

SIGAR

**Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction**

OFFICE OF SPECIAL PROJECTS

SCHOOLS IN PAKTIKA PROVINCE,
AFGHANISTAN: OBSERVATIONS FROM
SITE VISITS AT 6 SCHOOLS



FEBRUARY 2019

SIGAR 19-21-SP



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

February 27, 2019

The Honorable Mark Green
Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development

Ms. Karen Freeman
Assistant to the Administrator, Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs, USAID

Mr. Peter Natiello
USAID Mission Director for Afghanistan

Dear Administrator Green, Ms. Freeman, and Mr. Natiello:

This report is the ninth in a series that discusses our findings from site visits at schools across Afghanistan that were either built or rehabilitated by USAID. The six schools discussed in this report are in Paktika province, Afghanistan. The purpose of this review was to determine the extent to which those schools were open and operational, and to assess their current condition. We found that four of the six schools were open and in generally usable condition, and that two of the schools were closed and not in a condition suitable for use. We also found that there may be problems with student and teacher attendance at the schools we visited that were in operation. In addition, we found that some schools have structural deficiencies (e.g. cracked or crumbling walls or broken windows) that could potentially impact safety and the delivery of education.

We provided a draft of this review to USAID for comment on February 13, 2019. USAID provided comments on February 24, 2019. In its comments, USAID stated that in addition to sharing this report with the Ministry of Education (MOE), USAID “will request that the MOE provide USAID with an update of the actions taken to address the deficiencies within 90 days of the receipt of the report.” USAID’s comments are reproduced in appendix I.

We conducted our work in Paktika province, and Kabul, Afghanistan, and in Washington, D.C. from May 2018 to February 2019 under the authority of Public Law No. 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended; and in accordance with the Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*. Should you or your staff have any questions about this project, please contact Mr. Benjamin Piccolo, Director of Special Projects, at (703) 545-2142 or benjamin.j.piccolo.civ@mail.mil or Mr. Parker Laite at (703) 545-5966 or parker.s.laite.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

BACKGROUND

The United States has made significant investments in Afghanistan's education sector since 2002. Specifically as of January 12, 2019, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) reported that it has disbursed more than \$1 billion for education programs in Afghanistan.¹ USAID's programs have concentrated on teacher training, child literacy, community-based education, textbook printing and distribution, and school construction or rehabilitation. USAID-constructed or rehabilitated schools include primary, lower secondary, and higher secondary schools; teacher training colleges; universities; kindergartens; and trade schools.²

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."³ 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 have received attention at the highest levels of the Afghan government. The Afghan Minister of Education, Dr. Asadullah Hanif Balkhi, told parliament in May 2015, that nonexistent schools received funding and noted that the ministry's Education Management Information System, used for tracking the number of functioning schools, is imprecise.⁴ Similarly, in June 2015, the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC) reported that "ghost"⁵ teachers have been a long-standing problem, and in most provinces, including Paktika, teacher attendance sheets are not filled out or are frequently forged.⁶

Concerned by these and similar allegations, SIGAR issued an inquiry letter to USAID on June 11, 2015.⁷ 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."⁸

¹ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, January 30, 2018, p. 169.

² For the purposes of this report, we will collectively refer to these facilities as "schools," and individually, unless otherwise noted, as a "school."

³ 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.

⁴ UNAMA, "WJ Proceedings Summary," May 27, 2015.

⁵ 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.

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

⁸ USAID, "Response to the Inquiry Letter on Afghanistan Education Data Reliability, (SIGAR Inquiry Letter-15-62-SP)," June 30, 2015.

THE AFGHAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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:⁹

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 MOE's Education Management Information System (EMIS) for Afghan fiscal year 1396 (December 22, 2016 – December 21, 2017), Afghanistan reportedly had 16,049 general-education (government run, grades 1-12) schools, including 959 inactive/closed schools, with 8.95 million students enrolled. The number of enrolled students includes both students who regularly attend school as well as those that have been absent for up to three years. The MOE counts students who have been absent for up to three years as enrolled because, it says, they might return to school. In October 2017, a report from the Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee said that this sub-population represents about 20 percent of total enrolled students, implying only about 7.2 million students were actually attending classes in Afghanistan.¹⁰

To help the MOE gather school data to guide its decision making, and help understand how donor funding is benefitting Afghanistan's education system, donors funded EMIS, which tracks educational statistics such as the number of teachers working and students enrolled in schools. However, the Afghan government, as well as USAID, have stated that the EMIS data is imprecise and inaccurate. In addition USAID funded two assessments of EMIS data quality to identify and address gaps in the system.

USAID's first assessment identified key weaknesses within EMIS, including a lack of oversight, inconsistent monitoring at schools, insufficient capacity and training on EMIS forms and procedures, inadequate financing and overreliance on donor-funded assistance, and lack of coordination resulting in duplicative data collection and inefficiencies. USAID's second assessment focused on verifying EMIS data to assess its reliability and identifying inconsistencies at the national, provincial, and local school levels. The assessment found that EMIS data collection varied at the school-level and there was an urgent need for training. School officials lacked a clear understanding of the EMIS form and how to fill it out, particularly student and teacher data, resulting in data discrepancies and inaccurate information. For example, the assessment documented seven percent more teachers marked present in attendance registers than actually found at schools.

