

*Life*

# Afghanistan

LITERACY INITIATIVE FOR EMPOWERMENT  
NEWSLETTER

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# UNESCO Kabul's role

in literacy intervention and peace building in Afghanistan

*“Literacy is a prerequisite for peace because it carries multiple benefits, cutting across the human, cultural, social, political and economic spheres.”*

Ms. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of the International Literacy Day, 8 September 2011

The UNESCO office in Kabul was established in late 2001 to contribute to the reconstruction efforts being undertaken by the Government of Afghanistan, the United Nations and the international community. As a specialized UN agency, UNESCO promotes peace and security in Afghanistan and firmly believes in building the foundations of peace through quality education. Over the last 10 years, UNESCO Kabul has contributed to strengthening the Government's capacity in planning, managing, implementing and monitoring the education system at all levels from pre-school to higher education, including formal and non-formal approaches. Together with the Education Sector at Headquarters, UNESCO Institutes, UNESCO Bangkok, donors, and development partners, UNESCO Kabul has supported a number of education initiatives in Afghanistan. This newsletter highlights its active role and achievements in literacy and non-formal education.

## **LIFE as the National Literacy framework**

The Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), a global strategy led and supported by UNESCO, has been adopted as the national literacy framework. This framework enables all stakeholders to promote literacy development in a more coordinated, harmonized, and effective manner. In close collaboration with LIFE partners and technical support from



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UNESCO, the Needs Assessment Report (for Literacy) has been developed by the Literacy Department of Ministry of Education (MoE), which reviews and analyses the literacy situation in Afghanistan to identify the gaps to be tackled in the priority areas. Based on the Needs Assessment Report, the National Literacy Action Plan (NLAP) was developed. The NLAP is envisaged as providing the government, donors and all other literacy stakeholders with a common vision, guiding principles and a sound national strategy that lays out a general framework necessary for the effective implementation of literacy programmes and plans.

See [www.life-afg.org](http://www.life-afg.org) for more information on LIFE in Afghanistan.

## **Capacity Development and Strategic Planning**

UNESCO Kabul has strongly supported and cooperated with the Afghan government in the development of the National Education Strategic Plans (NESP I 2006-2010 and NESP II 2010-2014). These plans serve as a framework and coordinating mechanism for all foreign interventions in the education sector. Literacy, as highlighted above, is identified as one of the priority areas within NESP II.



Availability of reliable and quality statistical data on literacy is imperative for strategic planning of literacy interventions. UNESCO Kabul office jointly with the Literacy Department of MoE, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) of Afghanistan, and UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) started preparation on Afghanistan Literacy Assessment Survey (ALAS). The survey is based on the Literacy Assessment Monitoring Programme (LAMP) which is developed by UIS and is widely being conducted in the world. For Afghanistan, ALAS is the first test-based literacy assessment sample survey ever to be conducted. The reliable data from ALAS

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will be one of the strongest tools to formulate effective national policy, design appropriate interventions and monitor the literacy situation of the country. In addition, through ALAS, UNESCO and MoE aim to build national capacities in assessing the literacy situation in Afghanistan.

Systematic and sustainable monitoring through Management Information System (MIS) enables literacy stakeholders to avoid duplication of interventions, enhance effective resource allocation, and design more strategic policies and plans for literacy delivery in Afghanistan. UNESCO Kabul, with technical support from UNESCO Bangkok, has been developing a Non-Formal Education Management Information System (NFE-MIS) for Afghanistan to collect, store, process, analyze, and disseminate information for educational planning and management in the non-formal education sector. Pilot projects have been conducted in Bamiyan province. NFE-MIS is currently being integrated into the existing Education Management Information System (EMIS) to allow the Ministry to monitor a wide range of educational programmes throughout the country.

To further enhance the Government's capacity for promoting literacy and non-formal education, UNESCO Kabul provides technical assistance to the Literacy Department of the MoE to develop, revise, and print literacy materials. As a result, approximately 500,000 literacy materials in Dari and Pashto have been printed and distributed nation-wide.

