

SIGAR

**Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction**

OFFICE OF SPECIAL PROJECTS

SCHOOLS IN BALKH PROVINCE: OBSERVATIONS FROM SITE VISITS AT 26 SCHOOLS



MARCH 2017

SIGAR-17-32-SP



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

March 28, 2017

The Honorable Wade Warren
Acting Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development

Mr. William Hammink
Assistant to the Administrator, Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs, USAID

Mr. Herbert Smith
USAID Mission Director for Afghanistan

Dear Administrator Smith, Mr. Hammink, and Mr. Smith:

This report is the second in a series that will discuss our findings from site visits at schools across Afghanistan.¹ The 26 schools discussed in this report were either built or rehabilitated using taxpayer funds provided by USAID. As of September 30, 2016, USAID has disbursed about \$868 million for education programs in Afghanistan. The purpose of this Special Project review is to determine the extent to which schools purportedly constructed or rehabilitated in Balkh province using USAID funds were open and operational, and to assess their current condition.

SIGAR was able to assess the general usability and potential structural, operational, and maintenance issues for each of the 26 schools. Our observations from these site visits indicated that there may be problems with student and teacher absenteeism at several of the schools we visited in Balkh that warrant further investigation by the Afghan government. We also observed that several schools we visited in Balkh lack basic needs, including electricity and clean water, and have structural deficiencies that are affecting the delivery of education.

We provided a draft of this report to USAID for comment on February 23, 2017. USAID provided comments on March 22, 2017. In its comments, USAID pointed out "that of the 26 schools visited by SIGAR, two were constructed and 24 were rehabilitated by USAID. Of the 24 rehabilitated schools, 11 were non-structural renovations." USAID also stated that it is no longer building new schools in Afghanistan and that it transferred these 26 schools to the Afghan Ministry of Education. USAID acknowledged that it "continues working with the Afghan government to build a comprehensive, nationwide education system by training teachers, expanding community-based education, supporting institutions of higher learning, and strengthening the ability of the MoE to deliver high-quality education throughout Afghanistan." Additionally, USAID stated that it "will ensure that the MoE is notified of the data issues identified by SIGAR for further analysis, and follow-up as well on other issues raised in the SIGAR review report. USAID's comments are reproduced in appendix II.

We conducted our work in Balkh and Kabul provinces, Afghanistan, and in Washington, D.C. from October 2015 through February 2017 in accordance with SIGAR's quality control standards. These standards require that we carry out work with integrity, objectivity, and independence, and provide information that is factually accurate and reliable. For more information on the policies and procedures and quality control standards for conducting special project work, please see SIGAR's

¹ On November 4, 2016, we issued a review detailing our observations from site visits at 25 schools in Herat province (see, SIGAR, *Schools in Herat Province: Observations from Site Visits at 25 Schools*, SIGAR 17-12-SP November 4, 2016).

website (www.SIGAR.mil). SIGAR performed this special project under the authority of Public Law No. 110-181 and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.

Should you or your staff have any questions about this project, please contact Mr. Matthew Dove, Director of Special Projects, at (703) 545-6051 or matthew.d.dove.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John F. Sopko', written in a cursive style.

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

INTRODUCTION

The United States has made significant investments in Afghanistan's education sector since the fall of the Taliban. Specifically, as of September 30, 2016, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) reported that it had disbursed approximately \$868 million for education programs in Afghanistan.² USAID's programs concentrated on teacher training, child literacy, community-based education, textbook printing and distribution, and school construction or rehabilitation. The schools constructed or rehabilitated by USAID included primary, lower secondary, and higher secondary schools; teacher training colleges; universities; kindergartens; and trade schools.³

As stated in a prior SIGAR report, USAID has claimed that the Afghan education sector is an area in which USAID programs "have contributed to measurable positive impacts on Afghanistan's development and stability."⁴ For example, in USAID's 2014 fact sheet on education in Afghanistan and in response to a 2013 SIGAR request for a list of its most successful programs in Afghanistan, USAID cited an increased student enrollment from 900,000 students in 2002 to 8 million in 2013 as evidence of overall progress in the sector.

Nevertheless, concerns with the Afghan education system continue to receive attention at the highest levels of the Afghan government. The Afghan Minister of Education, Dr. Asadullah Hanif Balkhi, told parliament in May 2015, that more than half of all teachers lacked necessary skill sets, the general-education curriculum was not sufficient, students did not have timely access to textbooks, and that educational services were unbalanced. He also stated that nonexistent schools received funding and noted that the ministry's management system, the Education Management Information System, used for tracking the number of functioning schools, is imprecise.⁵

Similarly, in June 2015, the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC) reported that efforts to improve teaching quality were being subverted by a recruitment system that is highly vulnerable to corruption and that the education of Afghan students was being "significantly undermined by bribery and nepotism."⁶ Moreover, the MEC report stated that "ghost"⁷ teachers have been a long-standing problem, and in most provinces, including Kabul, teacher attendance sheets are not filled out or are frequently forged.⁸

² SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, September 30, 2016, p. 207.

