



Case Study Report Children in Crisis Afghanistan

By Ritesh Shah, Lead Researcher AEWG Principles Field Testing

Acronyms

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|---------------|--|
| ACTED | Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development |
| AE | Accelerated Education |
| AEP | Accelerated Education Programme |
| AEWG | Accelerated Education Working Group |
| CBE | Community Based Education |
| CBEC | Community Based Education Centres |
| CiC | Children in Crisis |
| ECCN | Education in Crisis and Conflict Network |
| IDPs | Internally Displaced Persons |
| IRC | International Rescue Committee |
| NESP | National Education Strategic Plan |
| NGO | Non-government Organisation |
| NRC | Norwegian Refugee Council |
| ODA | Overseas Development Assistance |
| OoSC | Out of school children |
| UNHCR | UN High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | UN Children's Fund |
| USAID | US Agency of International Development |

Purpose of the study

The AEWG is a working group made up of education partners working in Accelerated Education (AE). The AEWG is currently led by UNHCR with representation from UNICEF, UNESCO, USAID, NRC, Plan, IRC, Save the Children, ECCN and War Child Holland.

Based on the aim for a more standardised approach to accelerated education provision globally, the AEWG has begun to develop guidance materials based on international standards and sound practice for AE. In 2016, the AEWG developed a set of 10 Principles for effective practice (i.e. “the Principles” or “AE Principles”), and also accompanying guidance to these principles (known as the *Guide to the AE Principles*).

The purpose of this case study was to more fully understand the relevance, usefulness and application of the AE principles and guidance within the context of Children in Crisis’ (CiC) accelerated education programming (AEP) in Afghanistan. This case study sits along three others – two from Kenya and one Sierra Leone – all implemented by different actors and working with different populations of learners. The research was initially guided by three key questions specified below:

- 1 To what degree is CiC's AEP in Afghanistan currently aligned with the principles? What are the reasons for this?
- 2 How might the AE principles and accompanying guidance be used by CiC and other AE providers and partners in Afghanistan to develop, refine, or assess programme quality? What are the challenges and limitations to doing so, and what could be done to address this by the AEWG or others?
- 3 Based on the evidence collected by CiC to date on key AE outcomes of improving access to education for out of school learners, ensuring their successful completion and of earning an equivalent qualification, to what degree are these outcomes a reflection of the programme's current strengths/weaknesses of all or some of the 10 AE principles?

It should be made clear that the intent of this research is not to evaluate or compare different AE programmes against each other, nor is to specify recommendations or areas of improvement for CiC's activities. Rather, this case study helps to illustrate the possibilities and challenges of using the principles and accompanying guidance in the development, refinement, and assessment of AE programmes in Afghanistan, and with populations and contexts like that which CiC currently works with in the country. Additionally, given that the principles and accompanying guidance have only been recently introduced, it is acknowledged that a key limitation for this research was an assessment of current utility of these tools. That stated, sufficient discussion was held while in Afghanistan to understand how they might be used moving forward, as well as some key limitations of these Principles and Guide in its present form for CiC and other AEPs in Afghanistan.

Programme background and context

Description of the programme

Since 2011 CiC, a UK-based INGO with a focus specifically on the provision of education in conflict-affected contexts, has developed a model for community based education (CBE) that includes accelerated education programming (AEP) within it. Through this CBE model, CiC offers: (1) a three-year programme of accelerated education which leads to out of school learners completing Grade Six and ideally transitioning into the formal system; (2) remedial tutorial classes for disadvantaged children enrolled in formal schools but at risk of failure/drop out;¹ (3) literacy and tailoring classes for mothers of these learners and other women in the community; (4) provision of community awareness sessions on child rights and health issues; and (5) self-help group savings schemes to provide women with the opportunity to save money and take loans for income-generating activities.

To date, all CBE Centres (CBECs), have been located in vulnerable informal settlements within Kabul, or remote communities on the outskirts of the city. These communities are often ones comprised primarily of internally displaced populations (IDPs) who have migrated to Kabul due to ongoing conflict or economic hardship. The communities themselves are usually informal settlements, often made up of temporary or semi-permanent housing and lack access to electricity and water. As informal settlements, they are usually not covered by state provided services, particularly education. In these communities, the effects of internal displacement, coupled with the limited access to schooling, has led to a situation where large numbers of children have not entered school or have been forced to drop out in (described in more detail in next section).

CBECs are established by CiC in these communities with a three-year commitment, after which time CiC makes clear that it will exit the centre. In each centre that has been established, specific beneficiary groups and target numbers are specified (see Table 1).

¹ The programme calls them coaching rather than remedial classes.

Table 1: Targeted beneficiaries in each CBEC

| Category | Per CBEC |
|--|------------|
| Out of school children (served through AEP) | 60 |
| In-school, at risk children (served through coaching classes) | 250 |
| Women (served through literacy, tailoring, and self-help groups) | 170 |
| Community members (attending health and child rights awareness sessions) | 500 |
| TOTAL | 982 |

Through its AEP activities in CBECs thus far, CiC has served 739 students since 2011.

As a proportion of the total number of beneficiaries in each CBEC, the AEP group is relatively small, but is the most resource intensive aspect of the budget for running each CiC (estimated at approximately 50-60,000 USD per year). A 2015 Evaluation noted the cost of providing education to each AEP learner at £124 per year (approx. 155 USD per year), compared to the other activities which are less than half this amount per beneficiary served. The AEP specifically employs three qualified and experienced teachers per centre, who are responsible for teaching the national curriculum and/or supporting English, Arts or subjects taught only in the higher grades. In addition to this, the AEP draws extensively on the support of a CBEC Team Leader, who holds key responsibility for engaging with the community and the parents of the learners about the importance of sending and continuing to support their children to complete the full primary cycle through the AEP. Funding for the CBEC's to date has come largely from private funding sources (foundations, charities, and other small private donors), rather than a multilateral or bilateral donor. The CBECs are overseen by a locally-based Education Programme Manager, international Programme Manager (who splits time between Kabul and the UK), and the Country Director for CiC.

