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Changing Profile of Education in Afghanistan

Saif R. Samady, Ph.D.

Former Chairman of Independent High Commission of Education for Afghanistan

2013

Changing Profile of Education in Afghanistan

This is a factual and analytical paper on development of education in Afghanistan since 2002, following two decades of conflict in the country, and the beginning of a new and more hopeful phase involving the support of the international community. It covers the opportunities and challenges in basic education, secondary, technical and vocational education, teacher education and higher education, with special reference to improvement of educational opportunities for girls. It presents progress and expansion of education at all levels, based on statistical data for 2002-2012, and signals the challenges for quality of education, achievement of compulsory basic education especially for girls, and adult literacy. The paper concludes that there is a strong and growing demand for modern education and training for boys and girls in Afghanistan. Peace and stability and innovative strategies will contribute to progress of education in the country.

Prior to the twentieth century traditional education and training for Afghan children and young people were provided at home, in the mosques, in religious centres (Madrassa) and through informal apprenticeship and on the job training. Modern education in Afghanistan began in the early 1900s and developed in the 1920s, following independence in 1919. For political, social and cultural reasons, the pace of modern educational development was slow. The first significant development of general education and higher education took place in the 1960s and 1970s in the context of political reform and social and economic development. In the late 1970s Afghanistan had a functioning education system comprising over a million students including 20% girls in primary, secondary and higher education. The coup d'état of 1978 and the subsequent war of resistance and ideological and ethnical conflicts during the last two decades of the twentieth century had a devastating effect on the social and economic infrastructure including education in Afghanistan. In 1999 the enrolment in primary education was 811,500 with only 7% girls. The enrolments in secondary and higher education were limited and the universities were often closed and did not function effectively.

The dramatic international events of 2001 which led to the establishment of the Transitional Islamic Republic of Afghanistan brought new opportunities and challenges for educational development in the country. The new Constitution of Afghanistan, which was adopted in 2004, stipulates that nine years of basic education will be compulsory for all Afghan children (boys and girls) between the ages of six and fifteen years old. Secondary, technical and vocational education and higher education will be expanded. Education in State schools and institutions will be free up to university level. Special reference is made to elimination of illiteracy and promotion of education for women. The establishment of private general, technical and vocational and higher education will be allowed and regulated by the law. In accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, the Education Law and Higher Education Law have been prepared by the government and submitted to the Parliament for approval.

In the context of social and economic development, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan gave special attention to the development of education in the country. In 2002 the government established, with the support of UNESCO, an Independent High Commission of Education to propose policy, objectives and strategies for the revival and development of education in Afghanistan. The ministry of education and ministry of higher education, in cooperation with UNESCO and other International Organizations, prepared strategic development plans for primary, secondary, technical and vocational education and higher education. In cooperation with the international community, educational opportunities were significantly increased for Afghan children especially girls. Attention was given to teacher education and higher education. The private sector participation was encouraged in the development of education and training, especially in higher education and technical and vocational education.

Between 2002 and 2012, enrolment in general education increased from 2.3 million to 8.6 million including 3.2 million female students (38%). Enrolment in higher education during this period increased from 31,200 students to 101,000 including 19,200 female students (19%). The growth of general education and higher education during the period 2002-2012 is shown in Figures A and B and Table I. The rate of growth for male and female students in general education is about the same; however, the rate of growth for female students in higher education is slower due to social and cultural constraints in some parts of the country and smaller number of female secondary school graduates (currently there are twice as many boys as girls in the secondary schools; based on girls enrolment in primary and middle schools, the situation should gradually improve). It should be pointed out that in spite of the relative expansion of education, in 2012 only 58 % of school age children (70 % boys and 45 % girls) were in basic education. Lack of security, constraints in educational services and limited financial resources are the main obstacles for more rapid growth of general education.