## Curriculum Development and Review

From 2003 to 2005, UNESCO and the Literacy Department of MoE implemented Literacy and Non-formal Education Development in Afghanistan (LAND Afghan) through financial contributions from the Government of Japan. The project aimed at developing technical and structural foundations for promoting literacy and non-formal education. Under LAND Afghan, the following materials were developed: the national curriculum framework for 9-month adult literacy education (6 months basic literacy and 3 month post-literacy), national literacy primer for basic literacy, supplementary material for post-literacy, and literacy facilitators' guideline for the basic literacy primer. All materials were compiled from scratch after the fall of Taliban regime.

Although the materials developed through LAND Afghan have greatly contributed to improving the quality of adult literacy education in Afghanistan, it has been more than five years since the development of the curriculum and primer. The Afghan literacy environment has been changed by massive literacy interventions from various stakeholders. Thus, UNESCO is working with the Literacy Department of MoE to lead an evaluation and revision process of the national curriculum framework and accompanying materials.



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## Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (ELA)

With a generous grant from the Government of Japan, the programme for Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (ELA) is one of the largest literacy interventions under the framework of LIFE in Afghanistan. The Programme aims to contribute to the achievement of the education goals as set forth in NESP and ANDS, and to build a peaceful, secure and sustainable Afghanistan through wide-scale literacy interventions. The integrated literacy instruction provided through ELA will not only enhance literacy skills, but also ensure self-sustainability, promote both income-generating and critical thinking skills, generate a sense of public good, and empower men and women to participate in decision-making processes. In the course of five years from 2008 to 2013, 60% of the 600,000 beneficiaries in 18 provinces will be women.

Through a joint delivery modality with the Literacy Department of the MoE, ELA also aims at strengthening institutional and human capacities of the MoE, particularly its Literacy Department in order to deliver literacy and non-formal education programmes in a more effective manner while empowering communities to create enabling environments in their vicinity to promote and sustain educational opportunities. Whilst ELA could address more than 15% of the quantitative targets of NLAP, the holistic approach taken by the programme will significantly empower literacy stakeholders from the government to the community level, thereby contribute to a productive, peaceful, secure and sustainable nation-building in Afghanistan.

## Skills Development Project

Just as a book has little relevance to the hungry, those worried about economic survival are easily distracted from reading. Literacy can play an enormous transformational role at the individual and community levels. The extent of this transformation, however, depends on how literacy is linked with other development initiatives.



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From 2010 to 2011, UNESCO through its \$2 million skills development project funded by the Government of Japan, trained 3,170 neo-literate youth in nine provinces of Afghanistan, exceeding the target of 2,500 trainees. The overall objective of the project is to provide skills development/agricultural training to neo-literate youth in order to sustain and advance their literacy skills and equip them with productive and marketable skills, thereby improving their livelihoods and contribute to peaceful, secure and sustainable nation-building in Afghanistan.

UNESCO field staff and four partner organizations selected the neo-literate participants from amongst those who graduated from ELA literacy classes. Trainees from the provinces of Balkh, Badakshan, Samangan, Daikundy, Bamiyan, Nangarhar, Wardak, Ghor and Paktika participated in over 30 skills (house wiring, plumbing, tailoring,



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carpentry, mobile set repairing, generator repairing, bicycle repairing, furniture making, auto mechanic, TV and VCR repairs, barber, embroidery, metal working, bee keeping, etc.).

One contributing success factor has been the close coordination between provincial project staff, implementing partners and CDCs. Having the community involved at every stage of implementation including selection of skills at the village level, participants and location of classes has garnered support for the project in general and also encouraged greater female participation. Part of the project requirement is to have 60% female participation, which the project has been able to meet and sometimes exceed in certain communities by as much as 10%.