³ For the purposes of this report, we will collectively refer to these facilities as "schools," and individually, unless otherwise noted, as a "school."

⁴ USAID, Response to SIGAR Letter to the Department of State, USAID, and Department of Defense Requesting Top Most Successful and Least Successful Projects, May 9, 2013.

⁵ UNAMA, "WJ Proceedings Summary," May 27, 2015.

⁶ Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, "Vulnerability to Corruption Assessment of Teacher Recruitment in the Ministry of Education," June 2015, p. 6.

⁷ The word "ghost" has been used to refer to teachers, students, and schools that are registered with the Afghan Ministry of Education, but that do not actually exist.

⁸ Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, "Vulnerability to Corruption Assessment of Teacher Recruitment in the Ministry of Education," June 2015, p. 6.

Concerned by these and similar allegations, SIGAR issued an inquiry letter to USAID on June 11, 2015.⁹ The letter requested information regarding the reliability of data used by USAID to fund, oversee, and measure the effectiveness of its education programs in Afghanistan. In response, USAID stated that it “has been working with the Ministry of Education [MoE] for over a decade, has a good understanding of the challenges of working in Afghanistan, and has developed monitoring procedures, in compliance with standard practices, for USAID projects that do not rely solely on data from MoE.”¹⁰

CURRENT STATE OF THE AFGHAN EDUCATION SYSTEM AND RECENT INVESTIGATIONS

The Afghan Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for administering general education, Islamic education, technical and vocational education, and teacher and literacy training in Afghanistan. The MOE-administered education system consists of three levels:¹¹

1. Primary Education: Grades 1 through 6, where students age 7 to 12 learn reading, writing, arithmetic, and national culture.
2. Lower Secondary Education: Grades 7 through 9, for students age 13 to 15.
3. Higher/Upper Secondary Education: Grades 10 through 12, where students age 16 to 18 choose between continuing an academic path that could lead to university or studying subjects such as applied agriculture, aeronautics, arts, commerce, and teacher training.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as of 2013 there were 14,600 general education schools in Afghanistan. Approximately 41 percent (6,056) were primary schools only, while 27 percent (3,918) were lower secondary schools that included all primary grades, and another 32 percent (4,625) were upper secondary schools containing all three levels.¹² In May 2016, the MOE reported that Afghanistan had 15,249 general education schools with 184,024 teachers and almost 8.7 million students enrolled.

In July 2015, President Ashraf Ghani ordered an investigation into allegations of corruption within the MOE.¹³ By August, provincial teams from the Afghan government were assigned to collect more reliable figures for 6,000 schools across all 34 provinces, with field work conducted in September 2015.¹⁴

In January 2016, Afghan media sources began publishing results of the investigation, which included allegations of embezzlement, inconsistent and underreporting of nonexistent “ghost”

⁹ SIGAR, *Afghanistan Education Data Inquiry Letter*, SIGAR 15-62-SP, June 11, 2015.

¹⁰ USAID, “Response to the Inquiry Letter on Afghanistan Education Data Reliability, (SIGAR Inquiry Letter-15-62-SP),” June 30, 2015

¹¹ SIGAR, *Primary and Secondary Education in Afghanistan: Comprehensive Assessments Needed to Determine the Progress and Effectiveness of Over \$759 Million in DOD, State, and USAID Programs*, SIGAR 16-32-AR, April 26, 2016, pg. 10.

¹² UNESCO, *Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Afghanistan*, June 2015, p. 28.

¹³ Ariana TV, “Afghan President Assigns Delegation to Probe Corruption Allegation in Ministry,” July 14, 2015; Tolo News, “Task Team Uncovers Hundreds of Ghost Schools,” January 2, 2016.

¹⁴ USAID, response to SIGAR vetting, October 12, 2015; USAID, Operations Evaluations Department, response to SIGAR data call, September 23, 2015.

schools, thousands of “ghost” teachers on official rolls, “ghost” training seminars, and discrepancies in student enrollment and attendance records.¹⁵

On January 4, 2016, USAID officials attended a meeting with President Ghani to discuss the investigation’s preliminary findings.¹⁶ USAID officials told SIGAR that President Ghani outlined specific organizational and management reforms, such as introducing a national electronic payment system and a national public corruption council to minimize fraud and corruption. Similarly, according to the Department of State, Minister Balkhi recently reemphasized his commitment to increase transparency within the MOE, root out corruption, and curtail the misuse of funds.