After the decline of education during the latter part of the twentieth century, the government's campaign of 'back to school' generated enormous interest and over two million children including 30% of girls enrolled in primary education. Steps were also taken to improve the curriculum of general education, prepare new textbooks and expand teacher education. In addition to the textbooks in official languages (Pashto and Dari), according to the provision of the new Education Law, a number of textbooks for primary education were developed in several minority languages. Since 2002 the number of schools increased from 6,040 to 14,456 and the number of teachers nearly tripled (181,640 including 32 % female teachers in 2012). Out of 8.6 million students 71 % are currently in primary and middle schools (grades 1-9) and 29 % enrolled in secondary education (grades 10-12). The nationwide pupil/teacher ratio in general education is 47.6 which is slightly higher than previous years. The proportion of students in rural and urban areas are 60 % and 40 % respectively. Steps were taken to make education more relevant to the environment and improve the management of schools by developing collaboration between schools and

communities. In this perspective school councils have been established in the majority of schools. The National Strategic Education Plan (2010 - 2014) envisages that the net enrolment rate of girls and boys in basic education will increase to 60 % and 75 %. Increased attention will be given to education for girls and reducing the disparities among provinces, geographical areas as well as socio-economic groups in society.

Adult literacy has been a major problem in Afghan society. In spite of the efforts by different governments the rate of adult literacy at the end of the twentieth century was estimated slightly higher than twenty percent. The main reasons were the limitation of resources for an effective adult literacy campaign and lack of schooling for a large portion of school age population. In 2003, the Independent High Commission of Education recommended the launching of a national programme for eradication of illiteracy, which should be decentralized and conducted in close cooperation with governmental and non-governmental organizations, agencies, institutions, development projects and communities. The ministry of education has initiated a plan for development of literacy, with special attention to women and rural areas. Innovative approaches in teaching and learning introduced through Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (ELA), Learning for Community Empowerment (LECP) and other initiatives. The number of learners between 2006 and 2009 doubled to half a million (204,000 male and 306,000 female learners). In 2009, the literacy rate for the population aged 15 and over reached 26 % (39 % male and 12 % female). It is estimated that 9.5 million Afghans were illiterate in 2008, in a population of approximately 31 million people.

Teacher Education

The development of education depends on the number and quality of teachers available for different types and levels of education. In the late 1990s about 5000 male and female students were being trained in twelve teacher training colleges. By 2001 not all of these colleges were functioning. In view of the rapid expansion of primary and secondary schools efforts have been made to expand and improve pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes. These programmes include secondary, post-secondary (grades 13 – 14) and university level training. The ministry of education organizes the secondary and post-secondary teacher education and the ministry of higher education is responsible for university level teacher training. In 2003 a Pedagogical Institute in Kabul was upgraded to a University of Education. The University of Education has 3575 male and 2564 female students in 2012/2013 studying in six Departments (natural sciences, social sciences, vocational education, special education, languages and literature). In 2012 the first group of 22 male and female students received their Master of Education degrees. In addition to Kabul Education University, all other universities and Institutes of Higher Education have faculties of education and teacher training programmes. Enrolments in faculties of education increased eight-fold between 2002 and 2010 (Table II).

In 2007 the ministry of education established a National Teacher Academy to train teacher educators for Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs). A group of 150 educators including 27 % females have been trained. As of 2012, forty-two Teacher Training Colleges (at least one in each Province) and 153 TTC Satellites have been established. A total of 64,480 students (42 % female) were enrolled in TTCs, and trained by 1989 teacher educators. In order to meet the targets for expansion of general education greater efforts are needed to increase the capacity and develop the facilities of TTCs. The quality of teacher education, especially the upgrading of existing general education teachers (181,640 of whom only about 30 % have post-secondary or higher qualification), will be a continuing challenge. The shortage of women teachers and constraints in attracting women trainees in certain parts of the country is an obstacle for development of general education for girls. In order to improve the quality of science education, and reinforce in-service training for science teachers, the ministry is developing the National Centre for science and technology education with mini satellites in every province. To enhance the professional capacity of science and mathematics educators in the faculties of education, 240 science and mathematics professors participated in seven seminars between 2007 and 2010.

In view of the rapid expansion of technical and vocational education and training in public and private sector, the training of specialized teacher trainers in technical fields has become increasingly important. The national authorities with bilateral technical assistance have recently reinforced teacher training programmes through the following initiatives: (1) The Technical Teacher Training Academy has currently 120 teacher trainees and plans to expand to 300 trainees in 2013; (2) An Agricultural Teacher training College was expected to be completed in 2012, which will have an annual capacity for 300 teacher trainees; (3) The Afghanistan Technical and Vocational Institute has developed a Teacher training Faculty and has an accelerated programme allowing teachers to begin working within a year while continuing to receive training for another year. In addition to these initiatives, the University of Education and some faculties of engineering and agriculture of other universities are contributing in the training of technical and vocational teachers.