## Literacy for Empowering Afghan Police (LEAP)

*“Building human resource capacity is a major issue which the Government of Japan believes is the foundation of any development. This new programme is a major step toward sustainable and effective development in Afghan Police human resource.”*

**His Excellency Mr. Reicho Takahashi,  
Japan’s Ambassador to Afghanistan**

*“70% of the Afghan National Police suffer from illiteracy or low literacy and tackling this problem is our first priority.”*

**His Excellency Mr. Bismillah Khan Mohammadai,  
Minister of Interior, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan**

This \$3 million programme funded by the Government of Japan will provide literacy training to 3,000 Afghan National Police (ANP) officers and law enforcement officers who have difficulties in reading, writing and calculation from 2011 to 2013. The implementation of the programme will be lead by the Ministry of Interior (Mol) and the Literacy Department of the MoE in close collaboration with literacy stakeholders such as NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A). UNESCO’s main role in the programme is to provide technical support in the creation of contextualized literacy materials that will not only enhance the literacy abilities of police, but also equip them with transferable knowledge and skills to be better able to perform their duties.

Curriculum and teaching/learning resources will be developed by a task force which consists of relevant department/personnel of Mol. A minimum of 20 master trainers (within Mol as well as other relevant literacy providers) will be equipped with enhanced capacities in managing and sustaining quality literacy education for the ANP. This process and the development of curricular materials specific for the ANP as an end product of the programme will greatly contribute to enhancing both human and institutional capacities in the security sector of the Government of Afghanistan as the country moves towards transition by 2014.





# Literacy in Afghanistan

## a priority for recovery and reconstruction

*“Peace, security and democracy are the foundations of the development for countries, and require the existence of a self-sustaining critical mass of literate, responsible and productive citizens.”*

Reproduced from *UNESCO Building Human Capacities in Least Developed Countries to Promote Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development*, 2011

On a global scale, literacy as well as adult literacy rates for Afghanistan are among the lowest of developing countries, ranking above only Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. Approximately one third of Afghanistan’s population aged 15 and above is literate, which means that an estimated 11 million Afghans aged 15 and above remain in great need of opportunities to gain literacy and numeracy skills. The illiteracy rate among Afghans, however, is not solely attributed to poverty but is rather a myriad of social and economic factors which include shortage of qualified teachers, especially females; insufficient learning spaces and materials; poor institutional capacity to plan and manage educational programmes; political and cultural conservatism; and traditional family structures.

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the Government of Afghanistan and international organisations have developed several frameworks aimed at educational reform, including the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS 2008-2013), the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF 2010-2013), and the two National Education Strategic Plans (NESP I 2006-2010 and NESP II 2010-2014).

The NESP II 2010-2014 identifies literacy and non-formal education as one of its priorities. Whilst its overall aim is to develop a long-term literacy programme to empower communities and individuals to build a productive, secure and



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literate nation, it sets the following objectives and principal targets:

- Increase literacy of the population aged 15 and over to 48% (43% females and 54% males) by 2014
- Provide literacy courses for 3.6 million by 2014, with at least 60% female learners
- Provide vocational training for 360,000 learners (or 10% of the graduate of basic literacy) by 2014
- Enhance standard learning achievement of graduates from 50% to 80% in 2014



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# Stories from the field

comments from beneficiaries

*“Literacy is a fundamental human right contributing to the improvement of health conditions, socioeconomic standards and the overall quality of life.”*

Mr. Shigeru Aoyagi,  
UNESCO Representative to Afghanistan  
Director, UNESCO Kabul

## Learners of ELA Literacy Classes

**Increased feeling of empowerment** was typically seen among many women who completed the literacy programme.

*“Now I can go to the hospital by myself. I don't need someone to go with me since I can read where to go in the hospital.”*

*“Now I don't feel cheated in the bazaar since I can check by myself.”*

Many women also experienced **improved gender relationships** within their family and community.

*“We thought it was shameful for men and women to sit together, but now we have the courage to sit and talk with them.”*

For women, learning with other women in the literacy classes created rare opportunities to interact with non-family members, thereby empowering them to **be active members within the community**.