As part of our ongoing examination of the Afghan education sector, and to assist USAID and the Afghan government to improve education-related data throughout Afghanistan, we initiated this special project to determine whether schools purportedly built or rehabilitated in Balkh province using USAID funds were open and operational, and to assess their current condition.¹⁷ To accomplish these objectives, we identified 41 USAID-funded projects to rehabilitate or construct schools in Balkh province, which USAID completed between 2004 and 2007. We worked jointly with an Afghan civil society organization to perform limited inspections of 26 such schools on October 25 through November 15, 2015.¹⁸ Our site visits lasted for approximately 1–2 hours and were conducted during normal school days and operating hours. At each site visit, we observed and recorded information about school resources and structures, completed standardized survey questionnaires, and, where available, interviewed school officials and community members.¹⁹ We also used Global Positioning System (GPS)-enabled cameras to secure geospatial coordinate- and date/time-stamped photographs for each school. Through this process, we identified geospatial coordinates, assessed general operations and usability, as well as potential problems at each facility.

While a single site visit, during one of two shifts at a school, cannot substantiate claims of ghost teachers, ghost students, or ghost schools, it does provide valuable insight into the operations of a school on a normal school day.

CONDITIONS REPORTED AND OBSERVED AT 26 SCHOOLS IN BALKH PROVINCE

Our site inspection teams interviewed school staff and community members, inspected school grounds and buildings, and obtained photographic evidence at 26 of 41 schools constructed or rehabilitated by USAID and now operated by the MOE in Balkh province.²⁰ All of the 26 schools

¹⁵ Tolo News, “Task Team Uncovers Hundreds of Ghost Schools,” January 2, 2016.

¹⁶ The final investigation report has not yet been made public.

¹⁷ This report is the second in a series that will discuss our findings from site visits at schools across Afghanistan. On November 4, 2016, we issued a review detailing our observations from site visits at 25 schools in Herat province (see, SIGAR, *Schools in Herat Province: Observations from Site Visits at 25 Schools*, SIGAR 17-12-SP November 4, 2016).

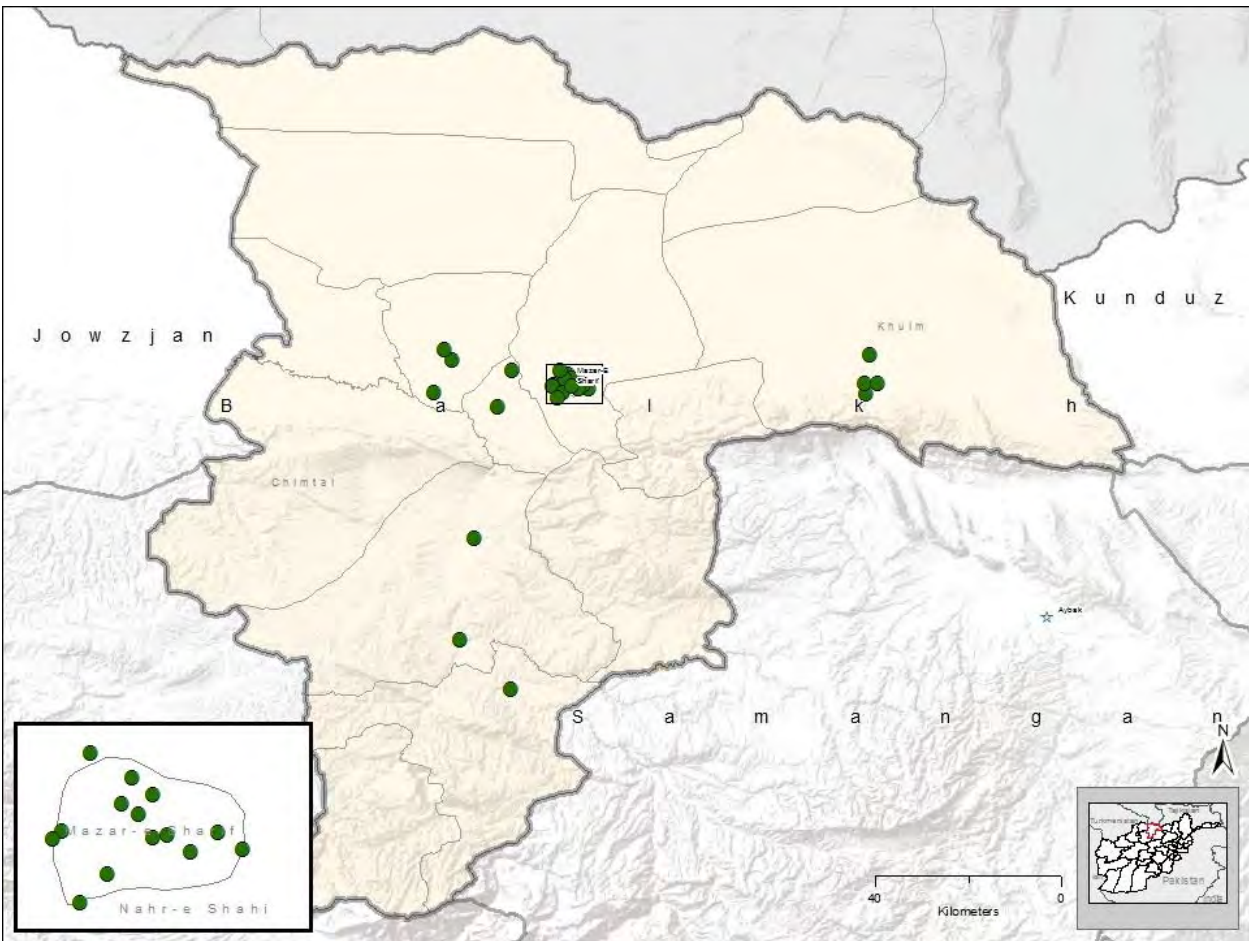
¹⁸ We were able to conduct complete site inspections at 26 schools. We were unable to gain access and fully inspect one additional school located at Balkh University.