Technical and Vocational Education

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is provided by the ministry of education, ministry of labour and social affairs, some other ministries such as the ministry of agriculture, transport and aviation, energy, information and communication technology and the private sector. The ministry of higher education will also play an increasing role by developing community colleges. A recent study shows that in 2011 there were more than 350,000 technical and vocational students at all levels, who were trained in about 600 centres in the country. It is reported that 30 % of students were in public TVET schools and institutes and 70 % received training in the private sector including training organized by NGOs. A survey of 420 public and private centres indicated the following TVET training categories: English 28 %, ICT and computers 18 %, business 17 %, textile and tailoring 7 %, and

construction 6 %, mechanics 5 %, agriculture 4 %, electronics repair 4 %, carpet weaving 4 %, handicraft 3 % and others 4 %. The private sector training activities, which are organized in Kabul and provinces, focus on basic skills training and training of middle level personnel in business and administration, accounting and finance, health science, medical and dental technology, ICT/computers, and media training.

Traditionally the ministry of education has been providing much of formal technical and vocational education in Afghanistan. However, in the 1990s the vocational schools did not function adequately, due to lack of staff and facilities, and in 2004 a total of 4900 students were attending 41 training centres run by the ministry of education in the country. Efforts have been made to rehabilitate and develop technical and vocational schools. In 2012 a total of 80,000 students (10 % female) were being trained in 210 schools and institutes at secondary and post-secondary levels (62 % at secondary level) by 2740 teachers. The majority of students were in Kabul (38 %), Nangarhar (12 %) and Balkh (6.6 %). The ministry established a national institute for management and administration in Kabul in 2008. The ministry intends to increase access to TVET by expanding regional institutes and provincial schools and establishing district schools for vocational training. In 2010 the government decided to construct 200 new TVET district schools and 34 provincial TVET institutes.

The ministry of labour and social affairs works closely with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to provide short term vocational training courses. The National Skills Development Programme (NSDP) was established by the ministry of labour with the assistance of the World Bank. The objective of this programme is to train less educated unemployed population in short courses for basic skills in auto repair, carpentry, welding and trades. This programme aims at training 240,000 workers. It is expected that NSDP will evolve into the National Vocational Training Authority. The ministry of labour has currently 20 training centres. It is developing standards for training and levels of competency for specific skills within five sectors: agriculture, social, construction, services, business. The ministry in cooperation with ILO established a number of Employment Service Centres around the country.

In order to coordinate human resources development in Afghanistan, the government established the Human Resource Development Board (HRDB) in 2010. The Board includes the ministries of education, higher education, labour and social affairs, women's affair, finance, and development partners. The government departments and agencies have developed separate strategies for TVET, which need to be coordinated into a comprehensive strategic plan. UNESCO has been involved in facilitating the process of creating an umbrella strategy for the stakeholders. In order to standardize learning outcomes and level of competency, and ensure the quality of training, the Afghan National Qualifications Framework (ANQF) and National Quality Authority (NQA) are being established. With the increasing responsibility of the ministry of education for expansion of technical and vocational education in the country, the ministry established in 2012 the position of a

deputy minister for technical and vocational education, with departments for programmes, curriculum development, teacher education, and certification of private centres.

Higher Education

In the 1990s the universities were not functioning effectively due to lack of staff and teaching facilities as well as insecurity. In 1995 a total of 10,700 students were registered in five universities in Kabul, Nangarhar, Balkh, Herat and Kandahar. In 2002 the ministry of higher education initiated a programme of staff development, rehabilitation and reconstruction. In 2003, a total of 31,200 students (19 % female) attended 17 institutions of higher education in the country. With the assistance of UNESCO-IIEP a strategic plan was developed and published in 2005. The plan recommended the reorganization of institutions of higher learning, which envisaged five regional universities and 13 other universities and institutes. The plan has been further elaborated in cooperation with specialists from UNESCO, the World Bank and the Higher Education Project (USAID). In 2009 the ministry finalized the National Higher Education Strategic Plan for 2010-2014.

