 ECD school shuras have been established and are being supported | | 42 of the 45 SSAs established and are being supported | 3, Future MoE policy informed by AKF experience in pre-school model and teacher training programmes- to be reported in final report. |
| | Income generation possibilities explored and established | | Piloting On-going | | Pilot of viable income generation projects is ongoing. | |
| **Create Conducive & Effective Learning Environments Grades 1-2** | School makes physical and organization changes to create learner-conducive and child friendly environments | Children in early primary grades (gr1-2) in government schools receive a solid foundation in literacy and numeracy in a welcoming and learner-conducive environment. | 0 of the 70 respective schools made physical and organizational changes to create conducive learning environments | Too early to report | 70 of the 70 schools made physical and organisational changes to create child friendly environments. | 1. Improved retention and attendance rates for students in early grades- to be reported on in final report. |
| | Teachers, school management, school inspectors and wider community receive training in child- friendly techniques and concepts | | 0 of 200 teachers, school management, school inspectors have been trained in child friendly techniques and concepts | | 180 of 200 teachers , school management staff, school inspectors and wider community stakeholders are trained in child-friendly schools | 2. Improved school survival across primary school - to be reported on in final report. |
| | | | 0 of the 5,000 (2,000 girls) show improved learning results in learner achievement studies | | O of 5,000 learners (2,000 girls) show improved learning results in learner achievement studies | |
| | Teachers trained in methodologies to teach literacy and numeracy are more effective | | 0 of the 140 teachers train in effective literacy and numeracy methodologies | | 121 teachers are trained in effective literacy and numeracy methodologies in Year 2. To date 289 of 140 teachers trained | 3. Ethos of "child friendliness" spreads across whole school- to be reported on in final report. |
| **Developing Supportive Communities** | Adult literacy and numeracy classes take place in pre- school communities | The development of literate communities in which education and learning is encouraged within the whole community is supported | 45 of the 45 literacy classes established | Too early to report | To date 55 of 45 literacy classes are established. In Year 2, 15 literacy classes established. | 1. Parents engaged with their children's learning more actively. |
| | | | 200 women of the targeted 1,350 adults (945 women) received literacy training | | 1,257 women of the targeted 1,350 adults (360 men and 945 women) receive literacy training | |
| | Parenting classes arranged in communities with pre-schools | | 6 of 45 parenting classes are established | | 56 of 45 parenting classes are established | |
| | | | 106 of the 900 adults (540 women) received parenting training | | To date, 1,969 of the 900 adults (1,296 women) receive parenting training. | 2. Increased interest from communities in school attendance and retention. |
| | Radio programs designed and broadcast to support the learning of children and their parents | | 0 of the 10 radio programs produced and broadcasted | | 10 radio programmes produced and broadcasted. | |
| **Ensuring Sustainability & Expansion** | Establish ECD resource Centers | Learning from the program is institutionalized to enable the learning to be sustained and expanded to others | 2 of 2 ECD Teacher Resource centers established | Too early to report | 2 ECD Teacher Resource Centres established | 1. A greater understanding and broader acceptance of the advantage of pre-school education- to be reported in the final |
| | | | 0 of 200 teachers benefiting from the ECD TRCs | | 99 of the 100Teachers benefit from the C+ECD TRCs | |
| | Impact study conducted on impact of pre- schools in child learning and development | | Study not completed - 0 findings disseminated | | Study to be finalised by the end of the project. | 2. Greater work opportunities for women in rural communities- to be reported in the final report. |
| | Teacher training program designed for potential pre- school teachers in rural areas | | | | Programme completed and shared with government | |

دبي العطاء

Dubai **Cares**