

Case Study Series

**HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING
AND SCHOOL ENROLMENT
IN AFGHANISTAN**

**CASE STUDY 1:
Chahar Asyab District,
Kabul Province**

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About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

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Glossary

Afghanis/Afs	Afghan unit of currency; ~50 Afghanis = US\$1
<i>chador</i>	traditional piece of cloth worn by Afghan women over clothes, revealing only the hands and face
<i>chadri</i>	an all-covering pleated garment which covers a woman from head to toe; a small netted area around the eyes allows her to see (also <i>burqa</i>)
<i>jerib</i>	unit of land measurement; approximately one fifth of a hectare
madrassa	religious school
<i>malik</i>	community leader
<i>mujahedin</i>	fighters in the <i>jihad</i> , or holy war
mullah	religious teacher, mosque prayer leader
<i>tandoor</i>	clay oven
<i>woliswali</i>	district centre

Acronyms

AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DEO	District Education Officer
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
IDP	internally displaced person
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	non-government organisation
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
NSS	National Surveillance System
SDF	Sanayee Development Foundation
TISA	Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

1. Introduction

This report presents findings from a qualitative study on education conducted by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) in four sites in Afghanistan: two urban and two rural. This is a case study of two neighbouring villages in Chahar Asyab District, Kabul Province.¹ The key questions the study sought to answer were:

- Why do some households decide to send their children to school, while others do not?
- Why do some children in a household go to school, while others in the same household do not?
- Why do some children stay in school, while others drop out?

The household, defined here as a group of people living and eating together, was the basic unit of analysis for the enquiry. In-depth focus on the household allowed for careful examination of its complex internal dynamics, including decision-making processes and resource allocation, which may be either cooperative or conflicting in nature. Decisions about children's school enrolment (both sons and daughters) and other important topics were explored in detail. In addition to intra-household relationships, the unit within the context of the community was also considered through the study of inter-household social networks and community decision-making, with emphasis upon the role of education, available schooling options and perceived needs.

The primary focus was on demand-related issues in education (e.g. desire for girls' education), while also looking at some important supply-side issues (e.g. school location). This approach generated valuable insights in which typical Afghan villagers in Chahar Asyab – men, women and children – presented their own detailed analyses of their life situations.

A study concerning education in Afghanistan today must also deal with the specific strategies of households as they attempt to cope with the many recent changes in their lives. In the sample group from Chahar Asyab were returned internally displaced persons (IDPs), along with returned refugees from Pakistan. Currently their strategies may or may not include seeking education for their children (of differing gender and age). Indeed, as Afghanistan struggles to rebuild, a successful Back-to-School campaign in 2002 (1381) has resulted in a striking total of 4.3 million children now enrolled in grades 1–12. However, some 2.5 million school-aged boys and girls are still not enrolled.² What are the reasons, often complex and multiple, for these differences?

¹ The three other research sites for this study included both urban and rural settings: Pul-i-Khushk (District 13), Kabul City; a village in Belcheragh District of Faryab Province; and District 2 in Kandahar City. Case studies are available for each of these sites.

² *Securing Afghanistan's Future: Accomplishments and the Strategic Path Forward* (Technical Annex/Education), Kabul: TISA and International Agencies, 2004. Education is compulsory to grade 9 (*The Constitution of Afghanistan*, Article 43, 2003/1382).

2. Methodology

The study undertaken was qualitative, and its purpose was to gain in-depth understanding of household decision-making and school enrolment in rural Chahar Asyab. A small sample of households was chosen, not a large random sample as would be used in quantitative research. Rather than using an interview form with coded responses, this research used open-ended questions and answers. And rather than undergoing statistical analysis, the resulting data were examined for common themes or qualities, and a descriptive report was prepared.

A number of recent quantitative studies have collected data with which to examine the topic of enrolment of Afghan children in school. These include the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA).³ Data presented in this series of case studies provide in-depth insights which complement these quantitative analyses.

In carrying out this study in Chahar Asyab, the AREU education team coordinated closely with the Sanayee Development Foundation (SDF), an Afghan NGO currently active in the area of education in the district.⁴ Over the past four years SDF has established nine village-based girls' schools in Chahar Asyab, and their contacts in these villages proved invaluable. With their staff's participation, a training workshop in qualitative research methodology was conducted by the AREU education team⁵ prior to fieldwork, and selected SDF staff members⁶ were seconded to AREU to participate in data collection for the study.

After meeting with the District Education Officer's (DEO) staff in Chahar Asyab, it was decided that the village of Chil Dokhtaran, in which SDF had a functioning girls' primary school, would be the research site. Fieldwork was carried out during March–April 2005. According to the research design, a purposive sample of 12 households was sought out in Chil Dokhtaran containing the following:

- Four households in which *all* children of school age⁷ were enrolled in school;
- Four households in which *some* children of school age were enrolled in school; and
- Four households in which *no* children of school age were enrolled in school.

With the assistance of the community leader (*malik*), numerous households were contacted. However, it quickly became apparent that the required sample of households could not be included in the sample if only the village of Chil Dokhtaran was included. Strikingly, there was no household in the village in which no children of school age were enrolled in school – all units had at least one child in school. In

³ *Moving Beyond Two Decades of War: Progress of Provinces* (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003 Afghanistan), CSO and UNICEF: Kabul, 2003; *Results and Discussion of Education Data Collected in the Afghanistan National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2003*, WFP, APEP/USAID, Save the Children USA: Kabul, 2005.

⁴ SDF's primary focus is in education; it also works in the areas of peace building, income generation, health, capacity building and community mobilisation.

⁵ The AREU education team leaders were Saghar Wafa and Baser Nader. Saghar Wafa was the team leader for the Chahar Asyab fieldwork. Other members of the AREU team were Fauzia Rahimi and Hadi Akbari. Overall management of the project was by Gulbadan Habibi and Pamela Hunte. Jeaniene Spink compiled the training manual for this work and made initial contacts with the Ministry of Education and partner NGOs.

⁶ SDF staff participants were Farida Harooni and Haji Abdul Oduz.

⁷ For this study the term "school age" is defined liberally and includes children and youth from 7–18 years of age. Due to the years of conflict and the fact that many individuals have missed years of schooling in the past, students' ages do not always correspond to their grades.

addition, units in which *all* children were enrolled in school were few. It was decided to include the nearby village of Daag in the research in order to broaden the characteristics of the sample. After extensive searching, the final sample contained 13 households: two units with *all* children in school and 11 units with *some* children in school.

Each participating household's male and female members were visited by a team of two men and two women field researchers (respectively), facilitating the collection of necessarily detailed qualitative data. While one researcher asked open-ended questions and kept the conversation going smoothly, his or her team member took extensive field notes. Following each conversation, lengthy field reports were prepared from each in-depth discussion which contained information concerning complex household social dynamics and decision-making, along with important economic data, the unit's migratory history during recent decades of war, degree of female mobility, hopes for the future and other information. Repeat visits were made to a selected sub-sample of six households to follow up on specific topics and explore additional topics. In summary, the research explored villagers' livelihoods, specifically the degree to which education plays a role in their complex survival strategies.

To guide the conversations, a series of discussion topic outlines was used. In addition to daily participant observation and numerous walks through the district, the following fieldwork was undertaken in Chahar Asyab District.

Individual discussions with:

- The DEO's staff in Chahar Asyab centre
- The *maliks* of the two villages of Chil Dokhtaran and Daag
- 13 households (eight from Chil Dokhtaran and five from Daag):
 - Discussions with men, women, and children
 - Six households with repeated visits

Focus group discussions with:

- Village elders of Chil Dokhtaran
- Teachers (male) of Chil Dokhtaran Primary School
- Students (male) of Chil Dokhtaran Primary School

As indicated from the range of respondents, this study focused particularly on demand issues in education, while also not forgetting important supply issues in education. The study's findings and concluding recommendations will help to guide current plans by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to make improvements to teacher training, curricula, outreach/media messages and other undertakings in the area of education.