The objective of the ministry of higher education, as stated in the Higher Education Strategic Plan, is to facilitate equitable access to higher education, establish innovative institutions that provide high quality teaching, research and service; produce graduates who are competitive in a global economy, contribute to economic growth, social development, nation building and the stability of the country. In this perspective, the Strategic Plan envisages two broad programmes: (1) Educate and train skilled graduates to meet the socio-economic development needs of Afghanistan; enhance teaching, research and learning; and encourage service to the community and nation. (2) Lead and manage a coordinated system of higher education comprising universities, institutes and community colleges dedicated to providing high quality tertiary education. The Strategic Plan underlines the importance of faculty and staff development, revision and development of curriculum, science and technology, post-graduate studies and research, equity and access including open and distance education, accreditation and quality assurance, and governance of higher education.

Table I shows the higher education student enrolments in 2002-2012, which increased from 31,203 to 101,000 – more than three folds. Table II reflects the distribution of students by Faculty in 2002 and 2010. Currently 81,785 male and 19,215 female students (19.0 %) are enrolled in 31 public universities and institutes in Kabul and 26 Provinces (Table III). About a quarter of students attend universities in Kabul, which provide boarding facilities for male and female students, and a significant portion of the students in Kabul universities come from provincial secondary schools. Furthermore, 80 % of increase in higher education enrolment during this period took place in the provinces. In 2002 there were 17 universities and higher education institutes in Kabul and twelve provinces. Since 2002 higher education facilities have been developed in 13 other provinces, notably Bamyan, Paktia and Baghlan, where current student enrolments are higher than 2500. The female enrolment between

2002 and 2012 increased from 4200 to 19200 students (nearly five-fold), but the percentage of female students remained the same (19 %). Despite the increase in enrolments, the rate of growth for female students in higher education nationwide has not improved over the last ten years (Figure B), due to constraints in some parts of the country, and fewer female graduates from secondary schools. The universities with higher female enrolments are in Herat (34 %), Kabul (27 %), Balkh (25 %), Samangan (24 %), Faryab (23 %) and Badakhshan (21 %). The major universities in the South and East of the country have low female student enrolments: Kandahar (5.8 %), Nangarhar (5.7 %), Paktia (4.7 %) and Khost (1.2 %).

In 2012 there were 3009 male and 510 female faculty members (4.7 % PhDs, 36.2 % Masters and 59.1 % BAs/BSs) in the universities. There is some improvement in the proportion of female faculty members from 12.0 % in 2002 to 14.5 % in 2012. In view of rapid expansion of higher education, the ratio of students to faculty almost doubled during this period from 16.9 to 28.7 students per faculty member. Despite the efforts of the ministry of higher education, the qualifications of faculty members have not significantly improved over the last few years. Last year about 500 new faculty members recruited, none of whom had PhDs and the majority possessed only BAs. Furthermore, a large number of senior faculty members reached the mandatory retirement age in 2012. Steps have been taken to improve the situation by developing post-graduate education programmes in Afghan universities and provide training opportunities abroad. Currently 175 faculty members study abroad for MAs and PhDs. Seven Masters programmes in physics, computer science, geology, mining, hydrology, exploration and extraction of oil and gas and education are available in the related faculties of the universities in Kabul. The upgrading and professional qualification of faculty members will continue to be a major challenge for the ministry of higher education.

An important development in Afghan higher education has been the emergence of private higher education, which is in principle allowed by the new Constitution of Afghanistan. In view of the constraints in the capacity of public higher education institutions, private higher education and technical and vocational education and training are expected to play an increasing role in providing training opportunities for secondary school graduates. The number of secondary school graduates is increasing rapidly. Last year 130,000 students graduated from secondary schools. Public universities can only admit about 40,000 new students. During the last few years, private higher education in Afghanistan has been expanding. The first private higher education institution was the American University of Afghanistan, which was established in Kabul and started offering courses in 2006. Currently there are more than fifty private higher education institutions, with a total enrolment of approximately 20,000 students in the country. The ministry of higher education has so far approved 30 institutions. There are 20 institutions in Kabul and 10 in the provinces (Mazar 4, Jalalabad 4, Herat 2). These institutions offer four year study programmes in economics, business administration, political science and law, journalism, computer science, engineering, medical technology and pharmacy .