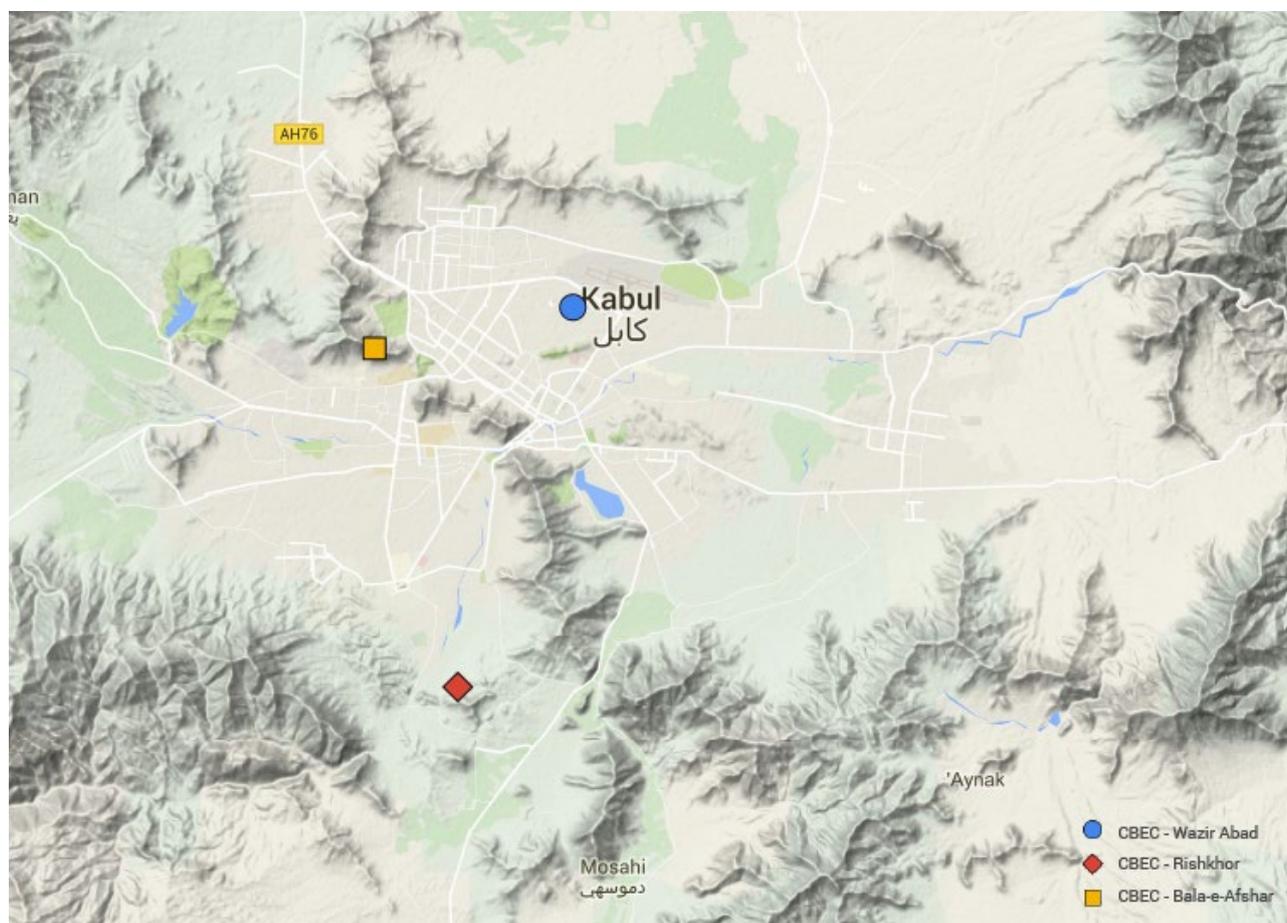


Figure 1: Location of CBEC's in Kabul

At present as part of its current programme cycle (2015-2018), CiC is operating three CBECs in Kabul, in the communities of Rishkor, Bala Ko-e-Afshar, and Wazir Abad (see figure below).

CiC's AEP is explicitly designed for out of school children and youth who have passed the age of entry in Grade 1 or further grades in primary education due to economic conditions (i.e. need to work in the house or in the community), displacement, and cultural practices (specifically girls where parents may not allow them to go to state schools because of distance or other issues). It also supports learners who are precluded from entering schooling due to the lack of official status/national identification.

As of July 2016, a total of 220 students were being served in the current 2015-8 cycle of AEP provision across the three centres. This included 44 boys (20%) and 176 girls (80%). According to an initial needs assessment undertaken, more than half of these learners had never been to school prior to starting the AEP. 25% had dropped out of school as a result of displacement/movement and 22% because of family restrictions on continuing to attend school. Those who had been to school, had on average completed less than two years of formal schooling, and had been away from school for 2-3 years. Only 1% of the students were classified as having a disability.

The AEP within each centre is administered in two four-hour shifts (morning and afternoon), with teachers rotating responsibilities between the AEP and tutoring classes. Classes meet for 12 months of the year, six days a week (Saturday-Thursday), with the aim of students completing two grades per year.²

CiC positions its CBEC and AEPs as a demand-driven approach to strengthening education provision. The belief is that while IDPs may suffer from a lack of integration into host contexts and be excluded from access to local services, the bigger factor which precludes the children in these communities from entering into or completing schools is a lack of demand. Issues like economic hardship, the 'hidden' costs or requirements for enrolling and continuing to attend state schooling, cultural practices (such as early marriage or beliefs that girls should not go to school), and the demands for the children of these communities to take on responsibilities in the house or labour market, preclude or exclude them from schooling. The opportunity costs involved in sending children to schools are often great, particularly when what is on offer is perceived to be of low quality or relevance.³

CiC's theory of change for its programme is that if CiC combines basic delivery methods of CBE and Accelerated Learning (AL), with a range of complimentary family and community-level activities, then it will develop demand for education where it previously did not exist, and create the necessary support structures for children to attend school, remain there for longer, and achieve more.

Description of the context

Since 2001 Afghanistan has experienced the fastest growth in access to education of any country in the world. This success is illustrative of the prioritisation of education by the Government and international donors. Yet it is estimated that as much as half of the school age population of 10 million still do not have access to any form of education, and 50% of those who attend do not complete the primary level.⁴

² Note that this structure is stipulated by the CBE Policy which CiC's AEP falls under.

³ As evidence for this, the attrition rate in the first six years of basic education is estimated at approximately 50%, with 2.5 million children noted to have dropped out of schooling, according to the *National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2020*.

⁴ Accurate data on the number of out of school children in Afghanistan varies. Recent Ministry of Education documentation has specified numbers as low as six million, and other documents state this number as ten million.

In terms of *equity* Afghanistan has the highest gender disparity in the world. Less than half of girls enrol and the Government reports that only 20% complete primary school.⁵ Gender inequities are compounded by geographic location, ethnic background, and poverty. The *quality* of state education is low. A quarter of all teachers did not graduate from secondary school. The lack of educated women perpetuates a chronic shortage of female teachers, one of the main reasons why girls do not attend school. More than half of schools operate from tents or open areas.⁶

Afghanistan is the second largest recipient of Overseas Development Aid (ODA), though the vast majority is security related. Only an average of 4% of ODA is earmarked for education with the majority directed to the World Bank managed *EQUIP* Programme.⁷ However, the Government is recurrently unable to execute the development budget due to poor administrative systems. Corruption aside, only 30% of education ODA has been spent in recent years. The Ministry of Education (MoE) is unable to manage large funds or transfer to the local level, and has failed to provide the reporting required to release funds from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).⁸ There is broad recognition that greater levels of funding to the MoE would not substantially impact access to quality education.

The education system suffers from considerable challenges both of supply and demand. In areas of supply, increasing insecurity, limited local resources to build schools, and a lack of trained teachers undermine the state's ability to deliver education. On the demand side, economic factors (i.e. 40% of the country in absolute poverty, approximately 25% of 6-17 year olds in child labour), cultural practices (child marriage, opposition to female education), violence in schools, and the low standards of education on offer, have limited the enrolment, retention, and achievement of children, especially girls.

The MoE recently reiterated that *"Although many strengthening measures have been adopted, supply side constraints are likely to substantially limit effective demand over the medium term. Therefore, there is great pressure on the Government to consider alternative ways of delivering education."* A recent report into education financing in Afghanistan highlighted the need for NGOs to deliver education as well as the need for new financing options, including private and beneficiary supported programming.

Since the early 2000's, Community Based Education (CBE) has been the main method for expanding access to schooling, as detailed in successive National Education Sector Plans (NESP). Current policy states that *"the continuing insurgency and associated security threats, community attitudes and beliefs about girls' education, and the inability of the government to reach remote areas make CBE the most feasible option."* In 2012 a set of policy guidelines for CBE was adopted by the Ministry of Education. AEPs, or Accelerated Learning Centres (ALCs) as they are specified within the guidelines, come under the CBE umbrella and are identified as opportunities for, *"the great number of Afghan children (boys and girls) who are older than the formal guidelines for MoE schools"* or *"deprived of a formal education due to various problems"* (p. 5).

Current large-scale CBE programmes focus on the out-of-school-children (OoSC) of school age who have no supply. CBE is seen, according to the Ministry of Education NESP (p. 20) as *"a general MoE strategy for increasing equitable access, retention and learning achievement in remote villages."* CBE has been shown to have considerable success at increasing enrolment in education, specifically for girls. This is particularly true for more remote areas. Large scale CBE programmes have been implemented in recent years (PACE-A funded by USAID, and STAGES funded by DfID). Both programmes have had success at increasing supply and, in comparison to

⁵ Government of Afghanistan (2016). *National Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021*. Ministry of Education.

⁶ See for example Jackson, A. (2011) *High Stakes: Girls Education in Afghanistan: Briefing Paper*.

⁷ This is a World Bank implemented budget support programme (Education Quality Improvement Project), now in Phase 2. It is funded through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Fund (ARTF), the bi/multilateral funding mechanism: <http://goo.gl/TCwMkt>

⁸ See Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2011). *Afghanistan National Development Strategy 2008-2013*.

state schools, can improve achievement levels. However, both programmes were designed to support the establishment of new schools that would subsequently be adopted, and funded, by the Government.⁹ In both cases this did not happen for the reasons of financing and the limited government capacity noted above.

Thus, as a mechanism of increasing basic supply, CBE has proven effective. However, integration into the state system remains unviable and therefore wider options for meeting basic needs and for financing need to be investigated. State provision offers little for the large number of over-age OoSC who are not in education due to demand side factors of poverty, child-labour, cultural practices, and low quality. These long-standing concerns present a far more pernicious challenge to creating sustainable and publically-demanded education provision.

This is particularly true for IDP or returnee populations who have flooded into Kabul in recent years. While access to state schooling is nominally present, a number of issues effectively preclude these populations from (re) enrolling their children in these schools. Typically ending up in informal settlements, it is estimated that they comprise around 55,000 (of Kabul's burgeoning population). Most within these settlements live in slum-like conditions. Their shelters do not provide sufficient protection against the harsh cold and wet winter months, are over-crowded and do not provide sufficient privacy or security. In many locations, families share small numbers of hand pumps and have irregular access to clean water. The population lives under the constant threat of eviction as over 80% have no formal agreements for their residency; as a result, access to basic services, such as health care and education, and public infrastructure is very limited.