¹⁹ The survey had four sections: external observations, internal observations, staff interviews, and community interviews. Prior to completing on-site visitation, staff were trained on how to locate and access a school, perform internal and external observations, fill questionnaires properly, and take GPS-embedded and date/time-stamped photographs. One official from each school was asked to complete the survey/questionnaire and provide responses for the school to provide insights related to personnel enrollment and attendance, school functionality, and other relevant information. An inspection supervisor attended several site inspections to ensure that staff collected survey information in a standardized manner, accurately accounted for all questions on the questionnaire, and properly photographed facilities.

²⁰ In total, staff visited 27 schools but could only complete surveys at 26 MOE-operated schools. At one school, we were not granted access to conduct a complete site inspection or interview a staff member. We omitted that school from our review.

appeared to be at least nominally open or in-use. Figure 1 shows the general location and the corresponding operational status of the schools we completed site visits for in Balkh.

Figure 1 - Location of Schools Visited in Balkh Province



Source: SIGAR analysis

Site Visits at 26 Schools in Balkh During One Shift on a Normal²¹ School Day: Students Observed

School staff reported that the 26 schools our staff inspected typically operated two or three shifts of approximately 3-4 hours each per school day. We interviewed school staff and asked questions about total enrollment and estimated daily number of absent students. Survey responses were collected and analyzed for irregularities. On average, officials reported an enrollment of 2,461 students at each of the 26 schools in Balkh province and a daily expected absentee rate of roughly 4 percent (or 110 students).²²

²¹ We define a normal school day as Saturday-Thursday between 08:00AM and 3:30PM

²² Numbers are rounded. UNESCO reports that the Afghan government does not measure absentee rates based on individual school enrollments. Instead, MOE uses net enrollment rates or “the number of children of official primary school

SIGAR staff observed and tallied the students present at the schools during each site visit. On average, 734 students were observed at each of the 26 schools inspected in Balkh province, which represents approximately 30 percent of all students reportedly enrolled by school staff.²³ At 17 schools, we observed less than 40 percent of students reportedly enrolled on the school grounds, including 8 where we observed fewer than 20 percent of students reportedly enrolled and 5 where we observed fewer than 10 percent of students reportedly enrolled. Table 1 provides a list of reported and observed numbers of students at each inspected school.

Table 1 - Reported and Observed Student Data at 26 Schools in Balkh Province during One Shift on a Normal School Day

USAID School No.	District	School Type	School Level	Observed Operational Status	Reported Across All Shifts ¹ (Students)	Approximate Number Observed in One Shift ² (Students)	Observed Student Percentage ³	Reported Number of Daily Shifts
HEP-005	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	C	Open or In-Use	1,920	1,300	67.7%	2
SR03	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	1,900	1,000	52.6%	2
SR13	Nahri Shahi	Boys	L, H	Open or In-Use	590	300	50.8%	2
IOMMZRO10	Mazar-e-sharif	Girls	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	4,945	2,300	46.5%	2
SR15	Dihdadi	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	1,096	500	45.6%	2
IOMMZRO02	Mazar-e-sharif	Girls	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	2,245	1,000	44.5%	2
IOMMZRO03	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	I	Open or In-Use	904	400	44.2%	2
SR10	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	1,662	700	42.1%	2
SR035A	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	4,750	2,000	42.1%	3
SR19	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	4,080	1,400	34.3%	2
SR02	Mazar-e-sharif	Girls	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	2,940	1,000	34.0%	2
SR18	Sholgara	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	390	130	33.3%	2
S036A	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	5,200	1,600	30.8%	3
SR11	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	3,910	1,000	25.6%	3
SR07	Khulm	Boys	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	720	200	27.8%	3

age, who are enrolled in primary education as a percentage of the total children of school age population.” In 2013, the net enrollment rates in primary education for boys and girls were 86 and 64 percent for primary education, and 71 and 50 percent for general education (grades 1–12) respectively. However, during our site visits, school officials provided SIGAR specific enrollment and absent student figures in-lieu of net enrollment rates (see UNESCO, *Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Afghanistan*, June 2015, p. 11.).

²³ Represents the mean average. Median averages include the following: 1987enrolled, and 600 observed.