Science and Technology

Training in science and technology continue to be a high priority in universities. In addition to Kabul Polytechnic University and the Medical University, many universities have faculties of agriculture, science and engineering; several universities have faculties of geo-science and mining, medicine, veterinary science and pharmacy. A number of public and private universities have developed computer science departments. In 2008 the ministry of higher education prepared a 'National IT Strategy for Higher Education in Afghanistan', which is implemented in cooperation with Technical University of Berlin and other universities. Table II indicates that enrolments in the Faculties of Agriculture, Engineering, Geology and Mining, and Economics have doubled between 2002 and 2010; enrolments in medical and basic science studies remained stagnant (the enrolment in medical education slightly increased to 6546 in 2012 compared with 6195 students in 2002) . The quality and standards of training in scientific and technological faculties continue to be a challenge, as many faculties do not have adequate laboratories, workshops and trained staff.

In view of limited post-graduate studies and resource constraints, research activities in science and technology have not developed in Afghan universities. The University of Kabul initiated research activities in the 1960s and 1970s. In the early 1960s Kabul University set up a research centre and a research board for promotion of scientific research. In the 1970s different faculties carried out some twenty research projects. The research activities of the university were disrupted when the education system suffered during the last decades. In recent years the ministry of higher education has taken steps to encourage research activities especially in relation to post-graduate studies. In 2012/2013 ten short term applied research projects have been initiated in Kabul, Herat and Bamyan Universities. A number of ministries such as the ministry of agriculture, ministry of mines, and other ministries and departments concerned with development of industry and natural resources have laboratories and research and evaluation projects, which undertake studies and applied research related to their training and development needs. These activities are generally short term and project specific.

Partnership between Afghan universities and a number of American and European universities have contributed in enhancing the quality of higher education, through training and research, application of new technologies, and development of curriculum and teaching materials, especially in scientific and technological fields. The professional groups in Afghan universities have promoted exchange of information and innovation by organizing conferences and workshops, in cooperation with the international community. They have been supported by bilateral assistance projects and Afghan scientists and professionals abroad such as the Society of Afghan Engineers in the United States and similar organizations in Europe. In 2010 the National Association of Science and Mathematics Educators of Afghanistan (NASMEA) was established to promote science and mathematics education in the country. Several hundred science and mathematics educators from the

faculties of education in Afghan universities are members of NASMEA. The Association has been active in developing teaching/learning materials and in-service training of science teachers.

The National Development Strategy of Afghanistan envisages investment in development of food, water, energy, transport, telecommunications, natural resources, and mining. Attention has been given to the ICT sector; the ministry of communication was renamed as ministry of communication and information technology in 2007. The formulation of a science and technology policy for training and research will play a crucial role in enhancing efficient economic development. Promotion of applied research in the public and private sector has been the subject of recent studies. In 2003 the Independent High Commission of Education recommended the preparation of a national policy and long term strategic plan for science and technology, with special attention to applied research. A study on science and technology policy was submitted to the national authorities in 2005, proposing the establishment of a National Council for Science Technology. This subject was further studied by UNESCO in 2007, which came to similar conclusion on the need for a national mechanism to promote the application of science and technology for economic development in Afghanistan. The proposed strategies for implementation of science and technology policy include a national council, strengthening education and training, applied research in universities and national laboratories, as well as establishing science and technology units for systematic applied research in all relevant ministries and agencies. It is also recommended to set up a national documentation centre for science and technology and a digital library, and promote science and society programmes through the media, science discovery centres and a science museum. These studies are being considered by the national authorities.

Conclusion: progress and challenges

Since 2002 the profile of education in Afghanistan has changed: significant expansion of all levels and types of education; increased access and educational opportunities for all Afghans, especially girls and women; participation of the private sector in educational development. The international community has contributed in these achievements. While in quantitative terms and variety of initiatives the developments are significant, the quality and efficiency of education continue to be a challenge for national authorities (shortage and quality of teachers and faculty, lack of adequate physical and learning facilities including laboratories and libraries, out-dated curricula and lack of suitable textbooks, especially in vocational and higher education, absence of a comprehensive national strategy for science and technology and vocational training). There has been no significant improvement in the rate of literacy (26 % for 15 year olds and over in 2009). It is unlikely that compulsory basic education for school age boys and girls (7-12 years old) will be achieved before 2020. Without a strong political will and an effective national campaign for literacy, and adequate

resources, substantial improvement in the rate of adult literacy especially for women seems unlikely to happen in the near future.