Importantly, school enrolment and retention remain low amongst this population due to a combination of factors. Economic poverty is a significant factor, with 97% of the families in these settlements living under the national poverty line of 1,710 AFA/month. These families are extremely poor and dependent on child labour to bring necessary income, especially when fathers have irregular sources of income. Additionally, the high ancillary costs of schooling, for texts, stationery and uniforms, present a significant economic burden to these households, and contribute to pushing learners out of school, particularly as they get older. Finally, discrimination is an issue which many IDPs and urban poor face in attending state schools in Kabul. A recent needs assessment undertaken by CiC identified that IDP/Returnee children are considered to be less disciplined than local urban children by local teachers, and the children themselves also reported that their teachers treated them differently. Children also reported they were bullied for 'smelling bad,' 'not having clean clothes,' and speaking a different dialect by other students in the school.¹⁰

The government has begun to recognise that exclusion from schooling takes many forms, and has developed an inclusive education policy that targets 12 categories of exclusion, including children that are displaced, refugees and returnees. In February 2014, a National Policy on IDPs was launched under the auspices of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation and set out a framework of responsibilities for national authorities to address internal displacement in Afghanistan. Even with clear legislation, educational provision to children in Kabul's informal settlements has not been adequately delivered. IDP/returnee children fall in multiple categories of exclusion identified by the government, including being children from poor economic backgrounds, street working children, children affected by drugs, children with disabilities and children from poor economic backgrounds. Given the limited resources, the Ministry of Education admits addressing exclusion will rely heavily on international donor support as the state is not able to respond adequately to deliver all forms of inclusive education.

⁹ This information is taken from a CiC concept note on community-based education developed in 2016 by Pete Simms.

¹⁰ The information in this section comes from a CiC ECHO application which incorporates a needs assessment undertaken in the informal settlements in January 2017, along with studies conducted by other INGOs and multilateral organisations.

Methodology and approach to fieldwork

Completion of this case study involved a combination of remote-based document/data review and a field visit to CiC's programme in Afghanistan. A mapping of data collection activities against the three key research questions is noted in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Data collection sources against key research questions

| Key research question | Monitoring data or internal reporting | Internal or external evaluation(s) | Project proposals | Interviews or FGDs with programme management | Interviews or FGDs with on-site programme staff | Interviews or FGDs with beneficiaries | Interviews or FGDs with community and/or parents | AE principles checklist |
|--|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|--|---|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| To what degree is CiC's AEP in Afghanistan currently aligned with the principles? What are the reasons for this? | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| How might the AE principles and accompanying guidance be used by CiC and other AE providers and partners in Afghanistan to develop, refine, or assess programme quality? What are the challenges and limitations to doing so, and what could be done to address this by the AEWG or others? | | | | X | | | | X |
| Based on the evidence collected by CiC to date on key AE outcomes of improving access to education for out of school learners, ensuring their successful completion and of earning an equivalent qualification, to what degree are these outcomes a reflection of the programme's current strengths/weaknesses of all or some of the 10 AE principles? | X | X | | X | | | | X |

As the table suggests, a range of data sources were available to assess the question of alignment of CiC's programme to the principles. Data sources were more limited in terms of understanding the usefulness of the principles and accompanying guidance, given that they have only recently been introduced and not utilised to any great extent within the programme to date. As a result, discussions held on this question were more speculative in nature. Additionally, it became clear that these discussions were most effective with those engaged in programme design or monitoring work, rather than implementation. CiC also has strong systems in place to track key AE outcomes, and has now completed one full phase of its AEP (ending in 2015). For that reason, it was possible to explore these outcomes to some extent and hypothesise how it may link to alignment to certain principles.

Documents reviewed, specific to CiC's programme, included concept notes, project summary sheets, funding proposals, needs assessment reports, interim project reporting to donors, and an internal midterm evaluation report completed by the Director of Programmes and Programme Support Officer of CiC UK in 2014. Additionally, the Ministry of Education's CBE policy, the current National Education Strategic Plan (NESP III) for 2016-9, and a range of donor and academic literature on the education landscape of Afghanistan were provided by CiC and also reviewed. Project monitoring data provided by CiC ahead of time was particularly useful in understanding programme outcomes to date. CiC had also completed the pilot checklist for the AE Principles for its AEP in Afghanistan, and the responses and feedback provided was also reviewed, and incorporated into this study.

Fieldwork was carried out in Kabul over one week in late January/early February 2017. During this time, a number of activities were carried out. At the outset, an initial workshop was held with the management team¹¹ of CiC's AEP, and the team leaders of the 3 CBEC centres, along with education technical advisors from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and ACTED. The purpose of this initial half-day meeting was to (re)introduce the 10 AEP principles and accompanying guidance and understand how they might be of utility and relevance to AE programming, and adapted to the particular context of education provision for out of school children/youth in the country.

This was subsequently followed by a series of focus group meeting with beneficiaries and stakeholders engaged in CiC's AEP within the three CBECs to determine the degree to which the programme, at present, is aligned with various principles, and better understand some of the constraints that preclude greater alignment (see table below).

Table 3: Summary of beneficiaries spoken to

| Stakeholder/beneficiary group from AEP | Number of individuals spoken to |
|--|--|
| Teachers | 11 (10 female, 1 male) |
| CBEC Team Leaders | 3 (all female) |
| Former AE students from CBEC | 20 female former beneficiaries ages 14-18; 11 male former beneficiaries ages 12-17 |
| Current AE students from one CBEC | 9 (5 female, 4 male) |
| Community members (local Shura) | 17 males (includes community leaders/elders, fathers of students) |

Focus group and individual interviews generally followed the protocols developed for use across the research team and field study sites. There were, however, some adaptations that had to be made due to increased sizes of some groups (former beneficiaries), language/translation issues, or advice received on best ways to engage particular groups of individuals in a culturally sensitive and respectful manner.¹²

A follow up meeting was also held with the Education Technical Advisor from ACTED and the Director of Programmes for CiC to discuss the *Guide to the Principles* in more depth, and ways in which this guidance could be used and also improved to suit the needs of programme designers and managers. On the last day, a feedback workshop was held with the CiC Management team to discuss the researcher's assessment of their programme against the 10 principles, and better understand some key tensions which exist between the principles in the context of Afghanistan.

In addition, all three of the CBEC centres were visited, to observe the facilities available to learners, the pedagogy occurring in the classrooms themselves, resources available for teaching and learning, and to review on-site student and teacher record keeping and monitoring data.

Analysis of data collected against the principles was done thematically through a deductive coding approach. Using each principle, responses from interview notes, transcripts, field/observation notes were mapped against one or more principle on the issues of alignment. For questions related to the potential relevance or utility of the principles and guidance, some key thematic categories (such as design, monitoring, review/assessment, areas for improvement) were used to categorise responses provided by those interviewed. Through a process of merging these codes thematic ideas and issues were formed in relation to alignment against the Principles (see below).

¹¹ This included CiC's Director of Programmes (UK based), Country Director, and the Education Programme Manager for Afghanistan.

¹² For example, with the former beneficiaries, while a timeline activity was conducted (mapping experiences before, during and after their participation in the AEP), it was decided to have students draw their timelines individually rather than in groups to avoid sharing of embarrassing/shameful events if they so chose. With the Shura, the focus group activities were abandoned in favour of a more general series of questions and answers, as it was deemed that asking senior clergy members and respected elders of the community to work in small groups may not be well received.

Current programme alignment to the AE Principles

This section summarises key strengths and challenges/considerations related to one or more of the AE Principles. In doing so, it draws on the range of data sources specified in a previous table.

The AE Principles were thematically categorised into five areas, specific to learners, programme management, community engagement, alignment, and teachers, as they were seen to broadly reflect the different domains which the principles and accompanying guidance focus on. Under each category, the associated principles are listed, to make clear how this was done.

Learners

Principle 1:

AEP is flexible and for older learners.

Principle 4:

Curriculum, materials, and pedagogy are genuinely accelerated, AE-suitable, and use relevant language of instruction.

Principle 8:

AE learning environment is inclusive, safe, and learning-ready.