3. The Research Setting

3.1 Location

The district of Chahar Asyab in Kabul Province lies directly south of the capital of Kabul, separated from the city by a mountain range. The main highway from eastern Kabul cuts south past Bala Hissar and through the district on the way to the neighbouring Logar Province. It is on this highway approximately 25 kilometres from Kabul that the town of Chahar Asyab, the district centre (*woliswali*), is located. Another smaller but much-travelled road stretching west from the town towards Darulaman also links the area to the western side of Kabul City. The area of Chil Dokhtaran is about five kilometres south of Chahar Asyab centre, with a gravel road connecting the communities to the paved highway.

3.2 History

This study's communities have a long and colourful history – for centuries the area has seen the movement of armies and traders between the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan. For example, during the Third Anglo-Afghan War of 1879–1880, General Fredrick Roberts, leader of the British troops, passed through Chahar Asyab during his march on Kabul and his men made note of the low hills, irrigated fields and many orchards near the village of Chil Dokhtaran.⁸ More recently, and often noted by respondents in this study, the army of Nadir Shah also passed through Chahar Asyab on its way to successfully taking Kabul from Bacha Saqau in 1929. Entering Afghanistan from the south through Thal and Padachinar, Nadir employed many Pashtun (Mengal) mercenaries from what was then British India along the way. Following his victory and assumption of leadership of Afghanistan, King Nadir Shah (1929–1933) rewarded the mercenaries with land in the Chahar Asyab region, and they subsequently settled there. Older respondents in many of the sample's households included mentioned this fact, and stated that they were originally from the Padachinar region of present-day Pakistan.⁹ With reference to the subject of this study, this history of land ownership holds negative implications for present-day school establishment in the villages. Currently housed in a large compound of a private individual whose family wants to re-possess it, the future of the Chil Dokhtaran Boys' Primary School is extremely insecure. As one of the heads of household, whose two grandsons attend the school, noted:

We've suggested numerous times to the Ministry of Education that we will give them a piece of land for a proper school to be built, but they ask for the deed for the land, and we don't have any. None of us have land certificates because the lands were given to us many years ago by the command of Nadir Shah.

Also the site of numerous conflicts during the recent decades of war, Chahar Asyab's 72 villages have been in a constant state of flux, with large portions of the population taking refuge either in other regions of Afghanistan as IDPs (especially in Logar or Kabul City itself) or in neighbouring Pakistan (in Padachinar, Peshawar and/or camps in the Punjab). In recent years, many refugees have returned to their home

⁸ H. Hensman, 1881, *The Afghan War of 1879–1880*, Lahore: Sang-i-Meel Publications.

⁹ Padachinar (or Parachinar), is located directly across the Pakistan border in FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Northwest Frontier Province).

district, however, and this process continues today. Out of a total of approximately 6,600 emigrants from the district in past years, about 4,700 have returned to date.¹⁰

3.3 Leadership

The large and geographically sprawling village of Chil Dokhtaran is comprised of 170 households, while the smaller community of Daag is made up of 27 households. All of the residents are Pashtun, primarily of the Mengal tribe; most adult males speak both Pashto and Dari, while most adult females only speak Pashto. Led by a literate and respected *malik* who takes care of external affairs with the government, and an older non-literate *malik* who is responsible for internal affairs, Chil Dokhtaran is a well-organised and united community. In contrast, Daag's elderly, non-literate and weak *malik* seems unable to lead its mixture of residents, some of whom are originally from Logar and others from Padachinar, and the village is characterised as being "Pakistani".¹¹

A village *malik* meets with the elders of the community as needed, and conveys any important issues, problems or disputes that cannot be settled locally to the district directorship in Chahar Asyab centre at a formal bi-weekly meeting. There is much competition for scarce resources between communities in the region, with frequent accusations of corruption and patronage, and in the present political context of Chahar Asyab a capable *malik* is crucial for a village to access services such as water supply, electricity and schools.

3.4 Household composition

Village household units are large, with an average of 14 members, and most families are extended in structure (containing three generations, and very often also more than one married sibling with children).¹² Indeed, in Chil Dokhtaran most residents are closely related to their neighbours, with many cases of married siblings (both brothers and sisters) living nearby in separate units. This makes for an extremely tight-knit community, but also often results in rivalry and gossiping about neighbouring relatives. Social pressure to conform to traditional lifestyles and "not rock the boat" is acute.

Many positive aspects of community solidarity are also present, including an extensive social support system, especially in times of sorrow. Both males and females attend funerals throughout the region, and a community fund (100 Afghanis¹³ per month per household) helps the grieving pay for the required communal feasting on the second and 40th days following a death, along with the one-year anniversary feast. Similar support also exists at times of weddings and births. With fewer related units, Daag exhibits less social cohesion than Chil Dokhtaran.

¹⁰ Interview with the Assistant Director of Education, Chahar Asyab (16 March 2005).

¹¹ While residents of Chil Dokhtaran noted that their ancestors arrived from what is now Pakistan at the time of Nadir Shah (1932/1311), the family of the *malik* of Daag arrived considerably later (1944/1323).

¹² In this sample of 13 units, three were nuclear in structure (containing only parents and children); three were generational extended (three generations); three were collateral extended (siblings with at least one married with children); and four were collateral and generational extended.

¹³ Approximately 50 Afghanis = US\$1.

3.5 Economic activities

Chil Dokhtaran and Daag are not poor settlements. All households in the sample¹⁴ were engaged in agriculture, with the majority of units owning an average of 4–6 *jeribs* of land.¹⁵ Wheat is the primary crop, but recent years of drought have decreased the yield considerably and all households have had to supplement their supply of grain with purchases from the bazaar. Small orchards of apricots, apples and other fruit are common, along with vegetable gardens of onions and potatoes. Each household also owns at least one cow, a calf, chickens and sometimes a few goats or sheep. Farm produce is for individual household consumption and is not sold in the bazaar, although it is frequently shared with relatives locally or those living in nearby Kabul City.

Males of the households work in the fields, with boys performing farm work and fetching water for their households from the public pumps¹⁶ in the afternoons following school. Women and girls tend to the livestock in the compound, along with doing numerous household chores. Females of all ages frequently gather fodder for the animals along with wild vegetables for human consumption from the nearby fields, and young girls also fetch water for their families.

Some physical assets found in a typical village compound include the following: bicycle(s), *tandoor*, water pump (dry), generator, TV, tape recorder. Some of the wealthier units also possess a motorcycle, car/taxi/truck, mobile phone and washing machine.

The adult male members of many households also work in the stone quarries in the nearby mountains, which is an off-farm economic activity that has existed in this area for generations. Members in over one half of the units in the sample are engaged in quarry work. This difficult and dangerous work, often involving dynamite, yields large rocks which are transported to Kabul for construction purposes. This work is often communal in nature, with some households owning large drills which are shared, while others contribute the use of a truck. Although this is detested work which often results in injuries,¹⁷ it can yield 400–500 Afghanis per day for those who sell the stones, while labourers who load and unload the trucks may make 80–100 Afghanis per day.

In addition to activities in the informal sector, other males of the community are formally employed in Kabul City and commute to and from the capital daily.¹⁸ Others work in Chahar Asyab centre or in towns in neighbouring Logar. These are men with some education (usually twelfth-grade graduates) who had attended local schools years ago and had gone on to further training in Kabul. Members in almost one half of the units in the sample were formally employed, working, for example, in Wazir Akbar Khan Hospital (2,000 Afghanis per month); in the Ministry of Agriculture (3,500 Afghanis per month); and as a police officer (1,800 Afghanis per month). A common

¹⁴ Based upon household physical asset assessment and discussion, the 13 sample units were classified as: wealthy (4); above average (2); average (6); and below average (1) – with respect to the local populace.