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 Paktika province using USAID funds were open and operational, and to assess their current condition.¹¹ To accomplish these objectives, we identified six

⁹ 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, p. 10.

¹⁰ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, January 30, 2018, p. 186.

¹¹ This report is the ninth in a series that will discuss our findings from site visits at USAID-funded schools across Afghanistan (see, SIGAR, *Schools in Herat Province: Observations from Site Visits at 25 Schools*, SIGAR 17-12-SP, November 4, 2016; SIGAR, *Schools in Balkh Province: Observations From Site Visits at 26 Schools*, SIGAR-17-32-SP, March 28, 2017; SIGAR *Schools in Khost Province, Afghanistan: Observations from Site Visits at 23 Schools*, SIGAR-17-66-SP, September 12, 2017; SIGAR, *Schools in Faryab Province, Afghanistan: Observations from Site Visits at 17 Schools*, SIGAR-18-17-SP, December 12, 2017; SIGAR, *Schools in Kabul Province, Afghanistan: Observations from Site Visits at 24 Schools*, SIGAR 18-31-SP, February 6, 2018; SIGAR, *Schools in Kunduz Province, Afghanistan: Observations from Site Visits at 6 Schools*, SIGAR 18-40-SP, April 4, 2018; SIGAR, *Schools in Parwan Province, Afghanistan: Observations from Site Visits at 14 Schools*, SIGAR 18-67-SP, August 21, 2018; and SIGAR, *Schools in Baghlan Province, Afghanistan: Observations From Site Visits at 14 Schools*, SIGAR-19-10-SP, January 08, 2019.

USAID-funded projects to rehabilitate or construct schools in Paktika province. We worked jointly with an Afghan civil society organization to locate and conduct site visits of the six schools in June 2018.

Our site visits lasted for approximately one to two hours and were conducted during normal school days and operating hours.¹² 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.¹³ We also used Global Positioning System (GPS)-enabled cameras to secure geospatial coordinate- and date/time-stamped photographs for each school. These photos enabled us to determine school coordinates, identify potential problems, and assess general operations and usability for each school facility.