As discussed in previous sections, the focus of CiC's AEP is on out of school, overaged learners. More than 50% of those enrolled in the AEP across the three CBEC centres have never been to school, and for those that have been to school, all dropped out before completing the full cycle of primary education, many after just one or two years. Most learners enrolled in its programme are past the age which they could reintegrate or enrol in the formal education system. For the roughly 5% of learners that could potentially enter into the formal system due to being younger (9 or 10), they have been enrolled in CiC's programme only because they lack appropriate identification papers to actually do so. Below is an age profile of CiC current AEP student population.

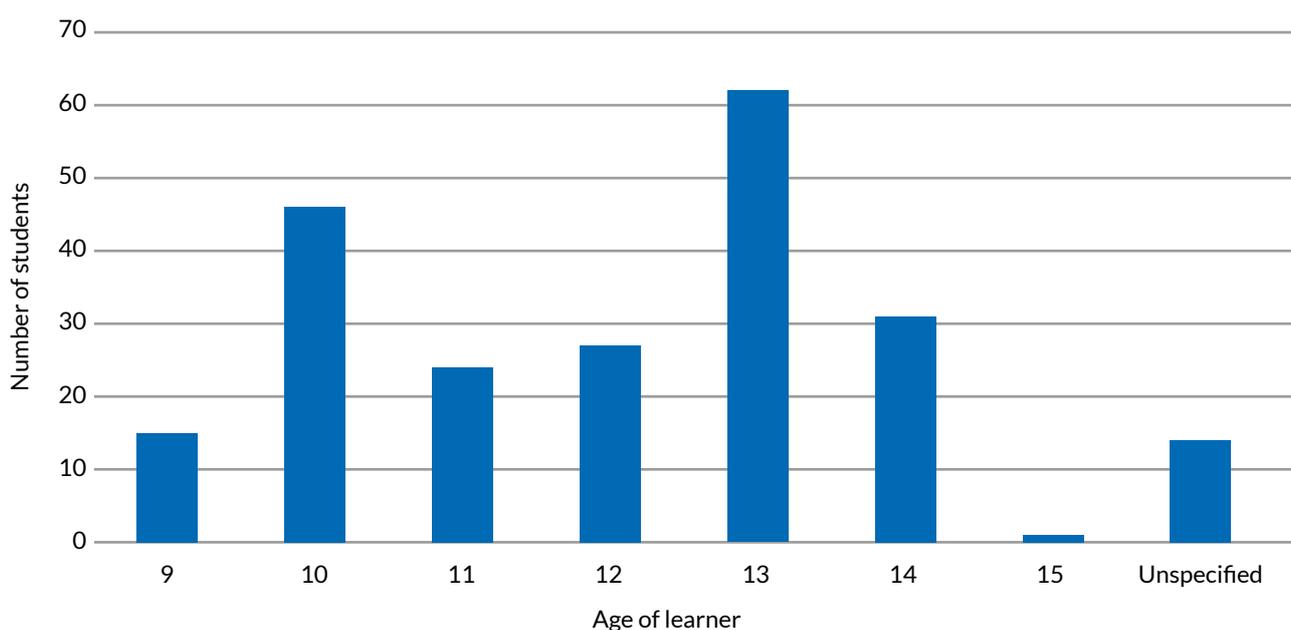


Figure 2: Age profile of AE learners across CiC's CBECs

A key activity which is undertaken when CiC is assessing whether or not to establish a CBEC in a particular location is to undertake a household survey. The Team Leader and teachers go door to door within a community and identify the number of children within each house who have never been to school, or have dropped out, and are overage. This census helps to inform management decision about whether there is a “critical mass” of learners to open a centre in the community. Once a decision is made to open a centre, a location is chosen which is within close proximity to the target population, to ensure that distance is not a barrier to attracting learners to the centre.

The first priority when establishing a new centre, and group of AE learners, is to prioritise those who have never entered into school, or who are assessed as having attended school but not having adequate Grade 1 skills (done by administering a special exam to these students). The small size of CiC’s programme, and the fact that when a new AEP is established it starts with Grade 1, means that the aim is to start with two full cohorts of Grade 1 equivalent learners (one in the morning, one in the afternoon). This process often takes significant time (several months), as at first both students and their families are suspicious of the motives of CiC, and may be reluctant to enter into the centre. For students who had been to school and dropped out, there were significant fears and anxieties related to their past negative experiences of schooling. Parents and community leaders also viewed the presence of an outside INGO with suspicion at first as well, feeling as one Shura¹³ member described, “*that they might be coming in with an outside agenda, such as converting our children to another religion.*” The role of the teachers and Team Leader is crucial in this regard, and many children and their families described how they had several visits from the staff of the CBEC before they felt comfortable to attend. This is discussed in more detail in a subsequent section.

When starting a new Grade 1 cohort, no preparatory programme/school readiness activities are currently offered to these learners, despite one teacher acknowledging that it is, “*...difficult to start with Grade 1 content and cover it in 6 months only, particularly for students who may lack any readiness for school.*”

Other over-aged and out of school learners are able to join the programme at intermediary points (middle and end of year when cohort transitions to next grade), as spaces become available from students dropping out from the original cohort, or as centre managers and teachers deem appropriate. CiC aims to have 180 students complete the programme to Grade 6 in this current phase, and currently has 190-195 students enrolled. This oversubscription is intentional, according to the programme management team, keeping in mind that drop out does occur, particularly amongst girls as they near puberty and become more prone to cultural restrictions or expectations of marriage. From the start of the current phase of the programme until July 2016, approximately 10% of the learners had left the AEP at an intermediary stage.¹⁴

What this means at present, is that class sizes range from 30-35 learners/group. For the facilities that CiC currently has available in its CBEC for the classes, 40 students is about the maximum capacity that could be taught in any one room. The rooms just fit this number of students as the photo below illustrates.

As discussed previously, CiC runs two different AEP cohorts (operating at same grade level) at any one time in each of its CBECs – one in the morning, one in the afternoon. Students and their families are given some flexibility over which of these cohorts they would like to enter into, based on the other demands on their time. Most students in CiC’s programme report that they are required to work, either in the home or outside in activities such as selling scrap metal, working in a local shop, or selling wares on the street. Having the ability to

¹³ The Shura is an already established community council comprised of the neighborhood’s elected leader (or mayor), religious leaders, and other government officials living within the community. CiC has expanded this Shura to also include some of the parents of children at each CBEC as well.

¹⁴ According to the 2014 midterm evaluation, in the last round of CiC’s AEP, the programme struggled to meet its target of 60 learners from each CBEC completing the cycle. Across the five centres which CiC operated, it had 283 students who were deemed to be on track to completing Grade 6, slightly less than the targeted 300 students due to drop outs from the programme. In response, within this current cycle, CiC has made a decision to enrol more students than required.



Figure 3: Photo from inside an AE classroom

continue to do this, and attend the programme at a time that was convenient to them, was seen as a strength of the AEP. Added to this, students and their families appreciated the fact that the opportunity costs for attending the AEP were relatively low. Students were provided with some basic stationery supplies by CiC at the beginning of each term, not expected to wear uniforms, and were also given (on loan) the required textbooks for instruction. While the education programme manager felt there was a need “for some small parent contribution to their child’s education in the form of purchasing some spare notebooks or pencils,” it was also acknowledged that cost “would never become a barrier for a child to remain in the programme.”

In many other ways, however, the programme’s ability to be inclusive and flexible to meet learners’ needs is hampered by the need for CiC to be in alignment with the government’s CBE policy. The policy is quite prescriptive on matters of timetabling, curriculum areas to be covered, and rate of acceleration. As already discussed, CiC’s AEP are required to run for all 12 months of the year, with a minimum of four hours instruction for six out of seven days. This precludes CiC from adapting its programme to meet seasonal labour demands or pressures, or changeable weather conditions, which might prevent children from attending their programme for periods of time. While not as significant an issue in Kabul, this policy can be prohibitive in other parts of the country. Additionally, CiC is required to cover all aspects of the curriculum specified – generally 10-11 distinct subjects¹⁵ across the grades – and through using prescribed grade-level texts. This leads to a quite compressed and fragmented form of curriculum delivery, and limits opportunities for AE pedagogical approaches which are more age-relevant, contextualised, and deeper in level of engagement. As one teacher expressed, “I would rather prepare some materials myself rather than use Ministry materials because I understand my students and their needs better. I can develop resources based on their level.” She was, however, constrained by the fact that guidelines stipulated following a common curriculum and set of texts. Teachers prepare their daily lesson plans based on the prescribed texts, which are not competency or outcomes focussed, making it difficult for them to consider alternative approaches to what is specified in the text. At present, CiC does not provide supplementary instructional resources or teachers guides to accompany the texts.

¹⁵ These include: Life Skills (Grades 1-3), Holy Quran, Islamic Studies, Dari, Pashto, English, Mathematics, Calligraphy, Social Sciences (Grades 4-6), Science, Ethics, and Drawing/Art.