¹⁵ Land ownership ranges from 1.5–30 *jeribs* (one *jerib* = approximately half an acre = one fifth of a hectare). With each generation, land holdings are decreasing in size because parcels of land continue to be divided up between sons.

¹⁶ In addition to decreasing crop yields, the drought has resulted in inoperable household wells.

¹⁷ One individual interviewed had been blinded by a faulty explosion in this work, while another had recently sustained a broken leg.

¹⁸ Public transport from the villages to Kabul costs approximately 25 Afghanis one way, while a private taxi costs 300 Afghanis.

pattern is that the fathers of these educated men are usually in their 50s or 60s and “jobless”, having worked in earlier years as drivers in Kabul.

A total of four households out of the sample of 13 units also receive substantial remittances to supplement income from male relatives living abroad in, respectively, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Germany and Holland. These relatives are either sons or brothers of heads of household, as well as one case of a brother of the head of household’s wife. Amounts received varied from 2,500–5,000 Afghanis to 20,000–30,000 Afghanis every few months.

In summary, households in these villages exhibit a pattern of economic diversification, combining agricultural activities with either informal or formal employment of adult male members, along with some supplementation through foreign remittances. The researchers encountered no cases in which women were employed for either cash or kind in the villages.¹⁹ There were, however, a few cases in the sample of children who work for cash or kind: in two separate households a boy in the eighth grade and a boy in the tenth grade sometimes worked in the quarries after school hours and, in another unit, a boy in eighth grade carried food to the labourers in the mountains every day for a small fee. In another case that will be discussed in more detail later, two sisters who had dropped out of school after seventh grade when they moved to the village from Kabul did piecework dressmaking. However, the research did not find that children of these villages were compelled to work due to the economic situation of their households.

Monthly household expenditures were estimated by heads of household (and/or their sons and wives) in conversations as ranging from 3,000–12,000 Afghanis, generally varying according to the number of members in the unit and the number of members gainfully employed. Respondents consistently said that most of their household expenditures were for food²⁰ and the health care/medicines.²¹

Although numerous education-related costs were incurred for each child, it should be noted that no respondent mentioned these costs as a major or limiting expenditure for their household.

3.6 Debts

All of the households in the sample were in debt. Individuals from a few poorer units mentioned small ongoing debts to the local shopkeeper for foodstuffs (such as tea and sugar), which they always paid back when they “sold the stones”. Debts of larger amounts were estimated by respondents in other units as ranging from 11,000–150,000 Afghanis, with an average of 45,000 Afghanis. Funds were usually obtained from relatives, with friends also providing loans in many cases. Social networks linking nearby Kabul City to the villages are often important in this respect, for it is often relatives or friends who reside in the capital city who were

¹⁹ One elderly woman had been involved in a project to vaccinate chickens years ago but, at one afghani per chick, she found that this was not economically viable. The project is no longer active.

²⁰ Basic foodstuffs purchased include wheat, rice, oil, tea and sugar. A number of units also noted that having guests increased their food-related expenditures, including meat, considerably.

²¹ Villagers usually paid 500–1500 Afghanis or more per illness episode, which included transport to Kabul, physician’s fees and medicine. Many households also contained individuals who were chronically ill with diabetes, asthma and rheumatism, whose treatments were more expensive. In addition, four of the units in the sample had seriously disabled members: war-wounded/paraplegic (one adult male); blind (one adult male); and mentally handicapped (one adult female; one male child). All of these cases required costly and repeated expenditures which stressed the households’ budgets.

able to assist. Borrowed funds were by far most commonly used by villagers to build a new house or repair a damaged house on the household's traditional land, to which they had returned in recent years from either an IDP or a refugee experience. Also mentioned repeatedly were loans to pay for weddings, funerals and medical treatment.

Strategies which are coping, adaptive and accumulative were exhibited by the sample studied. For example, almost half of the households had sold some of their physical assets in recent months. Most commonly, livestock (a cow) or rugs had been sold to pay medical bills, cover the extra costs of winter or other needs, and one unit also recently sold its car to buy additional land.

3.7 Refugee experience

All of the respondents recounted the many problems they had experienced due to the various conflicts during the recent decades of war. About half of the sample households had taken refuge periodically as IDPs in nearby Logar or in Kabul City, either living with relatives or in ruins. The remainder had spent years in Pakistan as refugees, usually in camps near Padachinar, Peshawar or Lahore. Many units had lost male members due to fighting, and one compound contained a small shrine commemorating the place where one of their sons had been killed. Other individuals had been jailed, sometimes for years. Careers and schooling had been interrupted. Comments were often made by respondents that, in comparison to their livelihoods during the war, now their lives were secure, they were safe and they could build for the future. Education was also clearly associated with peace, as this village woman (whose four sons and one daughter are in school) related:

Before when the war was going on, the mujahedin did not allow the children to go to school. During the night they were coming to our door and saying to us, "We'll teach those who send their children to school a lesson – you may lose them!" And then in the day the government soldiers were always telling us to send our children to school! We had a lot of problems then, but things have changed now. There's the school and the mosque here for children to be educated, and we can survive now. We're grateful for that.

3.8 Community facilities

Although the village paths contain numerous electrical wires and poles, there had not been electricity in the community for years – since the source was destroyed early during the conflict years. Rather every household has a generator, which is run with expensive gasoline or kerosene. These are used sparingly in the evenings, especially to watch television, which most households possess.²² Children often do their homework in the evenings by lantern-light.

Public pumps located throughout the communities in the pathways provide much-needed water, with shallow household water pumps dry due to the low water table. These public pumps were established in recent years by DACAAR (Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees) and SCA (Swedish Committee for Afghanistan). Two years ago a UN agency had also gravelled the road leading to the highway.

²² Not all respondents are pleased with the effect of television upon their children, however. A mother commented, "I try not to allow my children to watch television too often, because they broadcast bad films..."

A small store exists in Chil Dokhtaran centre which sells basics such as matches, soap, sugar, tea and school supplies of notebooks, pens and pencils. The large bazaar in Chahar Asyab centre is visited for most shopping, while periodic trips may also be made to Kabul where supplies are cheaper.

There is no clinic in the villages, and most households make the trip to Kabul for medical care. The government clinic in Chahar Asyab is closer and cheaper, but the medical care provided there is considered to be inferior.

3.9 Female mobility

As discussed in more detail below, the lack of freedom of mobility for females – especially young girls and teens – in Chil Dokhtaran and Daag is clearly one of the major reasons for their limited participation in education in comparison with their male counterparts. Prevailing social norms of these Pashtun settlements are extremely conservative and affect all women and girls. However, the degree of seclusion does vary with age: girls in their teens and newly married women are most heavily secluded and, in general, after the age of 30 an individual is able to leave her household more easily (usually wearing a large *chador* or *burqa/chadri*). Within the community, relatives and neighbours gossip about all female movements on the village paths, and outside the community the world is considered to be a dangerous place. In spite of social restrictions on movement, however, females are able (and are expected) to attend a variety of ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, births, Eid celebrations and other holiday events at the homes of relatives, friends and neighbours. Visiting one's parents at Eid is also a legitimate activity. And, although they do not work in the fields, young girls and older women do travel frequently to nearby fields to gather vegetables for human consumption and fodder for their livestock. In conversations, female respondents do not bemoan this social norm, but accept it as simply part of their cultural lifestyle as Pashtuns. As one middle-aged woman in an extended household unit in Chil Dokhtaran noted, there should always be a legitimate reason for a female to leave her compound:

Whenever there is something important a woman can go out around here – like for a funeral, a wedding ceremony or going out to collect fodder for the cows and other important things like that...

However, just as decision-making processes within households varied, female mobility similarly varied between units – and also between communities themselves. The following response is from a young mother of six children in a nuclear household in the less-conservative settlement of Daag; she is a fourth-grade graduate who attended school in Kabul when an IDP, and all of her school-aged children (both boys and girls) are currently enrolled in local schools:

There are no restrictions on the females in our household. I'm allowed to go anywhere...I even go shopping in Kabul now and then.