SR08	Balkh	Boys	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	4,703	1,200	25.5%	3
SR09	Khulm	Girls	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	1,430	300	21.0%	3
S037A	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	4,905	900	18.3%	3
S040A	Sholgara	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	570	100	17.5%	3
S038A	Nahri Shahi	Boys	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	3,400	1000	29.4%	3
S039A	Nahia Shashum	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	3,400	400	11.8%	3
S043A	Balkh	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	1,594	150	9.4%	3
SR21	Balkh	Boys	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	1,774	150	8.5%	3
SR04	Khulm	Boys	H	Open or In-Use	724	50	6.9%	2
SR05	Khulm	Boys	P, L	Open or In-Use	430	10	2.3%	2
S045	Kishidih	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	963	0	0.00%	2
Average					2,352	734	29.7%	2.5

Key: C – college or university; H – higher secondary school; L – lower secondary school; and P – primary school; I - Institute

Source: SIGAR analysis

Notes:

Observed students may reflect double counting of students observed both inside and outside of schools.

¹ Reported students are adjusted to account for daily reported absent students.

² Observed students reflect the sum of students on school grounds; in cases where we were unable to conduct a precise count without interrupting school operations, we approximated the number of students observed at the facility.

³ The Observed Student Percentage column reflects the observed students as a portion of total attendance. However, since SIGAR did not observe attendance across all shifts, we could not determine how the proportion of students observed in one shift compares to other shifts at each school. This figure represents the percentage of students observed on-site compared to the total adjusted number of students reported by school officials during the survey interview.

As shown in table 1, approximately 30 percent of the schools had very few students present during the observed shift. For example, site inspectors did not observe any of the 963 students reportedly enrolled at one school in Kishidih district—even though we visited the school from 11:50 am to 1:00 pm on a Thursday. Similarly, at a school in Khulm district, school staff reported 30, or about 6.5 percent, of 460 enrolled students were reported absent during our site visit. At the time of our visit, there were only ten students on school grounds. At a second school located in Balkh district, a school official noted that 1,634 students attended the school on a normal day. However, we observed that only 150 students were present on school grounds at that time. Photo 1 shows the exterior and interior of the school in Kishidih, and photo 2 shows the exterior and interior of the school in Khulm.

Photo 1 – None of the 1,003 Reportedly Enrolled Students Were Observed at School S045 in Kishidih District at the Time of Our Visit



Source: SIGAR, November 5, 2015

Photo 2 – Only 10 of 460 Reportedly Enrolled Students Were Observed at School SR05 in Khulm District at the Time of Our Visit



Source: SIGAR, November 10, 2015

Although we cannot draw any firm conclusions based on our observations, because our site visits only represent a snapshot in time, inflating enrollment figures is not without precedent in Afghanistan. A 2012 review of annual surveys from the MOE's Education Management Information System suggest that reported enrollment and participation levels in general education in Afghanistan are inflated by between 800,000 and 1.2 million children.²⁴ Similarly, a 2010 analysis of the state of education in Afghanistan described the problematic nature of attempting to calculate gross and net enrollment rates in Afghanistan:

Ideally, policy makers would know how many children of official school age are in school and complete their primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. Currently, this is extremely difficult to record, for a number of reasons... schools may

²⁴ Lynne Bethke, "Primary and Secondary Schooling Sub-Sector Report; Education Joint Sector Review 1391/2012." Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, June 2012, p. 6.

be tempted to inflate attendance figures because access to some resources is related to enrollment levels (e.g. school grants from EQUIP [Education Quality Improvement Program]).^{25, 26}

Site Visits at 26 Schools in Balkh During One Shift on a Normal School Day: Teachers Observed

School staff reported that schools typically operated two or three shifts of approximately 3-4 hours each per school day. On average, school staff reported 77 teachers assigned to each school with approximately 52 not on-site during visits. While our site visits found an average of 25 teachers on school grounds, or approximately 35 percent of the number of teachers reportedly assigned to a school, we observed 19 schools where less than 40 percent of assigned teachers were on-site, including three schools where less than 15 percent of assigned teachers were on-site during the observed shift.²⁷ Table 2 provides a list of reported and observed numbers of teachers at each inspected school.²⁸

Table 2 - Reported and Observed Teacher Data at 26 Schools in Balkh Province during One Shift on a Normal School Day

USAID School No.	District	School Type	School Level	Observed Operational Status	Reported Across All Shifts ¹ (Teachers)	Approximate Number Observed in One Shift ² (Teachers)	Observed Teacher Percentage ³	Reported Number of Daily Shifts
SR21	Balkh	Boys	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	41	31	75.6%	3
SR07	Khulm	Boys	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	19	12	63.2%	3
SR04	Khulm	Boys	H	Open or In-Use	22	13	59.1%	2
SR13	Nahri Shahi	Boys	L, H	Open or In-Use	45	25	55.6%	2
SR03	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	73	40	54.8%	2
S040A	Sholgara	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	40	20	50.0%	3
IOMMZRO10	Mazar-e-sharif	Girls	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	165	82	49.7%	2

²⁵ Steve Packer, et al, *Afghan Education Sector Analysis 2010*, commissioned by the MOE, June 2010, p. 22.