The political, social, cultural and security situation have impacted on development of education in Afghanistan. In some parts of the country the development of education has been restricted due to insecurity. Several hundred schools for girls have been destroyed or closed by extremists, especially in the South of the country. The religious, ideological and ethnic differences in Afghan society have also influenced and sometimes disturbed the progress and functioning of the education system. Afghanistan is going through a period of political reform and social and economic changes which will have a profound impact on the future of Afghan society. The progress of education in Afghanistan will depend on security, good governance, relevant and imaginative strategies, adequate financial resources, and continued support of the international community. There is a strong and growing demand for modern education and training for boys and girls in Afghanistan. The aspiration of the majority of Afghan people is for a better life, especially for their children, democracy and respect for human rights, justice, peace and security in the country and region.

Growth of Student Enrolment in Afghanistan: (2002 – 2012)

Table I

Year	General Education			Higher Education		
	Male	Female	Total	male	female	Total
2002	1,700,000	700,000	2,400,000	27,000	4200	31,200
2004	2,700,000	1,300,000	4,000,000	24,500	6200	30,700
2006	3,500,000	1,900,000	5,400,000	30,600	8800	39,400
2008	3,900,000	2,300,000	6,200,000	48200	12,900	61,800
2010	4,300,000	2,700,000	7,000,000	62,900	14,830	77,730
2012	5,359,000	3,284,000	8,643,000	81,785	19,215	101,000

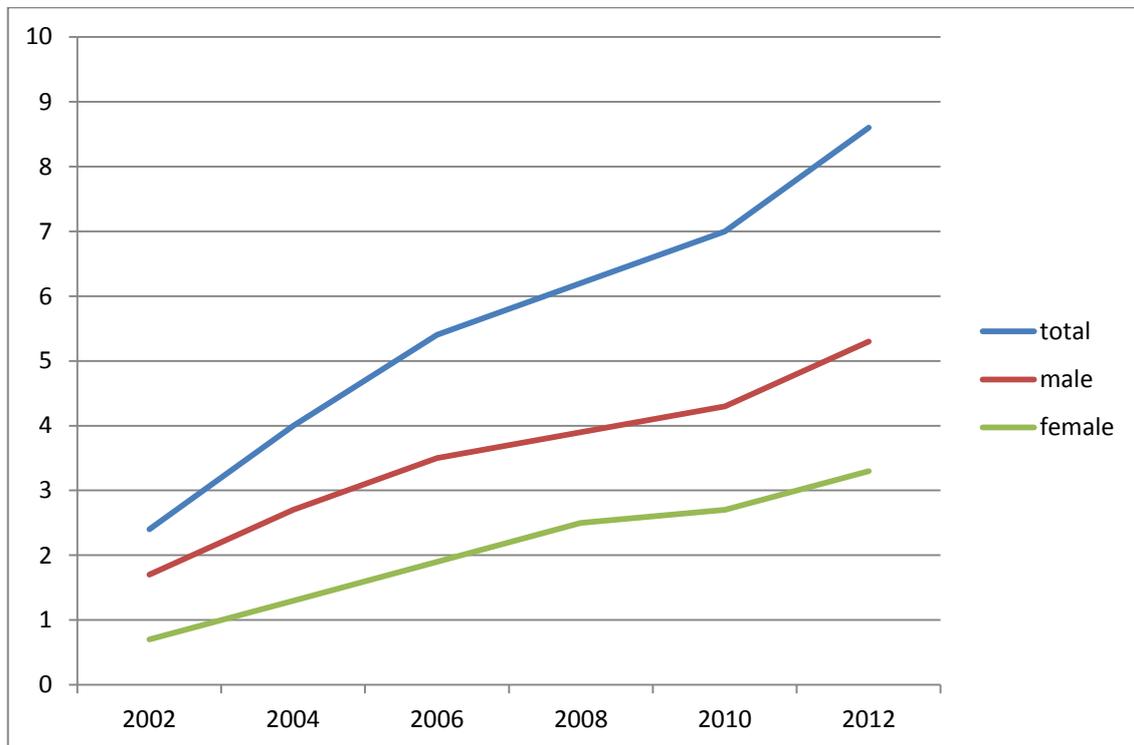
Higher Education Enrolment by Faculty: 2002 & 2010