Involved here are the types of relationships between husband, wife and other household members, along with the distribution of power within the unit. These are key aspects of the later discussion about decision-making with specific respect to school enrolment.

3.10 Options for education: the supply side

Before discussing the existing schooling options for village children and youth, some general comments should be made concerning the adult population. Adult males in the community varied considerably in their levels of educational attainment, with many not having attended school at all. However, there was a group of heads of household in their 50s and 60s who had studied from sixth to twelfth grade prior to the years of war – in Chahar Asyab centre or at a school in Tang-i-Sayedan, approximately half the way to Kabul on the western road toward Darulaman.²³ At that time there was no school in their villages. Almost all adult women in the community were non-literate and had not attended school. Exceptions included a few educated women who had married into the settlements from Kabul, or who had attended school as refugees in Pakistan.²⁴

To follow are the various educational facilities that currently exist for the villages' children and youth.

In Chil Dokhtaran/Daag

Mosque schools: A mosque exists in both Chil Dokhtaran and Daag, where visiting mullahs teach young children the Quran/Hadith. Only boys are allowed to attend in Chil Dokhtaran, while in Daag both girls and boys attend. Classes are usually held early in the mornings or in the late afternoons. Mullahs are frequently paid with food.

SDF Girls' Primary School: Established four years ago, the SDF School is located in the centre of Chil Dokhtaran in a small one-room stable owned by one of the local villagers. Thirty-seven girls are enrolled, with the fourth grade beginning this year; it is planned to expand yearly until classes reach the eighth grade. All four classes meet in one room, where the girls sit on the floor. The male teacher receives a salary of 2,000 Afghanis per month. He teaches here in the afternoons and at the local boys' school in the mornings. Monthly fees are 15 Afghanis per pupil, which are given to the owner of the compound; SDF pays the owner 6,000 Afghanis rent monthly. Books are provided by SDF, and students buy their own supplies.²⁵ The language of instruction is Pashto.²⁶ (Girls from five of the 13 sample households were enrolled in this school.)

Chil Dokhtaran Boys' Primary School: Established in the time of Taraki (1978/1357) as a girls' school,²⁷ this present-day boys' primary school has a total of 262 students enrolled in grades 1–6. It is located in a large compound²⁸ off the gravel road leading

²³ Four older heads of household in the sample had studied at Tang-i-Sayedan. There was now resentment in the villages towards this community, however, which had recently received two large new school buildings with Korean aid.

²⁴ Three households in the sample contained daughters-in-law/wives who had studied in Kabul to grades 12, 4 and 5, respectively; another case existed in which the daughter-in-law had studied to tenth grade in Lahore.

²⁵ Concerning local options for girls' education, in Daag a few respondents noted that two teenaged sisters in one of the sample households (dropouts from seventh grade when they previously lived in Kabul) had previously taught young girls of the village informally in their home, but this had not been successful and it had ceased.

²⁶ Due to increased demand for girls' education this year, and the inability of SDF to accommodate all of the students, the SDF male teacher also taught a private class of 20 girls on his own.

²⁷ This girls' school was closed after a few years when the civil war began in earnest.

²⁸ The landowner, a wealthy mujahedin leader who lived in Kabul until his recent death, had allowed the school to meet in his compound rent-free for years, but there were rumours that now his family wanted to re-possess it.

towards Chahar Asyab centre, and is a 10–15 minute walk from the villages. Boys come from a five-kilometre radius. There are ten male teachers and one headmaster, whose salaries range from 1,800–2,800 Afghanis per month according to experience. There are no desks in the classrooms, and some grades meet in tents provided by UNHCR. Both UNICEF and SCA had provided teacher training some years ago, and SCA had also provided some books. The language of instruction is Pashto. (Boys from nine of the 13 sample households were enrolled in this school.)

In Chahar Asyab Centre²⁹

Shahid-i-Malalai High School: Both boys and girls attend this school in different shifts. It includes grades 1–12 with more than 1,000 students. The school is located in a large, new one-story building in Chahar Asyab centre, which is approximately 30 minutes by bicycle from the sample villages. (Boys from ten of the 13 sample households were enrolled in this school.)

Private courses: Private courses in such subjects as English, computers and mathematics are offered by teachers after school hours and/or during the winter vacation months in Chahar Asyab. These range in cost from 70–200 Afghanis per course. (Boys from four of the 13 sample households were enrolled in these courses.)

In Kabul City

High schools: A variety of high school options exist in the capital city. The schools attended by male members of a few of the sample households, which are usually well-off, are on the western side of Kabul near Karte Sai/Darulaman/Chil Sitoon, and include Mehrabad High School and a technical high school. If the student commutes daily by bus, the transportation cost is 40–50 Afghanis per round trip. Some students stay with relatives in the capital; if the student must rent a room, additional funding for rent and food is also necessary. (Male youths from two of the 13 sample households are enrolled in these schools.)

Private courses: Some boys commute to Kabul from the villages to take courses in English, computers and mathematics, especially during winter vacation.³⁰ Fees quoted include 150 Afghanis per English course, 200 Afghanis per math course, and \$20 per computer programme. (Male youths from two of the 13 sample households are enrolled in these courses.)

3.11 Links with Kabul

The villages of Chil Dokhtaran and Daag have numerous and varied links with the nearby capital city of Kabul. Some of the major “pull” factors include the following, most of which have been common for decades. A number of villagers find markets for their stones in the city, while others are employed there either privately or with the government. Foodstuffs in Kabul bazaars are cheaper, and periodic bulk shopping is done there. Trips to the capital’s many medical facilities are made frequently. A few male teens from the villages go to Kabul for higher education. In many cases, extended relatives live in Kabul, along with married daughters, and their homes provide food and temporary lodging for the visiting villagers if necess-

²⁹ Statistics for the district as a whole indicate that out of a total of 6,894 primary and secondary students enrolled throughout the district of Chahar Asyab in 2005, 5,436 were male and 1,458 were female (Assistant Director of Education, Chahar Asyab, March 2005).

³⁰ In a few cases, boys also stay with relatives in Pakistan during winter vacations and take English or computer courses there.

ary. Many individuals from the sample villages had also spent years as IDPs in the capital in areas such as Karte Naw, Karte Parwan and Khair Khana, and so they were familiar with the layout of the city and knew how to navigate its busy streets. During the research, one of the sample households was in the process of moving back to Kabul where the head of household was taking up employment and the children – both male and female teens – would be able to access a better education than in the village.

Despite the conservative social setting in the villages of Chahar Asyab, exposure to the many powerful forces of change in the capital continues to alter their livelihoods, and this has often resulted in conflict between various ways of thinking and behaving. In many respects the sample communities now comprise a part of Kabul's ever-expanding suburbs – a complex mix of old and new.

3.12 The cost of education in the context of the household economy

As mentioned earlier, the sample villages are not poor. All households own land and practise agriculture, with some male members also engaged in either informal or formal employment. Their monthly expenditures are primarily for food and costly medical care, and it is noteworthy that no respondent mentioned school-related costs as placing undue stress on their household budget. Indeed, economic considerations were not mentioned in decision-making pertaining to school enrolment.

Nonetheless, sending children to school does call for monthly expenditures for school supplies (notebooks, pens, pencils, books etc.), clothes, transport and fees, and this investment represents an ongoing commitment on the part of parents and the household in general. The amount spent on these direct costs varies greatly according to the number of children in the household enrolled in school, level of schooling, location, and whether classes are public or private. The following examples serve as illustration.