²⁶ USAID contributes education funds through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund Investment Window for the Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP) managed by the World Bank. Although EQUIP funds are not used for operational costs or salaries, they are used to fund teacher training. The World Bank is responsible for independently monitoring and tracking EQUIP funds, and produces semi-annual reports for USAID on the program's progress and performance indicators. See USAID, *Response to Afghanistan Education Data Inquiry Letter*, SIGAR 15-62-SP, June 30, 2015, p. 4.

²⁷ Numbers are rounded.

²⁸ Numbers are rounded and only reflect the portion of observed teachers on school grounds during site inspections. It does not provide additional context into the reasons for a teacher's absence or whether the absence was sanctioned by school officials. Additionally, observed teacher totals may include double counting of teachers observed both inside and outside of a school during the completion of a school survey.

S036A	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	131	50	38.2%	3
IOMMZRO03	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	I	Open or In-Use	34	13	38.2%	2
SR15	Dihdadi	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	28	10	35.7%	2
SR08	Balkh	Boys	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	113	38	33.6%	3
SR02	Mazar-e-sharif	Girls	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	90	30	33.3%	2
S038A	Nahri Shahi	Boys	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	95	30	31.6%	3
SR19	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	96	30	31.3%	2
SR11	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	115	35	30.4%	3
SR09	Khulm	Girls	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	48	14	29.2%	3
S037A	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	94	25	26.6%	3
S039A	Nahia Shashum	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	115	30	26.1%	3
SR10	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	100	25	25.0%	2
SR18	Sholgara	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	24	6	25.0%	2
SR035A	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	160	40	25.0%	3
S043A	Balkh	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	59	14	23.7%	3
S045	Kishidih	Co-Education	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	24	5	20.8%	2
IOMMZRO02	Mazar-e-sharif	Girls	P, L, H	Open or In-Use	130	18	13.8%	2
HEP-005	Mazar-e-sharif	Co-Education	C	Open or In-Use	115	15	13.0%	2
SR05	Khulm	Boys	P, L	Open or In-Use	19	2	10.5%	2
Average					77	25	35%	2.5

Key: C – college or university; H – higher secondary school; L – lower secondary school; and P – primary school

Source: SIGAR analysis

Notes:

Observed teachers may reflect double counting of teachers observed both inside and outside of schools.

¹ Represents the number of teachers reported employed at a school by a staff member during the survey interview.

² Observed teachers reflect the sum of teachers on school grounds; in cases where we were unable to conduct a precise count without interrupting school operations, we approximated the number of teachers observed at the facility.

³ The Observed Teacher Percentage column reflects the observed teachers as a portion of total attendance. However, since SIGAR did not observe attendance across all shifts, we could not determine how the proportion of teachers observed in one shift compares to other shifts at each school. This figure represents the percentage of teachers observed on-site from the total adjusted number of teachers reported by school officials during the survey interview.

SEVERAL SCHOOLS IN BALKH PROVINCE LACKED ELECTRICITY, A SOURCE OF CLEAN WATER, OR HAD STRUCTURAL AND OTHER DEFICIENCIES

In addition to documenting the number of teachers and students observed, we examined the basic physical condition of the 26 USAID-constructed or -rehabilitated schools in Balkh province and identified several schools lacking basic needs. Specifically, less than half of the schools had reliable electricity, and ten facilities lacked access to clean water. Additionally, we found schools that had structural and utility deficiencies that could potentially endanger students, teachers, and other occupants.

Less than Half of Inspected Schools Had Reliable Electricity

During our site visits, we observed and documented whether the schools had electricity and heating, and interviewed school staff to inquire about school operations. We found that only 12 of the 26 schools had functioning electricity in their classrooms or offices. In the 14 schools without functioning electricity in their classrooms or offices, 13 schools reported having no power source at all. There are several reasons why a school may lack electricity in its classrooms despite having access to a power source. For example, connection to the electrical grid may be unstable, or the grid itself may not be carrying power. Photos 3 and 4 show two of the common issues with electricity at the schools, including exposed wiring and damaged electrical sockets.

Photo 3 – Exposed Wires from Electrical Socket at School SR07 in Khulm District



Source: SIGAR, November 10, 2015

Photo 4 – Damaged Electrical Sockets at School SR10 in Mazar-e-sharif District



Source: SIGAR, October 31, 2015

Observations on Access to Water and Overall Sanitary Conditions

Ten of the 26 schools we visited did not have access to clean water. Two locations, a boy's school in Khulm district and a primary school in Dihdadi district, appeared to have inoperable water wells. Photo 5 and 6 shows the water wells at Schools SR07 and SR15.