A female graduate was able to mobilize enough support from family members and community leaders to be elected as a member of the Community Development Council (CDC) with her newly acquired self-confidence and literacy skills.

## Skills Development Graduates from Bamiyan Province

Women who participated in wool processing, tailoring, and knitting have earned an average income of US\$ 20 -30.



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One woman earned US\$ 133 by providing make-up services for four brides in her village.

One animal husbandry trainee has raised some income by offering vaccination and castration services to other livestock owners.

Participants of kitchen garden training and milk processing are now able to reduce household expenses by consuming self-grown/processed products.

## From Collecting Firewood to Reading and Writing

Poverty is a chronic problem in Afghanistan, especially in the rural areas where people are heavily dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry. Needless to say, the problem is more daunting when the family has no agriculture land and livestock and the breadwinner is a female, which is the case of Amina and her family, living in the Lal Wa Sarjangal district of Ghor province in the central highlands of Afghanistan.

Amina, 17, had to take care of her family when she was very young. Her father based on health problem and being aged, is not able to work and her two younger brothers are only 10 and 12 years old. So she bears all the family's burdens on her shoulders. Stuck in the wretched poverty, Amina lost the opportunity to go to school and she remembers from the very early days when she was a teenager collecting firewood for the winter fuel.

*"It [collecting firewood] was the only work that I could do,"* she recalled. *"We would exchange our extra firewood with our neighbors for wheat".*

Last year, she decided to participate in a literacy class in her village. It was something she had never thought of before. The literacy class was facilitated by the Afghan Ministry of Education with UNESCO's technical support. Nine months later, Amina graduated from the course with high grades and was able to read and write.

The more exciting news for Amina was her acceptance to the skills development course which was for selected candidates who did well in the literacy class. Linking literacy and skill development gives the beneficiaries a sustainable livelihood.

Amina decided to learn knitting. She did very well in the 9-month skills development course. By using her literacy skills, she was able to record important tips from the lessons. She already feels excited about her achievements. In one month since her graduation from the course, she has knitted two pillows and a few table covers and has earned 1,100 AFS (US\$ 23).

In the traditional Afghan society where females are expected to be at home and do house chores, it was not easy for Amina to participate in the literacy and skills development classes.

*"My relatives and neighbours criticized my participation in the skills development course and they often talked behind my back,"* she said, *"but I am so lucky that my parents were supportive of me --- they knew that learning a skill would help us financially."*



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## A Life Changing Experience

Twenty-two year old Mahtab from the village of Ghari Ghalamak in Bamiyan province, central Afghanistan, says her life has changed in many ways since joining the ELA literacy class. She learned to read and write and now uses these skills in her everyday life. The ELA programme has also positively changed the dynamics within her family. Mahtab's father, who was previously opposed to her attending the class, is now pleased to know that his daughter's literacy skills are of use to the entire family.

## A Special Mother's Day Gift

Asma from Chata village, Central district of Badakhshan province lives with her mother and her two small brothers. Due to an accident, her father passed away long ago.

Asma is 16 and her youngest brother who is 12 was disabled at the age of 3 due to a lack of proper medical care. Her mother has to work as a cleaner in a school to provide for the family. Asma loves to help her mother out with housework.

After graduating from ELA literacy class, Asma was asked if she would like to participate in the ELA skills development project. She expressed interest in tailoring. First, her mother was concerned about the cost involved in learning tailoring skills. However, she was relieved to find out the training would be provided free of charge. In addition, Asma would receive a sewing machine at the end of the course along with training in basic business development. "It was an evening full of hope for our family", Asma recalled.

Now several months into the training, Asma sewed her mother a gift for this Mother's Day. She is excited to start making money with her newly acquired skills and lessen the financial burden on her mother's shoulders. "I am very happy and thankful to those who are caring about poor people such as us in these far rural areas."