Household A is very well off, with a monthly expenditure estimated at 12,000 Afghanis. Its three boys are all enrolled in school; its four school-aged girls are not.³¹ One son attends the local primary school, one son goes to school in Chahar Asyab, and the eldest 19-year-old boy travels daily to Kabul to attend ninth grade there. Sometimes he drives their private car but most often he pays the daily 40-afghani bus fare. He also requires 70 Afghanis monthly for an English course, which is paid for by his uncles who live in Germany.³² An estimated 2,000 Afghanis are expended monthly³³ by the household for schooling – of boys only.

Household B sends two boys and two girls to local schools (the Chil Dokhtaran Boys' Primary School and the SDF Girls' School) and is firmly committed to educating all of their children. With an estimated monthly household expenditure of 7,000 Afghanis, the approximate 1,000 Afghanis spent each month on school-related costs – for boys and girls – is considerable, but not exorbitant. The father had bought each of his sons a bicycle by which to go to school, and the mother had sewn uniforms for her

³¹ Their 19-year-old brother proudly noted that "no one in this household has ever dropped out of school because of economic reasons or because of chores at home".

³² His mother related that if the boy learns English, his uncles will invite him to visit Germany.

³³ These figures are approximate estimates provided by the respondents – usually the students' fathers – and may be somewhat inflated.

girls even though it was not required by SDF. She noted the following related expenditures in detail:

We just bought the girls school bags each for 70 Afghanis. UNICEF had given bags to the students, but my children didn't like to take them to school because they thought that that was embarrassing. The distance to the SDF School is far (a 20-minute walk) and their shoes wear out quickly, so that is another cost. I also took my daughter to a doctor in Kabul because of the stains on her face from the sun, and he told us to buy her an umbrella. So, in all, their expenses are a lot.

Household C, also with an estimated monthly expenditure of 7,000 Afghanis, has four children (two boys and two girls) attending local schools, as well as a boy in ninth grade in Chahar Asyab and a 19-year-old son who is studying at a technical school (eleventh grade) in Kabul. In addition to 200 Afghanis for his monthly room rent, he also requires \$20 for a computer course and 150 Afghanis for an English course monthly. Their school-related costs, at approximately 2,000 Afghanis per month – for boys and girls – are considerably more than Household B.

Household D, with an estimated monthly expenditure of 4,000 Afghanis, sends two boys to school. One rides his bicycle to seventh grade in Chahar Asyab and the other walks to the local primary school; two school-aged girls are not enrolled. The head of household noted that only boys go to school in this family, and that he is fully prepared to pay out 500 Afghanis per boy monthly for their pens, notebooks and books. The total amount spent is 1,000 Afghanis monthly – for boys only.

Concerning the opportunity costs related to school enrolment for boys, it appears that this was not an issue for the villagers in this sample. Almost 100 percent of school-aged boys were enrolled in school. Although most boys did have tasks to do at home (such as fetching water, bazaar shopping, farm work etc.), they were not required to work for cash or kind and did not drop out for economic reasons – other household members were willing to “put them through school”.

As far as the opportunity costs pertaining to girls' school enrolment, the situation is somewhat more complicated. Girls have many chores to perform in the household (i.e. cleaning, cooking, washing dishes, tending livestock, etc.), and in some cases this may be a related reason for not attending school. However, in most households in the village there were numerous females to perform these daily tasks, and they were not required to work for cash or kind. A more dangerous opportunity cost was the negative social sanctions that were perceived to be incurred by a household if one of their girls – especially a teen – was enrolled in school. Indeed, in these cases other household members were certainly not willing to “put them through school”.

3.13 The schools and the community

Both local schools – the Chil Dokhtaran Boys' Primary School and the SDF Girls' Primary School – were visited during the research. The boys' school (first to sixth grades), in a large private compound, has ten male teachers and approximately 400 male students of all ages (7–18 years). The girls' school (first to fourth grades), in a private stable, has one male teacher and 30 girls (7–12 years). Both schools lack basic facilities such as desks and classrooms, although attempts are made to keep the school areas clean.

Although the research team heard nothing negative against education itself from respondents, there were some complaints voiced by the villagers – especially adult males who had been to school themselves – concerning the quality of education, along with the politics and corruption perceived to exist in this sector.

Concerning the perceived quality of education, a few fathers stated that teachers were ill prepared to teach, having only studied to sixth grade themselves, and that there were no desks or books for the children. Children and parents occasionally related that the schools in Iran and Pakistan were better than those in the villages today. Most households simply continued to send their children to local schools, although two households did send their older sons to Kabul for their high school studies because of the perceived lack of quality education available locally. Many mothers voiced their frustration with the cleanliness of the schools, with one woman stating that her children returned home from school looking like they “were back from the grave” because they are so dusty from sitting on the ground. There was only one case in which a mother complained of her son being hit by a teacher at the elementary school, and one case in which it was noted that the mullah at the mosque sometimes also hit students.

Of much more serious concern to the villagers at present is the insecure status of the boys’ school, which involves heated local politics and perceived corruption. The large compound which now houses the boys’ school is owned by a prominent mujahedin leader of Hezb-i-Islam who lived in Kabul until his recent death, and it is now rumoured that his family wanted the compound back. The villagers had petitioned the MoE repeatedly to construct a “proper school”, for which they were willing to provide land. However, they had no official papers for their land because it was given to their ancestors “by decree” by King Nadir Shah in the early 1930s. Now they are at an impasse, and the local *maliks*, elders and other villagers repeatedly mentioned their concerns about the future of the school. It was jealously noted that the nearby community of Tang-i-Sayedan now has a newly constructed school (built with Korean funding) in addition to their previous schools, while Chil Dokhtaran has no permanent building.

In a few of the households, male relatives (fathers, brothers etc.) did check on the status of their boys’ progress with the teachers at the local primary school, especially if they knew the teachers or were related to them. This was done informally, as there had not been any formal parents’ function at the school recently.³⁴ The same was true for a few girl students, whose fathers informally checked on their work with the male SDF teacher, but this was not an established tradition. There was no involvement of mothers, except in one case where the woman is related to her sons’ teachers and she sometimes asked them about their progress at school.

³⁴ One male respondent recalled a teachers’ day which was held years ago.

4. Who Goes to School, Who Doesn't, and Why

Table 1 shows some basic information about the 13 sample households' children. There is a total of 97 children (53 boys and 44 girls) aged 18 and under in these units.³⁵ The greater number of boys present in these totals is largely explained by the early marriages of a number of girls in their teens and their departure from the households. Looking at the second and third columns, it is clear that almost all of the boys of school age are enrolled in school,³⁶ while less than one quarter of the girls of school age are enrolled in school.

Table 1. Children in and out of school in Chil Dokhtaran/Daag (13 sample households)

Number of children aged 18 years and under		Number of school-aged children (7–18 years)		Number of school-aged children in school now	
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
53	44	41	32	39	7

All of the 13 sample households have enrolled at least one child in school. Out of these, a total of eight households have only boys in school, while a total of five households have both boys and girls

in school. Boys enrolled in school (N=39) range from first to twelfth grades at the Chil Dokhtaran Boys' Primary School, the Malalai High School in Chahar Asyab, and in Kabul high schools. Girls enrolled in school (N=7) range from first to fourth grades in the local SDF Girls' Primary School.

Among the girls in the sample households there are 13 girls aged 12 and above who have never attended school. In addition, there are 13 cases of children who had dropped out of school,³⁷ including one boy and 12 girls. The boy dropped out of Malalai High School in Chahar Asyab two years ago. Among the 12 cases of female dropouts, four had dropped out in recent years from the SDF Girls' Primary School, and seven had previously attended school as IDPs or refugees but they did not currently attend.

4.1 Villagers' opinions about education: why children go to school

When adults in the sample were asked what they thought about education, both men and women voiced their resounding support, and noted its importance in present-day Afghanistan. These opinions were closely tied to their decisions to send their children to school. Parents – both fathers and mothers – consistently mentioned that they wanted the lives of their children to be better than theirs, and that they were striving to achieve this through their hard work to educate them.³⁸ One father saw education's broad role as taking his children "out of narrow-mindedness to civilisation," and as the *malik* of Chil Dokhtaran related, illiteracy, a by-product of the war, is a primary hindrance in their lives today:

³⁵ This yields an average of approximately seven children aged 18 and under per household – a large dependency ratio regardless of household structure.