Photo 5 –Water Well at School SR07 in Khulm District



Source: SIGAR, November 10, 2015

Photo 6 – Inoperable Well at School SR15 in Dihdadi District Provides No Access to Clean Water



Source: SIGAR, November 8, 2015

Our site inspections also found that several schools face serious sanitary issues relating to toilets and the absence of handwashing stations. Of the schools inspected, 22 of the 26 schools had functioning toilets, but 16 of those schools toilets did not appear to be cleaned or maintained properly. Five schools had handwashing stations, four of which were not cleaned or maintained. Of those visited, 21 (or 81 percent of all facilities inspected) lacked handwashing stations altogether. One school in Mazar-e-sharif district, SR 11, appeared to have handwashing stations, but they were not maintained properly and were inoperable. Photo 7 shows a handwashing station that lacked faucets and running water at one school in Mazar-e-sharif district.

Photo 7 –Inoperable Handwashing Station at School SR 11



Source: SIGAR, October 31, 2015

Potential Structural Deficiencies Effect Delivery of Education Services in Balkh Province

SIGAR observed schools with structural deficiencies. SIGAR observed that 23 schools had roofs that defects, including 5 schools with roofs that were cracked or had large holes. In addition to the roofing issues, we observed schools with other apparent structural damage. Photo 8 shows the cracked interior wall of a school in Nahia Shashum district. Photo 9 shows the interior wall of school SR11 in Mazar-e-Sharif District that appears to have large cracks and structural damage.

Photo 8 – Structural Damage on the Interior Wall of School S039A



Source: SIGAR, October 25, 2015

Photo 9 – Structural Damage on the Interior Wall of School SR11



Source: SIGAR, October 31, 2015

We observed missing or broken doors and windows at a number of the schools we visited. Specifically, we found that 8 schools (or 31 percent) had broken or missing doors, and 4 (or 15 percent) had broken or missing windows. At one school in Nahri Shahi District, most of the windows and doors were broken or missing. Photo 10 shows the school's broken and missing windows.

Photo 10 – Missing Windows and Doors in Classroom at School S043 Ain Balkh District



Source: SIGAR, November 08, 2015

Given the seasonal differences in Balkh's climate, it is important to protect students and teachers from harsh environmental conditions. For example, Balkh's cold season lasts from late November through early March, with an average daily high temperature below 56°F (13.3°C). During this period, there is a 30 percent average chance for precipitation each day.²⁹ Without windows and heated classrooms, schools may be unable to keep facilities in usable condition, and classes may be cancelled or suspended.

SIGAR observed classes in session at 23 of the 26 schools and found that classrooms at 20 schools had enough tables and chairs for the students who were present: in classrooms at the remaining three schools we observed that students were sitting on the floor. Photo 11 presents an example of a classroom SIGAR observed, where students were sitting on the floor due to a lack of classroom furniture. In addition, several of the facilities had stockpiles of broken furniture on school grounds. Photo 12 shows broken tables and chairs at school S038A.

Photo 11 – Lack of Classroom Furniture in School SR S036A



Source: SIGAR, November 14, 2015

Photo 12 – Stockpile of Broken Furniture Outside School S038A



Source: SIGAR, November 8, 2015

CONCLUSION

In late October and early November 2015, we visited 26 schools built or rehabilitated by USAID in Balkh province. We were at each site for approximately 1–2 hours during one of two daily shifts to gain insight into the operations of schools on a normal school day. Our observations from these visits indicate that there may be problems with student and teacher absenteeism that warrant further investigation by the Afghan government. Given that USAID has spent millions of dollars on the construction and rehabilitation of Afghan schools, and continues to spend millions of dollars on teacher training and salaries, the agency has a clear interest in ensuring that the improvements it reports in the Afghan education sector are based on actual attendance.

We also observed that several schools in Balkh province lack basic services, including electricity and clean water. Although USAID completed many of the projects between 2004 and 2007, our review of

²⁹ Temperatures were recorded at the Mazar Airport Weather Station in Mazar Sharif, Balkh Province, Afghanistan and are based on the historical records from 2010 to 2013. WeatherSpark, "Average Weather for Mazari Sharif, Afghanistan," accessed December 8, 2016, <https://weatherspark.com/averages/32752/Mazari-Sharif-Balkh-Afghanistan>.

these schools provides insight on what remains of the investment made by U.S. taxpayers in the Afghan education sector. We encourage USAID to share the results of this review with the Afghan government and to assist the MOE in investigating the cases we identified where there appear to be extreme discrepancies between reported and observed students and teachers. We also encourage USAID to assist the MOE in fixing structural and other deficiencies highlighted in this report that impact the delivery of education services.

AGENCY COMMENTS

We provided a draft of this report to USAID for comment on February 23, 2017. USAID provided comments on March 22, 2017. In its comments, USAID pointed out “that of the 26 schools visited by SIGAR, two were constructed and 24 were rehabilitated by USAID. Of the 24 rehabilitated schools, 11 were non-structural renovations.” USAID also stated that it is no longer building new schools in Afghanistan and that it transferred these 26 schools to the Afghan Ministry of Education. USAID acknowledged that it “continues working with the Afghan government to build a comprehensive, nationwide education system by training teachers, expanding community-based education, supporting institutions of higher learning, and strengthening the ability of the MoE to deliver high-quality education throughout Afghanistan.” Additionally, USAID stated that it “will ensure that the MoE is notified of the data issues identified by SIGAR for further analysis, and follow-up as well on other issues raised in the SIGAR review report. USAID’s comments are reproduced in appendix II.