While teachers did describe using techniques such as role-play, Q+A, visuals/posters, or group work to enliven instruction, there was not much evidence of this in lessons observed. Instead, much of what was observed was focussed on rote-learning and heavy use of the texts. Community expectations and local norms/practices of teaching meant that there was often a balancing act between 'best practice' in AE pedagogy, and locally driven conditions.

Despite the lack of AE pedagogy being present in the classroom, children were quick to note that one of the key strengths of CiC's programme were the teachers. The students described how the teachers were caring, treated all students with respect, worked hard to ensure all students succeed, and how they made learning more fun. It was amply evident in observations in the classroom that teachers showed concern for students, and relied on positive discipline techniques to motivate students. This is a point also observed in the programme's 2014 evaluation (p. 18) described the CBEC teachers as different because: "teachers at the CBEC are trying to teach, at school they don't try"; "teachers at CBECs tell us if we have problems, they are here to solve it"; "here the teachers do not punish but advise us"; "classes have good materials and posters, and classes are always ready for lessons".

One key finding from the research is that the programme's ability to meet many aspects of Principle 1 and 4 on flexibility and adaptation of curriculum to the needs of AE learners, is constrained by a commitment to aligning to Ministry guidelines and rules on AE provision. INGOs are required to work within the existing policy framework set out for AEPs in the Community Based Education Policy if they are to obtain an MoU from the Ministry of Education. This policy has a high level of specificity when it comes to the timetabling, scheduling, and curriculum coverage. It significantly reduces programmes' ability to be flexible to the needs of learners (Principles 1 and 4), but having this MoU typically allows learners to be accredited and enter into the formal education system on completion (Principle 2). The result is that AEPs in Afghanistan are often aligned with Ministry policy, but that alignment leads to the programmes being condensed formal schooling, with little room for flexibility or the inclusion of AE specific pedagogy.

One area of Principle 4 which CiC has been able to advance within its programming, however, is health and life skills training, as well as training on child rights for the learners themselves. Almost all of the AE learners participate in these additional sessions which fall outside the official programme of instruction, and many former beneficiaries reminisced that they enjoyed and could remember key messages from these workshops. As one of these individuals described, these "classes taught us how to live in our families and our society".



Figure 4: Photo from outside of CBE Wazir Abad

While CiC had been able to maintain the size of each of its AEP classes to 40 students or less to maximise learning opportunities for its learners and ensure that no fees are charge for attendance, other aspects of its programme are less aligned with Principle 8 at present, largely in relation the nature of its facilities. At all three of its CBE facilities, gender separated facilities are not available, and all students use one common latrine. This was a concern for a few of the female students spoken to, who noted that they would prefer having separate toilets for girls. Additionally, because the aim is to locate the CBECs in close proximity to where there is a critical mass of potential AE learners, facilities are often large houses that are converted to suit the programme’s needs. This constrains what is then available to learners and the teaching programme, particularly in terms of size of teaching spaces (with sufficient room for student movement), or recreational spaces. Many students lamented the lack of play space in the CBEC facilities, and wished for more area to run around and play games during breaks (see photo below for the only CBEC where this is possible).

Yet there appeared to be some awareness on the part of teachers on the importance of inclusivity when it came to gender, and spoke of actions such as making eye contact with all students, seating boys and girls next to each other (or apart from each other), and as one teacher argued, “*boys and girls have the same need...we treat the same.*”

Figure 5 summarises the key strengths and challenges for CiC’s programme in regards to Principles 1, 4, and 8.

| Key findings: Learners | |
|---|---|
| <p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme identifies, targets and works with over-aged out of school learners • Offers some flexibility in terms of two shifts/day (AM or PM) • Teachers recognise need to adapt to needs of learners and have some knowledge of AE approaches • Additional topics such as life skills, child protection, health included in curriculum • Classes are truly free to students • CBE environment is welcoming and supportive of students’ learning | <p>Challenges/considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No adapted texts or curriculum for over aged learners • Lack of play areas/space for children • Lack of separate toilet facilities or hygiene provisions for females • Teaching practices (as observed) are fairly didactic and do not allow for a lot of peer to peer or interactive learning opportunities • Gender aware/sensitive rather than gender responsive teaching approaches and practices in the classrooms • Lack of teachers guides/CiC supported resources to supplement curriculum |

Figure 5: Summary of findings for learner domain

Teachers

Principle 5:

Teachers participate in continuous professional development.

Principle 6:

Teachers are recruited, remunerated and supervised.

All of the teachers within CiC's AEP are experienced, qualified teachers. Of the present 11 teachers working across the three CBECs, all of them had completed their teacher training certificate and also graduated from university. All had some level of experience of teaching in either state or private education and working with children, with a few teachers with upwards of 20 years' experience. Three of these teachers had also worked in the past with other INGOs within their education programmes, and one had also worked in another AEP run by one of these INGOs. Many of the current teachers in CiC's programmes continued on from the previous 3-year phase and agreed to move to a new CBEC.

Recruitment processes for teachers, when necessary, are done in a fair, transparent and rigorous way. New positions are advertised online, and candidates send in their applications to the Education Programme Manager. These applications are vetted and shortlisted candidates are invited to take a written exam. Those who perform sufficiently on the exam are then invited for an interview. The teachers spoken to felt that the process was robust and quite competitive, and made them feel as if they were seen as the "exceptional candidate" for the job, as one described.

Teachers were generally happy with their conditions of pay and work, despite the fact that they work much more than their peers in either state or private school settings, where it is typically expected that they teach for a maximum of 4-5 hours/day, and with affordances for extended periods of holiday. One teacher described how "while we were told that the hours of work were going to be different, I wasn't really sure what this meant in terms of how much additional work we were expected to do until we actually started." Because of the increased work demand, and the higher level of expertise and skill which CiC believes its teachers require to work within an AEP setting, they are paid more than double what a normal state school teacher would receive on a monthly basis. While this is out of line with the government's CBE policy, and the AE sub-principle salary/incentive payments, the programme's justification is that otherwise it would struggle to maintain the level of quality it does. The higher salary, along with transportation incentives for female teachers, is also believed to be part of the reason that the programme is able to attract and retain qualified, experienced female teachers. This is a particular achievement in Afghanistan where the acute shortage of qualified female teachers is seen by development partners and the Ministry of Education as a significant barrier to girls' equal participation in schooling. It suggests the importance of not taking the Principles and Guide at face value, but rather contextualising them to the particular constraints and demands of the situation, with the aim of best supporting learners.

Alongside the employment of qualified, experienced female teachers, CiC is also employing and training a local female teacher at each of its CBEC's on an annual basis. These "peer educators" are unqualified and without teaching experience, but with some level of interest in pursuing teaching or social work as a future profession. CiC focusses on supporting their enrolment into a teacher training programme at the end of the year, or to ensure that they may be individuals prepared to continue to run literacy, health education, and tailoring classes after the conclusion of the three-year programme. Recruitment of these individuals is done in consultation with the local Shura, who help to identify prospective candidates. Working closely with the AEP educators, these teachers are given regular opportunities to be coached, teach alongside, and support instruction with AE learners.



Figure 6: A photo of AE teachers and current beneficiaries at CBEC Rishikor, as well as past beneficiaries from CBEC Tani-Kot

Overall, the programme is strong in its alignment to Principle 6, and demonstrate several examples of good practice that are worthy of further in depth research and study, particularly around their ability to successfully recruit female candidates and train local teachers. The programme, however, is less strong in Principle 5.

Initial and ongoing professional development within the auspices of the AEP are generally not as strong, and occur more within regular programme monitoring activities, rather than as purposefully designed inputs or specified outcomes of CiC's work. At the outset of activity, new teachers are trained for three days on the programme structure, positive discipline approaches, and child protection/rights measures. At the conclusion, they sign a child protection policy specifying their commitment to not using punitive discipline approaches in the classroom, and to work closely with the Team Leader on any more serious child protection issues which might require consultation with the family or referral. Following this, teachers described the ongoing training they receive as consisting of: (1) regular monitoring visits from the Education Programme Manager into their classrooms and centres to give feedback; (2) monthly CBEC team meetings run by the Education Programme Manager; and (3) regular conversations they have with the other teachers at their centre regarding challenges with students or the teaching of particular subjects/lessons. No specific or dedicated time is built into the programme for structured training after the initial three days, and very little focus of the training is on AE specific pedagogical approaches or techniques. As a result, it would appear that teachers do not have a broadened pedagogical palette from which to deviate from the standard text, and do not necessarily feel empowered or able to do so.