³⁶ There was one boy of seven years who was not enrolled in school this year because "the school is too far for him to walk", but whose mother said will be enrolled next year. Another older boy is a dropout.

³⁷ For this study, the definition of a dropout has been determined by the respondents themselves, rather than defined by the child's school or teacher.

³⁸ A middle-aged mother from a household in which all adult males make a living in the stone quarries and three young boys are in school said, "I wish that my children will someday get good jobs with the government so that their families will have a comfortable life free from the stone work in the mountains".

The mujahedin used to say that the Soviets fought them for ten years, but their mines would fight them for 20 years...but now it is our illiteracy that is fighting us.

Many consider education to be an individual's basic right these days, and that it is the government's duty to provide the necessary local facilities. Having spent years as refugees in Pakistan and IDPs in Kabul, both adults and children in the sample had been exposed to situations where schools for both boys and girls were common. Many respondents said that people had become enlightened or had "had their eyes opened"³⁹ during this period away from the villages. A father of two young sons, both of whom were enrolled in primary school, mentioned a number of points also related by others:

It's every child's right these days to go to school and study until twelfth grade – or as far as he or she can. They will learn something, become bright-minded, learn to respect people – especially father and mother – and then help their country.

A mother of four sons, all of whom are in school, a mentally handicapped young girl, and a baby girl, had this to say about the general population and education:

Before there were no schools around, and people didn't have much interest in education either. Now the situation has changed and most people want their children to study and become something in the future. But some people still don't understand, and they still don't send their kids to school. It's just like they're striking their life roots with an axe!

A mother of nine children, whose three sons but none of her four school-aged daughters are enrolled in school, optimistically related the following about her fellow villagers:

You know, now the people of Afghanistan have become wise. Before they didn't allow children to be educated at all, but now everyone wants to learn something and become sophisticated...every father and mother in the village desires their children to gain an education.

Often, however, parents' desires for their children's educational attainment were rather unrealistic, with the phrase "become a doctor or an engineer" repeatedly given in response to what they would like their children to do in the future. Indeed, this phrase was used so frequently that it appears to be just another term for "being educated".

Most respondents' discussions about education in general seemed to apply primarily to the development of the human capital of their households and the education of their sons, but a number of other comments also hinted that there are changes ahead for girls' education. For example, this was related in a discussion with the elderly *malik* and other younger and less conservative men of Daag:

Malik: People send their children to school now because there isn't any war any more...

³⁹ The term repeatedly appearing in conversation was *roshan fikr* (bright thoughts). One of the teachers at Chil Dokhtaran Primary School said, "People are sending their children to school these days because of the security and also because they saw the world when they migrated. Now they want their children to be educated. The people who migrated in recent years and those who did not are very different."

Villager 1: *And farming really doesn't have a good income these days. Before people were hungry for a loaf of bread, but now their lives are better, and they want to send their children for education to make a better life for themselves and also for their households.*

Villager 2: *Many people send only boys to school now but, with the passage of time, and considering the changing situation, they will send girls to school as well.*

This latter opinion is echoed in the following statement by a mother of six sons, two of whom are of school-aged and enrolled in the local primary school:

Everyone thinks that boys should get an education, but for girls that's a different story in some cases, due to some meaningless customs and untrue beliefs. I can say, however, that in our village of Chil Dokhtaran people have changed from before and they are saying these days that girls should go to school too. And some of the girls are going to school now...

The characteristic of *being respectful* came up again and again as a key attribute that all students – both male and female – should learn in school.⁴⁰ A well-educated son or daughter should learn to respect their parents especially, but also their elders, relatives and neighbours. This quote from a young mother about what children should learn, which also contains some gender-based differences, will illustrate:

Boys should learn good attitudes towards family, people and humanity, and the same is true for girls. A girl should also learn to be sober, respect her household members and her in-laws, and do her work on time.

It was common for respondents to stress that girls should learn to work hard and be neat, which are good traits for any housewife, while boys should learn to behave wisely and deal well with others. In the area of gender relations within the household, some individuals also specifically mentioned the positive role that education plays. For example, a mother of nine children, who has no formal education herself but whose four boys and two girls are presently in school, noted the following:

School has so many benefits. For example, my sons who have studied in school are now wise and clever. They know the rights of their mother, wives and sisters, and they respect me very much. But you should see the other people of the village who are illiterate. They don't know the rights of women and they treat them like animals...

Parents took pride in relating what they do to enable their sons and daughters to go to school each day. More than mere economic sacrifices, this usually involves taking time to assure that things are in order and that the child is well prepared for the day. Although it is primarily male relatives (father, uncle or older brother) who help

⁴⁰ Learning respect for parents and elders is also achieved through religious education, and villagers – both male and female – believe this type of education to be “a necessity for every Muslim”. Boys attend the mosque before school in Chil Dokhtaran, while boys and younger girls attend the mosque school in Daag before or after school hours; parents and other household members also sometimes assist their children in reading the Quran at home.

children with their homework,⁴¹ in many cases both father and mother take part in the general process. As the mother of three school-going sons proudly noted:

I get their clothes and shoes ready each day and I serve them their meals on time. I also see to their cleanliness – like checking to see that their nails haven't grown too long so that no one can criticise them and say that they haven't learned anything.

Another mother who has two sons and two daughters in school related how both she and her husband assist:

I prepare the children's school clothing and I serve them their meals. I also cover their books for them. Their father helps them with their lessons, pays their school expenses, and asks their teachers about them in order to know whether our children are trying in their lessons or not.

In summary, both male and female respondents voiced their overwhelmingly positive opinions towards education. The fact that almost 100 percent of school-aged boys in this sample are enrolled in school shows that these beliefs are being put into practice. However, what about the girls?

4.2 Household decision-making

Before dealing specifically with decision-making and school enrolment, the general process of making decisions within the village household will be briefly examined.

Closely linked with this is the quality of relationships between various household members, including the distribution of power within the unit. The dynamics of the interaction within these large families, which are often extended in structure and contain many members of differing ages and gender and, correspondingly, statuses and roles, are exceedingly complex and require a considerable amount of time to understand. Important clues emerged in the in-depth conversations, however, and these are summarised here.

Discussions with both male and female villagers indicated that, although decision-making *power* may be primarily possessed by the male head-of-household, as is often stereotypically thought, adult females are active participants in the decision-making process and, in many cases, wield considerable power within the household themselves. This varies between units considerably, however. In the research sample the dynamics ranged from an extended household in which an elderly patriarch stated that he makes all the decisions, to a nuclear household in which a middle-aged husband stated that he does not make any decision without the input of his wife. Family structure is often an important variable here,⁴² but individual personality and negotiation skills also play a crucial role.

In more than half (N=8) of the sample households it is both husband and wife who make most decisions jointly – especially those pertaining to the daily functioning of the unit (e.g. purchase of household effects). In the remainder (N= 5), it is the male head of household who is the major decision-maker.

⁴¹ In the few cases where adult females are literate, they also help children in their household with their homework, especially in the early grades.

⁴² Women in nuclear sub-units within an extended household may also have some autonomy, however; for example, wives of cohabiting brothers set up their own rooms and then decided on the decor of the shared guest room together.

Even in the case of “big” decisions such as engagements and marriages of children, travel on the Haj or the sale of a cow, males in most households do take the advice of their female counterparts. In addition, there are a few units in the sample in which women are responsible for the household budget. One statement illustrates how some village women do have a central role in the functioning of their households – this is what a teenaged son had to say about his mother (whose three sons and two daughters were in school):

My mother mostly takes the decisions in the household. For instance, if someone gets sick my mother and another person take the sick person to the doctor. And as far as buying things is concerned, if something is needed in the house, my mother takes the decision. We're happy with this situation. The money for education expenses like clothes, pens and notebooks is also all with my mother. She has the biggest role. My father, brothers and I work, and the money we earn we give to my mother. She saves the money and she spends the money.