APPENDIX I – SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We initiated this special project to determine whether schools purportedly built or rehabilitated by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Balkh province, Afghanistan were open and operational, and to assess their current condition. To accomplish these objectives, we identified 41 USAID-funded projects to rehabilitate or construct schools in Balkh province.

On this project, SIGAR worked jointly with an Afghan civil society organization committed to increasing transparency, accountability, and integrity in Afghanistan. We performed limited inspections of 26 schools in Balkh province.

For these limited inspections, we carried out physical site visits of 1–2 hours during reported school days and reported operating hours at each facility. Standardized survey questionnaires were used and we used GPS-enabled cameras to secure embedded geocoordinates and date-/time-stamped photographs. Site visits identified geospatial coordinates, usability, and efficiency, as well as potential structural, operational, and maintenance at each facility.

SIGAR formally requested that the Afghan Ministry of Education (MOE) provide an Inspection Authorization Letter for the schools in Balkh province. The issued letters provided access for inspection of schools and educational facilities. In total, staff visited 27 schools but only completed surveys at the 26 schools.

The standardized survey conducted during the site visits is comprised of four sections: observations from outside the school, observations from inside the school, staff interviews, and community interviews. Prior to completing on-site visitation, staff were trained on how to locate and access a school, document observations, fill questionnaires properly, and take GPS-embedded and date-/time-stamped photographs by the inspection supervisor. In addition, a supervisor attended several site inspections along with our team to ensure surveys were collected in a standardized manner, accurately account for all questions on a questionnaire, and take proper photographs.

All records and documentation were provided to the SIGAR Office of Special Projects for analysis. Scanned copies of the surveys completed by staff in the field, were carefully reviewed for irregularities during data normalization.

SIGAR conducts special projects under authority of Public Law 110-181 and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and in accordance with the principles of integrity, objectivity, and independence in the Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) *Quality Standards for Federal Offices of Inspector General*, and the policies and procedures and described herein, SIGAR's *Special Projects Policy and Procedures Manual*. The CIGIE *Quality Standards for Federal Offices of Inspector General* were established to help Offices of Inspectors General fulfill their oversight roles and comply with statutory requirements and professional standards. The CIGIE quality standards incorporate by reference (section III) the existing professional standards for audit, investigation, and inspection and evaluation efforts.

For more information about this project, please contact Mr. Matthew Dove, Director of Special Projects, at (703) 545-6051 or matthew.d.dove.civ@mail.mil.



USAID | AFGHANISTAN
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

MEMORANDUM

March 22, 2017

TO: John F. Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)

FROM: Herbert Smith, Mission Director 

SUBJECT: Mission Response to Draft SIGAR Review Report titled "Schools in Balkh Province: Observations From Site Visits at 26 Schools" (SIGAR SP-115A/SIGAR-17-XX-SP)

REF: SIGAR Transmittal email dated 02/24/2017

USAID thanks SIGAR for the opportunity to comment on this Draft Review Report.

USAID notes that of the 26 schools visited by SIGAR, two were constructed and 24 were rehabilitated by USAID. Of the 24 rehabilitated schools, 11 were non-structural renovations. Following handover, the Ministry of Education (MoE) became the responsible party to operate and maintain these facilities. Each facility was provided a one-year warranty period to ensure latent defects and/or poor workmanship issues would be identified prior to closing out the contract. USAID had no other ongoing commitments to operate or maintain these schools after the handover.

USAID completed the transition of these schools to MoE by 2006 and is no longer building new schools in Afghanistan. USAID continues working with the Afghan government to build a comprehensive, nationwide education system by training teachers, expanding community-based education, supporting institutions of higher learning, and strengthening the ability of the MoE to deliver high-quality education throughout Afghanistan.

USAID will ensure that the MoE is notified of the data issues identified by SIGAR for further analysis, and follow-up as well on the other issues raised in the SIGAR review report.

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APPENDIX III – ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This project was conducted
under project code SP-115B.

SIGAR's Mission

The mission of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) is to enhance oversight of programs for the reconstruction of Afghanistan by conducting independent and objective audits, inspections, and investigations on the use of taxpayer dollars and related funds. SIGAR works to provide accurate and balanced information, evaluations, analysis, and recommendations to help the U.S. Congress, U.S. agencies, and other decision-makers to make informed oversight, policy, and funding decisions to:

- improve effectiveness of the overall reconstruction strategy and its component programs;
- improve management and accountability over funds administered by U.S. and Afghan agencies and their contractors;
- improve contracting and contract management processes;
- prevent fraud, waste, and abuse; and
- advance U.S. interests in reconstructing Afghanistan.

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