Table II

	2002				2010			
	male	Female	Total	%	male	female	Total	%
Agriculture	3060	34	3094	9.92	7337	238	7575	9.92
Engineering	3833	145	3978	12.75	6379	239	6618	8.67
N. Science	1345	690	2035	6.52	1196	787	1983	2.59
Computer Science					1268	268	1536	2.01
Geology & Mining	953	12	965	3.09	2235	148	2383	3.12
Medicine	5068	1127	6195	19.85	4565	1472	6037	7.91
Veterinary Science	427	3	430	1.38	647	52	699	0.92
Pharmacy	287	42	329	1.05	285	134	419	0.55
Fine Arts	134	36	170	0.54	553	159	712	0.93
Economy	1616	134	1750	5.61	3636	272	3908	5.12
Law & P. Science	2201	355	2556	8.19	3511	672	4183	5.48
Social Science	771	460	1231	3.95	2256	628	2884	3.77
Journalism	523	127	650	2.08	624	92	716	0.94
Education	1479	1274	2753	8.82	17217	7055	24272	31.78
Lang. & Literature	2445	1340	3785	12.13	5830	2118	7948	10.41
Theology	1098	184	1282	4.11	3621	871	4492	5.88
Total	25240	5963	31203	100.00	61160	15205	76365	100.00

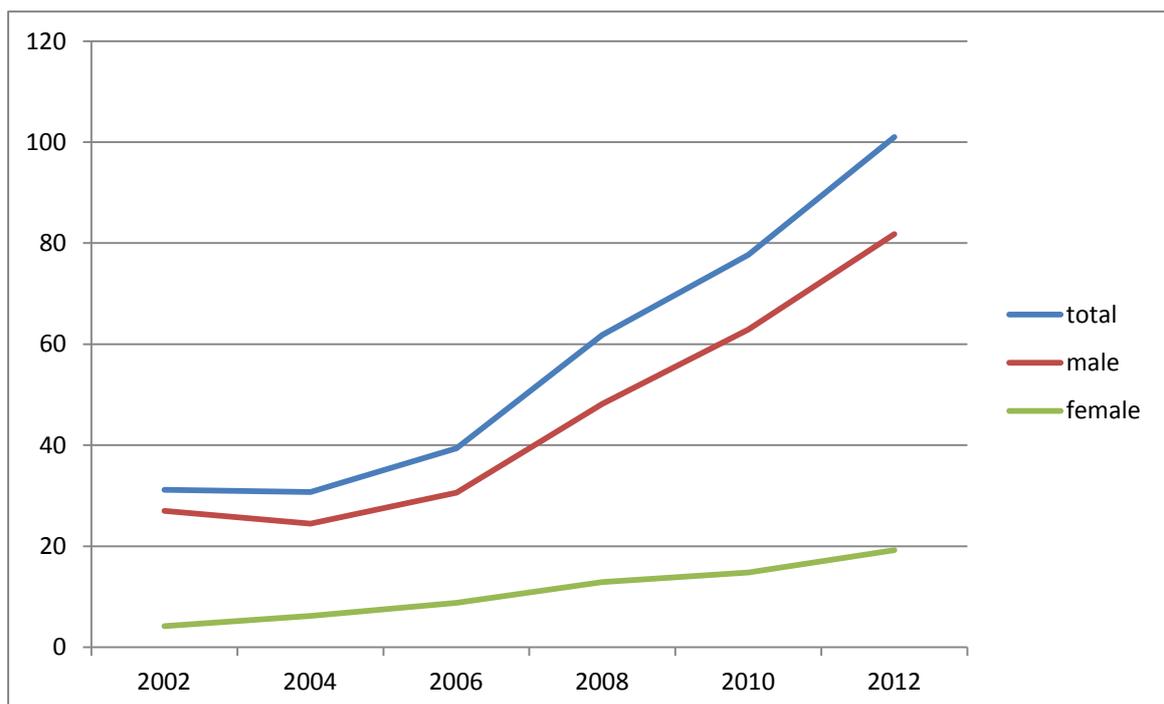
Growth of Student Enrolment (x 000,000) in General Education

Afghanistan: 2002-2012 Figure A



Growth of Student Enrolment (x000) in Higher Education

Afghanistan: 2002-2012 Figure B



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