Interestingly, respondents – both male and female – consistently and rather adamantly noted that no one outside the household had the right to interfere in the domestic affairs of the unit. In short, no one could “tell them what to do”: they make all of their own decisions. However, in spite of this defiant response, villagers continue to be extremely concerned and affected by negative sanctions in the form of neighbours’ and relatives’ gossip.

4.3 Household decision-making and school enrolment

With almost 100 percent of school-aged boys enrolled in school in the sample villages, it is evident that households clearly perceive the value of education for males. However, in this conservative and tightly knit community where many households are related to each other, sending girls to school is another matter, and only about one quarter of the school-aged girls are enrolled in school.

Table 2 shows information about the school-aged children in the sample households who had never been to school (13 girls), while Table 3 includes similar data for children who had dropped out of school (one boy and 12 girls). Listed in the tables are the household members primarily responsible for each decision, and also the major reasons involved in each decision.

Most of the girls who had never been to school were in their teens (Table 2). During the war years they were not enrolled in school, as perhaps their brothers were in either Kabul or Pakistan when they had been refugees. A variety of individuals had been the decision-makers in these cases, with a girl’s father probably playing the most significant role. Interestingly, however, mothers and brothers participated in this process too. In three cases, it was the patriarch of the unit – either a grandfather or an uncle – who had decided that the girl would not be enrolled in school. Reasons involved in these decisions were often multiple, and are included in the last column of Table 2. A common reason was that the girl is “too old” and “big girls” should not go to school, so these girls did not attend the SDF School with their younger counterparts, as was the case in the local boys’ primary school where teenagers were often enrolled in the lower grades with younger boys.

Table 2. Children who had never been enrolled in school (13 girls from eight households)

<i>Household</i>	<i>Child</i>	<i>Who decided</i>	<i>Reason(s)</i>
#1	teenaged girls (aged 16 and 18)	father, brother, mother	girls "too old" we're Pashtun people talk not our culture people fight when girls are teased
#2	teenaged girl (aged 16)	grandfather	girl "too old" no school here we're Afghans people talk disturbances of the "fool people"
#4	teenaged girl	uncle	girls can't go to Chahar Asyab we're Pashtun teachers are male
#6	teenaged girl (aged 15)	father, mother	due to the war (too young then)
#7	teenaged girl (aged 14) pre-teen girl (aged 12)	grandfather	Afghans don't like "big girls" in school
#9	teenaged girls (2)	father	not our custom our men don't like to send their girls to school only boys go to school
#10	teenaged girls (2)	father, mother	they are grown there was no school before there was war we people are strict it's "bad" girls are not very interested
#12	pre-teen girls (2)	father, mother	no girls' school here

Children who had dropped out of school were of a range of ages (Table 3). All were girls, except for one boy of 17 who had dropped out of school two years ago to manage his family's mill; he had re-enrolled himself in ninth grade this year in Chahar Asyab High School, and so he can no longer be considered a dropout. Household members involved in these decisions again included primarily fathers and mothers, along with brothers and the children themselves. Reasons involved in these decisions were also multiple, and are included in the last column of Table 3. Two households in the sample had withdrawn their girls from the local SDF School due to a mix of both supply- and demand-related reasons. On one hand, the school was considered to be too dusty, the teaching poor, and the teacher was male; on the other hand, reasons included that they were Pashtuns, people talk and the girl herself was lazy. Only one household specifically mentioned that girls were withdrawn from the SDF School because of the need for them to perform household chores, and in this case it was also combined with the idea that men in the village are very strict. A second group of girls had dropped out of school after arriving in the village, having previously been enrolled in school in other locations (Gardez and

Kabul) when refugees. In the context of this close-knit community in Chahar Asyab, it was feared that “relatives will humiliate us” if the girls were enrolled in school.

Table 3. Children who had dropped out of school (one boy and 12 girls from six households)

<i>Household</i>	<i>Dropout</i>	<i>Education history</i>	<i>Who decided</i>	<i>Reason(s)</i>
#1	two girls (8, 12)	dropped out of SDF school after one month	father, mother, brother	we're Pashtun people talk people fight when girls are teased classroom too dusty didn't learn anything (lessons/teaching poor)
#3	12-year-old girl	passed fourth grade at SDF school then dropped out	father, mother	girl is lazy classroom too dusty male teacher
#6	17-year-old boy	studied to seventh grade in Chahar Asyab (has now re-enrolled in ninth grade)	self, father, brothers	manages family mill
#8	two girls (11, 13)	studied to third grade at SDF school	father, mother	household chores men are very strict no transport
#12	three young teenage girls	attended school in Gardez	father, mother	no school for girls here school too far
#13	four girls (pre-teen and teen)	studied to fifth and seventh grades in Kabul	father, mother, brother	relatives humiliate us school too far

Reasons involved in the cases of children never being enrolled in school and having dropped out of school are included in Figure 1. Both men and women related that “big girls” (those nearing or past puberty) should not go to school, as it is against their customs. They are Pashtuns and “people talk” – which brings extreme humiliation and shame to the household. Teenaged girls are secluded within compound walls and any school is “too far” for many units – this applies not only to the local SDF School which is in the middle of the Chil Dokhtaran village but also to the Chahar Asyab High School in the nearby town. As an elder related, there is no suitable transport to school – the girls cannot walk, ride a bicycle, or travel alone daily in a bus or car. To do so would bring shame upon the honour of the household. Even the *malik* of Chil Dokhtaran did not send the girls in his household to school, and he seemed somewhat embarrassed about this:

The *malik* said that most of the people in the village were related to one another – they were from the same tribe. Researchers asked him about the two daughters of his martyred brother who were living in his household. Why didn't he send them to the school in the village? *I know very well that this is a mistake [i.e. it doesn't say in the Quran that girls should not go to school]. But...we're Pashtuns.*

Figure 1. Reasons associated with decisions to not enrol children in school

Supply-related reasons	Demand-related reasons
No girls school here (F)	People talk (F)
School too far (5 km) (F)	Not our custom (F)
No transport (F)	
	We're Pashtun (F)
Male teacher(s) (F)	It's "bad" (F)
	Girl "too old" (F)
Classrooms dusty (F)	Household chores (F)
Poor lessons and teaching	
	Girl lazy (F)
	Girl not interested (F)
	Managed household mill (M)

In many cases in this rural context, social pressure to conform to the locally perceived Pashtun ideal of the secluded female household member is a major factor inhibiting girls' school enrolment. If this is not adhered to, negative social sanctions in the form of gossip are too humiliating for household members – both male and female – to bear.

A primary concern for these village households is the strengthening of their social networks with other units, and this is often accomplished by the marriage of their daughters. Indeed, it is not daughters who will be supporting parents in their old age, and this consideration does enter into whether they invest in their daughters' education or not. Why do so if this is considered to be not "shameful" to others in the community? Who will then marry the girl? As a woman from a conservative household in Chil Dokhtaran, who is the mother of three boys (all in school) and six daughters (none in school), related:

Girls do not remain in the house of their father. They get married and then it is that household's will that is decided. But my son is mine, and he's staying with me. I want him to be comfortable and have a good future with his children. If he becomes a doctor that would be so good...

In juxtaposition to this is the comment by a mother (of six children of whom all of the school-aged boys and girls are in school) in the nearby village of Daag, who indicated that change is occurring:

We've passed our lives badly, and my husband and I don't want our children to live like we have...now our sons say that they want to marry educated girls, and so we think that if our daughters are also educated they may make a good life for themselves...