The box below provides a summary of the programmes' strengths and weaknesses in the areas of teacher management and professional development.

Key findings: Teachers

Strengths

- Teacher training within CiC stresses protection and inclusion practices
- Teachers have opportunities for regular support and coaching to improve their practice
- All teachers highly-qualified and experienced
- Teacher payments are commensurate with the demands of the job, and the particular constraints facing female teachers
- Teachers have a clear code of conduct/set of practices they follow

Challenges/considerations

- No evidence of structured training in AEP methodology, or to further build subject knowledge
- Lack of alignment to national teaching standards/practices (potentially because they do not exist)
- No certification process for the CPD which teachers receive
- Training, particularly in gender-responsive approaches, as well as in adapting curriculum demands to learners needs may be needed.

Figure 7: Summary of findings for teacher domain

Programme management

Principle 7:

AE centre is effectively managed.

Principle 9:

Community is engaged and accountable.

Principle 10:

Goals, monitoring and funding are aligned.

The structure of the CBEC's is focussed on ensuring that as many students as possible are supported and enabled to complete the AEP and transition into the formal education system. A critical component of this is active home and community engagement in the work of the CBEC. The role of the Team Leader, who is typically a trained social worker, rather than a teacher, is vital in this regards.

As already described, at the outset of starting a new CBEC, the Team Leader leads a needs assessment process with the centre's teachers to identify: (1) the number of households where children are out of school, or have not completed primary education; (2) where women are illiterate and/or unskilled; and (3) the general health status of each member of the family. This is done by going door to door in the neighbourhood immediately around the intended location (approximately 10-20 minutes walking radius), and is important in not only identifying need, but also brokering relationships between individual families and the staff of the AEP.

Along with the Education Programme Manager, the Team Leader of each CBEC also plays a key role in engaging with community leadership and local authorities. At the outset and on an ongoing basis, these individuals meet with local police, civic authorities, Wakils and Mullahs¹⁶ to ensure that they are aware of CiC's planned activities in the community and to ensure they have their support. On a monthly basis, Team Leaders at the

¹⁶ Wakils are community leaders and Mullahs are religious leaders

CBECs will be responding to the needs of individual children and women, who are being stopped from coming, to convince families (male relatives especially) to change their mind and let their children/ girls/ women attend. The 2014 evaluation notes that, *“Team Leaders of the CBECs spend at least half their working week at household/ community level, undertaking family visits, advocating on behalf of women and children, explaining the project to family members, negotiating with the Wakils (community leaders) and Mullahs (religious leaders).”* This is *“an approach worth highlighting, as it is undoubtedly a contributing factor to success,”* in respect to being able to keep girls, in particular, participating in programme activities.

At the outset, community engagement is often challenging and the Education Programme Manager acknowledged that it often took several meetings with these groups to earn their trust. What was clear, however, after one year of engagement, is that CiC had built a high level of trust with community leaders, and those interviewed were extremely positive about the CBEC's presence in their community. One community leader recalled how, *“Our community has a lot of children who have not gone to school, and a lot of women who do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to help their families survive. For years, the government has done nothing to address this, but then the CBEC started and things have changed.”*

In sum, locating the AEP within a broader frame of CBE activities that includes tailoring and literacy classes for mothers, awareness sessions for parents on health and child rights, and coaching classes for other neighbourhood children, provides ongoing and regular opportunities for CiC staff to engage with parents and other community members. It also engenders a sense that the CBE (and the AEP) are part of the community, rather than distinct from it. Integrating additional activities alongside the AE classes also strengthens the support networks which children have outside the CBEC, and addresses some of the key factors which may push children out of school (i.e. economic hardship, poor health, lack of parent support).

As an example, in Wazir Abad, one of the informal settlements, the mud paths become extremely hard to navigate. The community elders tried for many years, without success, to bring the issue to the attention of the local authorities and the relevant agencies. CiC's Education Manager was able to organise a meeting with officials of UN-HABITAT and give the community a chance to discuss their need for improvements to local infrastructure. UN-HABITAT has now taken the matter to the local municipality in hopes that the roads will be fixed in the near future. In another community, CiC has managed to link community leadership to the Ministry of Health to advocate for a maternity clinic in closer proximity. After meeting with the Ministry, a series of mobile maternal clinics commenced for the community.

CiC's engagement with community reflects the idea that accountability is a two-way flow – of community involvement and engagement with CiC's activities, including AEP; and CBEC's concern and action on community affairs. That stated, the community's engagement in the CBEC is mainly in terms of participation (either themselves, their children, or both) in programme activities, rather than in a management capacity. When the community leaders were asked about this, they did not see it as their responsibility or role to have oversight over the activities of the CBEC; but they did see a role in intervening and liaising with individual families if asked. This was something some of them had done on occasion, but only after the Team Leader had tried herself.

When CiC establishes a CBEC in a new location, it does so with the intention of exiting after three years. Some planning is put in place from the outset to ensure some potential for sustainability of activities after it departs. Every year, CiC trains a local “peer educator” in each of its centres using a structured training programme. The aim is to give them the skills they need to be able to either enrol on a teacher-training programme at the end of a project, or to continue running lessons (in literacy, tailoring, etc.) within their communities. Mullahs, Wakils and community members are encouraged to help identify spaces in the community where lessons could be held for these after the CBEC closes down. It is important to note that these peer educators are not trained or expected to continue the AEP, given the requirements in place from the Afghan government on qualification of teachers and certification of learning.

A challenge for CiC, as a small INGO which relies almost exclusively on private donations and charitable trust funding for its CBEC's, is predictability and scale of resourcing.¹⁷ CiC is careful to not open a CBEC in a new community until it has sufficient funds (either committed by funders or through its own unrestricted funds) in place to support the full three years of operation. Initially, CiC's intention was to have six CBEC's in operation in the current period, according to a concept note. To date, only three have opened due to just less than half of the expected funding of \$1.3 Million USD being available.

Systems of student record keeping are strong, and aligned with the requirements put forth by the MoU between CiC and the Ministry of Education. This MoU specifies that CiC must: (1) appropriately document a process for the registration of students in the AEP based on a clear assessment process, justifying the year level they have been placed into and 2) organise documentation on student attendance and exam performance, in line with Ministry expectations, and have it checked and verified by relevant Ministry officials on regular occasions. Given that strong record keeping is perhaps the most significant concern of Ministry officials when they visit the CBECs, the Team Leader and Education Programme Manager spend significant time ensuring records are kept in order, and are updated regularly. Almost all record keeping is done by paper but later, the M&E officer and Programme Manager collate some of this in electronic form to identify broader trends in student drop out, attendance, exam performance and completion. Much of this broader monitoring function is done by the international programme teams, rather than the internal programme staff, and is the higher-level quality assurance which is necessary for formative learning and improvement.

Given the small size of CiC as an organisation, the on-site project team of the AEP (comprised of the team leaders and teachers) is overseen by a relatively lean management structure where direct oversight of the CBEC's is the responsibility of the Education Programme Manager, whose work is then supported/overseen by the Programme Manager (international staff member with approximately 50% of time in country) and the Country Director. The Education Programme Manager has the greatest responsibilities for quality assurance, ongoing monitoring of AEP activity/teachers' pedagogy and record keeping, and managing community relations with the Team Leader. The Country Director helps to support this work, as needed, and liaises with those in relevant Ministries and particular donors, along with the Programme Manager.

Key findings: Programme management

Strengths

- Location of AEP within CBEC leads to significant synergies when it comes to community engagement, and support for learners
- Strong student record keeping and monitoring of progress systems in place (related to attendance, performance, drop-out, and postprogramme outcomes)
- Programme activities in community only commence after extensive needs analysis
- Programme goals are clearly focussed on improving access to schooling for out of school children, and providing them with a qualification
- Clear exit and strategy in place for CBEC

Challenges/considerations

- Exit strategy does not continue AE provision in communities served
- While data provided to Ministry of Education by CiC on its AE learners, it is currently not effectively integrated into EMIS or planning structures
- Community not involved in management activities of CBEC, rather serve a supportive/ advisory role – externally led

Figure 8: Summary of findings for programme management domain

¹⁷ According to one document, CiC's funding ranges from grants as small as \$755 and as large as \$240,000 USD. This funding also ranges in terms of whether it is a one-off grant, or an ongoing commitment.