Although not specifically mentioned as reasons involved in the above decisions, the teasing of girls by males of other households on the village paths or in the bazaar was also mentioned as being common. It is expected that this will occur, so girls do not leave their compounds very often. As a grandfather related, girls in his household did not go to school because of “the disturbances of the fool people”. A teen-aged brother of four school-aged sisters noted that if girls do go to school, villagers begin fighting with one another due to teasing incidents and insults, and this should be avoided at all costs – so his sisters were not enrolled in school.

Another factor not specifically mentioned but which came up in a number of discussions, pertaining to both girls and boys, is the fear of kidnapping of children on their way to and from school. A few months ago villagers had heard of cases of kidnapping occurring in Kabul and Kandahar on the radio and television, and this resulted in parents being extremely concerned about security for both boys and girls. A few children had even been withdrawn temporarily from the local boys’ primary school, until the school had formed a committee of eight members – teachers and students – who were posted along the road to assure that the students arrived safely. This fear had subsided somewhat, but it was still in the minds of a number of parents. No child in this sample was not enrolled because of this reason, however.

The research found that village parents did not always treat all of their children equally. Decisions about their schooling were frequently based upon careful assessment of a child’s qualities and personality. For example, the mother of two girls who had been attending the local SDF School noted that one of her daughters was “lazy” and had dropped out of the school after passing to fourth grade. “But my younger daughter is very intelligent, and she is still in school.” A sensitive and understanding father in another household (whose two sons and two daughters are in school) similarly noted how he treats his sons differently:

A good father or mother should have a good understanding of their children. Among my sons, I can talk to one of them kindly and he understands me, but the other one is very different. The way of thinking and the characteristics of my children change every day, and the way of understanding them changes every day.

In some cases, the orientation of some members of a household can result in some drastic changes – such as causing an extended household to split, or causing a unit to move to the capital city of Kabul. Two examples are included in Boxes 1 and 2.

Box 1. A household divides because of differences on education

Nasim Mohammad and his wife have four sons and two daughters who are all in school. This was not the case a few years ago, however, when they lived with Nasim’s brother, Shah Mohammad, and parents. As Nasim’s wife related:

Before I was living together with my in-laws. My brother-in-law was a terrible person. He was treating my children badly and not allowing them to go to school. He even made my sons drop out and made them rear livestock and do the farming. Then after we parted from them, I sent my children back to school – they’re very interested in education.

The household now lives in separate compound to Shah Mohammad but in the same village.

Discussion with Nasim’s young son, who is now studying in ninth grade, yielded a similar story:

My father always wanted us to study, but my uncle bought us sheep and said, “What do you want to do with schooling?” Then my father said, “No, you have to study so that you will be comfortable in your life in the future.”

Box 2. A household moves to Kabul for education

When the research team entered the compound it was clear that this household was moving – everything was packed and ready to go. Mustafa Khan, his wife and five children were moving to Kabul, where they were to rent a house in Karte Naw. They had lived in the capital during the war, where all of the children had been enrolled in school. In the village only the son had continued with his studies. Mustafa Khan's wife explained:

We are moving to the city because my husband is working there and because of my children's education...we want to send our daughters to school as well.

The girls had studied to the seventh grade and the fifth grade, but since coming to the village they had not been to school. Two of the older girls did tailoring and gave the money they earned to their brother for his school-related costs. He had studied to the twelfth grade and also wanted to go on with his studies in Kabul.

In a number of households the relationship between brothers and sisters is an important one, especially in the context of education, and both negative and positive examples exist. In one of the sample households an older brother of 19, a ninth-grade student, was one of the major decision-makers, resulting in none of his sisters being enrolled in school. The major reason was that they are Pashtun and people in the village talk negatively about girls going to school. In other cases, brothers who were studying in school helped their sisters who were not enrolled learn how to read, and this was often done on a regular basis.

As mentioned above, the villagers' major concern is now with the status of the boys' school, and girls' education is of secondary importance to them. They had not petitioned the government to establish a formal girls' school, and seemed content with SDF's activities in this area. The male teachers at the Chil Dokhtaran Boys' Primary School noted that they would be willing to teach girls at the school in a second afternoon shift, but there had not been any interest shown in this area. As one of the teachers noted, "The thought remains in the minds of the people not to send their girls to school."

On a positive note, however, within the sample households the majority of girls under the age of 12 are enrolled in the local SDF girls' school, and change is slowly taking place. Each year the SDF School grows in size, and adds another class. Next year there will be a fifth grade for girls. An optimistic mother of two young students at the SDF School had this to say:

There are some people who copy from us. We send our children to school and that is why they send their children to school as well...and if a girls' school were to be built here in the village I am sure that people would send their daughters to school. I was the first person to send daughters to the mosque to learn the Holy Quran, and other villagers then copied me and sent their daughters too...if you do not study you are like a blind person!

5. Recommendations

This research has yielded insights into the livelihoods of villagers in Chahar Asyab and, based upon these findings, the following recommendations are made.

1. **Increase knowledge and understanding of communities and households.**
 - Teachers should know the local community and individual households, and they should use this knowledge not only to improve relations with those households which enrol their children, but also to reach out to those which do not.
 - Educators should increase their knowledge of local households' decision-making behaviour about school enrolment and should understand the interplay of supply and demand issues in their community.
 - Outreach activities should be planned which bear in mind the fact that in many households both mothers and fathers play active roles in enrolment decisions. Supportive parents should be encouraged to become local advocates for education.
 - To achieve these goals, teachers should receive basic training in community analysis, rapid appraisal and related participatory techniques.
2. **Improve gender relations within and between households.**
 - Male and female teachers should receive basic training in gender relations so that they can positively influence their students and families to enrol both boys and girls.
 - A specific curriculum should be developed which stresses positive gender relations in the home and society.
 - Both male and female educators should discuss local perceptions of social risk related to enrolling girls in school openly with students, parents and the community, and work with the community to change these perceptions.
 - Teachers should identify supportive households and parents, and encourage them to become local advocates in this area.
3. **Improve communication between households and schools.**
 - Teachers (male and female) should build upon parents' interest in and concern about their children's education by encouraging their constructive participation in the local school.
 - To foster trust and ownership, school visits by parents should be encouraged. Small-scale class functions and awards events, along with parent–teacher conferences, should be held. For secluded mothers, meetings and events could be held in local homes.
 - Teachers should identify interested fathers and mothers and encourage them to become local advocates in fostering positive relations between all households and the local school.
4. **Improve communication between communities and schools.**
 - Appropriate aspects of school management should be decentralised, and educators should encourage communities to become more involved in their local schools (e.g. monitoring and management). With the overall guidance of

- the Ministry of Education (MoE), the head teacher and local leadership should coordinate this and all interested parents should be involved. Roles of all participants should be clearly defined.
- Fostering feelings of community ownership and commitment are critical, as is the accountability of the school to the community.
 - Local and district educators should initiate public awareness campaigns to make parents and communities aware of their new school-related opportunities and responsibilities.
5. **Target outreach to children not enrolled in school.**
- Outreach is crucial for those children not enrolled in school, and for this to be successful educators must know the community and its households well. There is a pressing demand for non-formal activities such as home-based schooling, accelerated learning opportunities, literacy training etc.
 - Home-based literacy training should be targeted at specific groups (e.g. teenaged girls in conservative settings, working children and youth).
 - With the MoE focused on formal education, the involvement of experienced NGOs in these targeted programmes is necessary.
6. **Develop government policies for private schools and courses.**
- In urban areas, the enrolment of students in private schools and courses is increasing rapidly, and explicit government policies (including formal registration) for these institutions are necessary.
7. **Develop supplementary reading for students.**
- A series of short, regionally specific, gender-sensitive stories of individual boys' and girls' lives should be developed, featuring children who are enrolled in school as well as those who are not.
8. **Conduct longitudinal research on household dynamics and education outcomes.**
- Longitudinal research on the ever-changing dynamics of households, school-related decision-making and education outcomes should be undertaken, utilising the sample households from this study.

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