Alignment to government education system or humanitarian architecture

As has already been discussed in previous sections, CiC's programme is strongly aligned to current government policies and expectations around CBE and AE as specified in the CBE policy. This is formalised through an MoU (or Protocol) which specifies the roles and responsibilities of both CiC and the Ministry for facilitating children's access to the AEP, recognition of learning, and transition to the formal schooling system. In addition to the responsibilities which CiC has to the Ministry as specified in the previous section (in regards to record keeping), they also must ensure:

- 1 They use the curriculum and approved textbooks of the Ministry of Education for Grades 1-6;
- 2 Complete alignment with rules and regulations of the Ministry of Education;

CiC does administer its own exam at the end of Grade 6, but this can be checked by the Ministry for quality.¹⁸ In return, the Ministry agrees that on verification of the results of examinations they will then facilitate transfer of these students into the relevant next grade level in the formal schooling system, if they drop out in the middle; or into the nearest state school at Grade 7, for those who complete the full cycle. The clear MoU in place between CiC and the Ministry ensures that almost all students who do complete the full cycle do in fact have the ability to enter into the nearest state school in Grade 7. It also ensures that students' learning in the AEP is formally recognised as equivalent by the Ministry. It does, however, mean that CiC is obliged to follow the Afghanistan national curriculum for the formal system, but in a condensed form, and to use the textbooks for each grade level. Some teachers felt this requirement meant that the students were using materials that were potentially too juvenile and slow in progression for the actual age of the AEP learners. At the same time, teachers and the Education Programme Manager felt they had little scope to deviate from the requirement specified in the MoU and do things more appropriate, in part because the MoU states very clearly that "*failure to implement the Afghanistan MoE curriculum*" was grounds for termination of the agreement.

It is important to note that challenges around coordination with other donors are more a product of systems-level issues. For example, the Education in Emergencies Working Group was dormant for many years, and there has been a lack of coordination amongst the humanitarian and development-focussed actors working in the country on education at present. Part of the issue is that the donor community is still unclear how to position the country – as one in recovery phase, suggesting a shift towards government budget-level support and alignment to sector priorities, or a humanitarian one, which would have the international community filling critical gaps in government service provision. The reality is that the education sector does both at the moment, and AEPs in particular remain part of the government's approach to serving those whose needs are unmet through its activities alone. While on one hand, the government recognises the important role of AEP as meeting supply side constraints, it has yet to effectively acknowledge how AEPs may need to a viable alternative and in-built response to the challenges of low quality education, cultural practices, and economic hardship which remain endemic across the country; leading to high dropout rates. At present the government does not show any willingness or capacity to take over CBECs, or AEPs, limiting discussions about strengthening coordination, revising the AEP policy, or considering the creation of AEP specific resources. At the same time, the limited presence of an international staff member who might serve a greater role in coordinating activity and serving in an advocacy role, is a potential impediment to more work in this area.

¹⁸ In Afghanistan there is no standard Grade 6 exam that is administered across all schools.

Key findings: Alignment

Strengths

- Use of national curriculum (and texts)
- Students have an accredited path to transition into state system at end of Grade 6, or at intermediary points
- Clear protocol and MoU between CiC and MoE for CBECs
- Alignment of programme to CBEC Policy
- Regular oversight/monitoring of programme by MoE, around record keeping

Challenges/considerations

- Lack of coordination amongst AE provider in Afghanistan at present
- No momentum for AE specific curriculum, texts, exams at present
- Government has no current interest in taking over AEP delivery
- Demand side issues justifying AEP poorly acknowledged by MoE

Figure 9: Summary of findings for alignment domain

Utility and relevance of the principles and guidance to the programme

This section explores the current familiarity and use by CiC and other AE providers about the principles and accompanying guidance, and ways that they may consider using these supports in future programme efforts.

Current utilisation and relevance of the principles and guidance

At present, CiC has engaged with the AE Principles to a limited extent. In September when the pilot checklist was released, the Director of Programmes agreed to complete an assessment of CiC's AEP in Afghanistan against this and provide some feedback. At that time, CiC was also developing a proposal for a new regionally-focused AEP project with a new donor, and was aiming to determine if using the principles would allow CiC to demonstrate how its programme was reflective of good practice.

Results from CiC's completion of the checklist identified that the programme was strong against all principles¹⁹ as the table below suggests.

Table 4: Performance of CiC's programme against the 10 AE Principles

| Location | Principle (% score achieved) | | | | | | | | | | Project overall score |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
| Children in Crisis, Afghanistan | 100% | 89% | 83% | 96% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 97% |

¹⁹ It is important to note that CiC completed the pilot checklist, which was slightly different to the checklist that was later administered to the broader range of AEPs globally. For that reason, CiC's data is not included in the synthesis report.

On reflection, the Director of Programmes felt, however, that *“the questions are quite broad they are also quite forgiving, meaning I can imagine most projects could score highly without necessarily being very good.”* While described as a *“useful process,”* particularly in terms of benchmarking and assessing overall programme quality against agreed to standards of practice, it was felt that a limitation of the Principles is its assumption that, *“quite a few of the principles seem to assume a national authority or standard which I would argue is often not the case in AEP contexts.”* As examples of this within the current context of Afghanistan, it was noted that several of the questions under Principle 3 presume that there is an established state apparatus for AEP which programmes feed into, and for Principle 4, that the national curriculum is competency based, where in Afghanistan, neither is true. What became clear to CiC and other INGOs who engaged with the Principles in the initial workshop and a subsequent discussion which took place later in the week, is the idea that when completing the checklist, *“it does not tell you on its own if your programme is ‘good’ or ‘bad’...there may be clear reasons for not doing something because it works against other principles or subprinciples.”* It was felt that, *“...missing [from] the guidance is acknowledgement that any AE programme needs to be driven by its context and the identified needs of its beneficiaries...programme design and outcomes should always take shape from that.”* When this was discussed in more depth during the field visit, there was a sense that *“the immediate point of having these principles is an advocacy function, to gain interest/engagement from Ministry. This could then be followed by assessing AE programmes in Afghanistan against this, and then coordination to bring implementing partners into alignment with these principles.”*

Significant appreciation was voiced for the accompanying guidance that has come out in support of the principles. In particular, the fact this guidance gives prominence to the importance of inclusivity of learners, and considering how all aspects of the programme should be designed around this key idea, was seen as critical, particularly to address demand-side constraints facing education service delivery. As an example, the advisor from ACTED felt that consideration of gender in the teacher workforce of AE programmes, and acknowledgement of the difficulties of finding sufficient numbers of female teachers, as well as potential solutions to this issue, was *“critically important to programmes in the Afghanistan context who struggle with this.”* Another strength noted in the guidance, is the prominence it gives to community engagement which again, in the Afghan context, is seen as essential if programmes are to achieve the key AE outcomes of completion and certification of an equivalent basic education qualification for most students.

One key limitation noted in both the principles and the Guide, is that it does not differentiate between large and small AE programmes and what scale or scope of influence they might have in the national landscape. This is particularly true for a programme like CiC, which works with a small group of learners on an annual basis. The Director of Programmes felt *“For a small to medium term organisation who are targeting a specific group, some of these principles may be unrealistic/unfeasible because the ability to shape/influence larger processes is limited, yet is implied (particularly in Principles 2, 3, 6) that this should be occurring.”*

Finally, there was a concern raised that there is no differentiation within the Guide, as written, between the various audiences it is supposedly aimed at – donors, governments, implementing organisations. It is specified on pg. 8 that, *“This guide is for those who finance, plan, design, manage and evaluate AEPs, including NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs), government education authorities, and other education actors. The guide should be useful to programme managers, education advisers, policy makers, and anyone seeking to improve inclusive, quality education in contexts affected by crisis and conflict.”* Yet, it was felt that the Guide may not be able to serve all audiences and purposes, and may need to be differentiated to the role and function of different actors within AE provision. It was believed, for example, that large donors of AE provision had an important role to play in shaping and informing the policy context, and creating conditions under which Principle 10 (particularly to funding) could be best achieved. Programme implementers, on the other hand may be more focussed on improving aspects of the learner, teacher, or community engagement side of things. For that reason, it was believed that separate guidance documents, geared to specific role division within AE provision, might be a more useful accompanying tool to the Principles.

Potential or future utilisation of the principles and guidance

A key challenge for CiC, and other AEPs in Afghanistan at present, is that the policy environment and government structures related to AEPs hinder, rather than enable their ability to effectively meet all principles. Specifically, for any AEP to operate in Afghanistan, an MoU must be in place and regularly reviewed between the provider and the Ministry. The MoU, in turn, is shaped by the 2012 CBEC policy in which AEPs are positioned narrowly and prescriptively. This narrows providers' scope to design programmes to consider maximum flexibility to learner needs, the ability to deviate greatly from the national curriculum which is content heavy and not focussed on competencies, and the potential to consider using different types of educators in particular roles for instruction. Programmes end up being aligned to government policy which results in many AE programmes being condensed and time-accelerated versions of the primary education system, but without being able to fully embrace the key principles related to learners (1, 4, 8).

In this way, the Guide is seen as a critical aspect of advocacy in informing, and potentially reshaping AE policy in the country. As was described by one individual from another INGO, *"the guide makes it very clear that accelerated education is more than doing things faster...now we just need to get the government to engage with this idea."*

As a result of this research, momentum and enthusiasm was built between CiC and a few other AE providers to begin to discuss their approaches to AE provision, and lead a process of bottom up engagement with the Ministry, potentially through the Education in Emergencies working group. The aim would be to ideally begin to advocate for a policy environment that is better aligned with the principles and examples of good practice reflected in the guidance. It will be critical, however, that these efforts are supported from the top down through key donors such as the World Bank and USAID, as well as the AEWG, supporting efforts to give greater attention to aligning the government's current AE policy with the parameters of the principles and guidance.

For ACTED and NRC who are both in the process of designing new AE programmes in other parts of Afghanistan, it was felt that the Principles and Guide could potentially be useful in shaping their designs. Specifically, it was believed that it served as a useful set of considerations – particularly around concepts of inclusivity, flexibility, alignment, and community engagement – that could then be contextualised to their beneficiaries and location of future work. At the same time, they felt this was unlikely to happen, *"unless there was a clear compulsion from either a donor or the government to do so."* One recommendation from the representatives from these two organisations was that the guidance should include in it a flow chart at the start, for designers to understand if an AE programme is the right 'solution' to their programme.²⁰ Accompanying this could be a set of questions to orient design teams through the flowchart. It was noted, for example, that with older out of school learners in Afghanistan (i.e. those entering into a non-formal education programme after 14 or 15) a full cycle of primary school may not be tenable or warrant sufficient demand relative to other needs such as livelihood opportunities or life skills.

²⁰ Such a flowchart has already been created by the AEWG in 2016 (included in the NORC report, p 77), and could easily be incorporated into the guidance documents.

Other feedback and recommendations regarding the principles and guidance

The following are a set of other feedback and recommendations that emerged from the fieldwork:

- From those who reviewed the Principles, and the Guide that went alongside it, there was a sense that the principles were aspirational for AEPs. While seen as laudable, there was also a sense of concern that when read alongside the subprinciples which offer a significant level of specificity, and particularly when used alongside the Principles Checklist, they may be interpreted as standards.
- The guidance document, it was felt, was also short on details on how programmes could shift their approaches to work towards these principles if they were not at that point yet. While offering examples of “good practice”, what is missing is sufficient narration of the process of change which programmes went through to achieve these practices.
- The reality of Afghanistan is such that the likelihood of many students completing the next level of schooling is quite low. As CiC’s own data shows 18 months after re-entry into the formal schooling system, less than 2/3 of the students remained in it. It was felt that much of the Guide was focussed on the sole goal of getting students back into formal education, and not to the other stated aims of vocational education or employment. Case study boxes which illustrate how AEPs have been designed to direct students into these trajectories, it was noted, could be useful.
- Related to the above, the Guide and Principles need to maintain the message that having basic competencies has intrinsic and life skills values as well (with reference made to the Delors Report). It should not be assumed the primary education alone is not sufficient for some learners.
- It was felt that some of the guidance specified for particular Principles did not make it sufficiently clear who was responsible for ensuring these activities happened. For example, within the guidance on Principle 3, it discusses elements of a good sector assessment. It was felt that this was not something that would normally be done by an individual INGO or implementing actor of an AEP, but is a consideration that would most needed to be taken account at the donor and Ministerial level when developing education sector plans and priorities.

Links to programme outcomes

Description of the current programme outcomes

The programme regularly collects student data – at the time of student enrolment, attendance on a daily basis, student performance on both midterm and final exams, drop-out rates (and reasons for this), and post-programme outcomes. Some of these data are presented below.

Analysis of the 2012-2015 cohort identifies that of the 477 students that were part of the AEP, 302 of them (63%) completed the programme and earned a primary qualification. All students who made it to Grade 6 passed the exam, thus there was no difference between completing the programme, and earning a qualification. The remaining 37% of the students dropped out of the AEP for various reasons, the main ones amongst them being relocating to another part of Kabul or the country, or that the students no longer had support of their families to attend the centre. Of the original 335 students who started in the AEP in Year 1, however, only 40% of them completed the full cycle of primary and earned a Grade 6 qualification through CiC’s programme. As was noted in the 2015 midterm evaluation (p. 13), “*retention was one of the biggest challenges of the programme transitioning from a one year model to the current three-year model.*”

In the current programme cycle, after six months, approximately 10% of the original group of enrolled learners had left. Again, the main reasons for children to leave the centre had to deal with the family moving out of the area, or cultural restrictions which precluded continuing enrolment.

CiC has also aimed to follow up on the learners who did complete the full programme in 2015 and identify whether they have continued their studies. Six months after enrolling in Grade 7, only 12% of the former AEP students had dropped out. After 18 months, this tripled, with 36% of the students dropping out. Reasons for drop out were not specified in the data collection, but the former beneficiaries described how the common reasons were related to boys needing to work, and girls being married or not having the support of their families to continue. Additionally, many felt that the learning environment in the state school was not as supportive as it had been in the AEP, though they did note that they were no longer the ones “*picked on by teachers, because they were the good students,*” as one former AE beneficiary described.

One success is that 99% of those completing the full cycle do in fact earn a Grade 6 certificate. CiC develops its own examination for Grade 6 and all intermediate levels, rather than having to comply with a nationally administered exam that may serve to otherwise “filter” students out. Within CiC’s programme, student progress is closely monitored at all points, and several times during the field visit it was made clear that “failure is not an option for these students.” In part this is a pragmatic issue, as CiC does not have the ability to place a student who fails into another cohort group (given there is only one), but it is also a product of CiC embedding its AEP within the confines of the CBEC which allows it to direct struggling students to additional support in the form of the tutoring classes or extra support in the other half of the day. Extra teacher support is also available, in the form of a peer educator, or the other AEP teacher, who can work with groups of students as needed.

Links to principles

As already discussed, the programme scored highly against all the principles on the checklist. It is hard to assess, in the absence of a counterfactual, whether the outcome data noted above, could be considered a success or failure in light of the context. What is clear is that for the population which CiC is working with, issues of mobility and the transitioning of learners from children to adolescents are big factors behind the drop-out rates within and after programme completion. **Going by the results of the checklist alone suggests high scores against the principles. When compared to the high cumulative dropout rate, this appears to counter the hypothesis that programmes that perform well have better outcomes.**

Yet, if explored with a bit more nuance, it could be argued, that the success of CiC’s programme, particularly in regards to 99% of its learners who make it to the end of the programme attaining a recognised qualification, is a product of its relatively strong alignment to Principle 2. And similarly, the fact that CiC is able to successfully recruit and identify students without meaningful access to education, has clear links to its strength of community engagement (Principle 9). What this suggests is that while the principles in aggregate may not on their own indicate the degree to which a programme achieves the key AE outcomes, particular strengths/weaknesses within the principles may have links to particular outcome areas.

What can be learned from this case?

There are several key messages that can be learned from this case in terms of the utility, relevance and application of the AE Principles, Guide and Checklist for other AE programmes globally:

- 1 The Principles may presuppose particular conditions which are not universally applicable (functioning state apparatus, supportive policy environment, coordinating bodies in operation). This needs to be better acknowledged in the Principles themselves or in the Guide that accompanies it.
- 2 There is a clear challenge of retaining learners for entire three-year course of an AEP, particularly in urban semi-periphery environments where IDPs are the target population. At present, there does not appear to be enough in the Guide on how to support retention in environments where a large number of students or their families might move before the end of the full cycle.
- 3 The depth and strength of community engagement, which is strongly linked to the positioning of the AEP within a community-based education model, is one of good practice and could be highlighted in some way within the Guide.
- 4 There are clear tensions within and between the Principles, as evidenced in Afghanistan. These tensions need to be acknowledged, and it should be made clear that it may not be possible to focus on all Principles at once.
- 5 Linking AE programme outcomes to all 10 Principles in combination may not be possible, but linking them to specific Principles more tenable and reasonable to do.
- 6 There is a critical need for the AEWG to engage with and support advocacy efforts on AE with governments and donors globally using the 10 Principles, Guide and body of evidence which sits behind it. Individual AEPs on their own may have little agency to change the institutional environment they operate in and feel quite constrained by this at times.