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

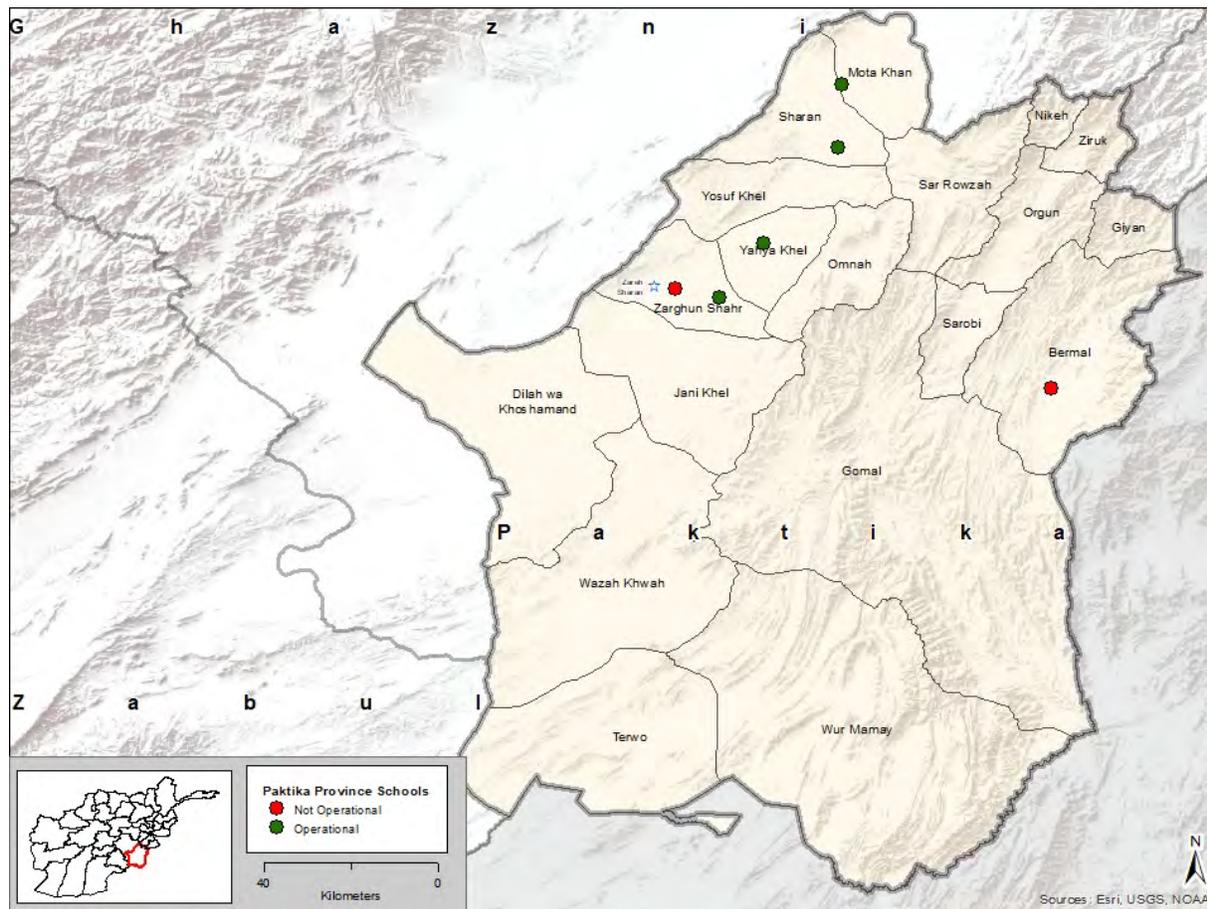
CONDITIONS REPORTED AND OBSERVED AT SIX SCHOOLS IN PAKTIKA PROVINCE

We conducted site visits at six schools in Paktika province that USAID paid to construct or rehabilitate and that are now operated by the Afghan MOE. We also interviewed school staff and community members. Four of the six schools appeared to be open and in-use, while two of the schools were closed—one school was destroyed by the Taliban and one school was never completed. Figure 1 shows the general location of the schools we visited in Paktika.

¹² We define a normal school day in Afghanistan as Saturday-Thursday between 08:00AM and 3:30PM.

¹³ The survey had eight sections: general observations, school compound observations, student and teacher observations, building observations, staff interviews, community interviews, interview background, and inspector input. Prior to completing on-site visits, staff were trained on how to locate and access a school, perform internal and external observations, fill out 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 student and teacher 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.

Figure 1 - Location of Schools Visited in Paktika Province



Source: SIGAR analysis

Two of Six Schools in Paktika Province Were Closed

Of the six schools inspected by SIGAR in Paktika Province, two schools were not open and operational. One school (PRTSRN020) located in the Zarghun Shah district reported as being completed in 2006, was unfinished and lacked a roof, finished floors, doors, and windows. Furthermore, this school had no infrastructure to allow for access to electricity or drinking water had been constructed. What appeared to be the start of construction of bathroom and sanitation facilities remained largely unfinished. A second non-operational school (PRTSRN031) located in Barmal district was bombed by the Taliban and left unusable due to extensive damage. Photos 1 and 2 show the partially constructed school in Zarghun Shahr (PRTSRN020). Photos 3 and 4 show the remnants of a school in Barmal District (PRTSRN031) that was reportedly attacked by the Taliban, rendering it unusable.

Photo 1 - Unfinished School PRTSRN020



Source: SIGAR: June 7, 2018

Photo 2 - Unfinished School PRTSRN020



Source: SIGAR: June 7, 2017

Photo 3 - School PRTSRN031 Destroyed by Taliban



Source: SIGAR: June 9, 2018

Photo 4 - School PRTSRN031 Destroyed by Taliban



Source: SIGAR: June 9, 2018

Site Visits at Four Schools in Paktika During One Shift on a Normal School Day: Number of Students Observed

School staff reported that the four schools we visited typically operated one shift (1 school), or two shifts (3 schools) of approximately 3-4 hours each per school day. We interviewed school staff and asked questions about total enrollment and the estimated daily number of absent students. Survey responses were collected and analyzed for irregularities. Officials reported a total enrollment of 2,387 students across all four schools with an expected absentee rate of approximately 22 percent (517 students) for a total of 1,870 students expected to attend on a typical shift across all four schools.

We observed 1,090 students present across all schools, which represents approximately 54 percent of all students expected to be in attendance during the observed shift. At all four schools we observed less than 70 percent of students expected to attend, with one school having attendance of approximately 40 percent of those expected to attend. Table 1 provides a list of reported and observed numbers of students at each school.

Table 1 - Reported and Observed Student Data at 4 Schools in Paktika Province During One Shift on a Normal Day

USAID School No.	District	School Type	School Level	Observed Operational Status	Reported for this shift (Students) ¹	Approximate Number Observed in One Shift ² (Students)	Observed Student Percentage ³	Reported Number of Daily Shifts
PRTSRN018	Zarghun Shahr	Boys only	P, L, H	Operational	500	250	50%	2
PRTSRN019	Mata Khan	Boys only	P	Operational	150	60	40%	1
PRTSRN023	Sharan	Boys and Girls (co-education)	P, L	Operational	550	330	60%	2
PRTSRN024	Yahya Khel	Boys and Girls (co-education)	P, L, H	Operational	670	450	67%	2
Total					1,870	1,090	54%	

Source: SIGAR analysis.

Key: "H" = higher secondary school, "L" = lower secondary school, and "P" = primary school

Note: 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.

Photos 5 and 6 show the classrooms at two schools where 50 percent or less of students were present during the one shift operated by the school.

Photo 5 - Classroom at School PRTSRN018



Source: SIGAR: June 7, 2018

Photo 6 - Classroom at School PRTSRN019



Source: SIGAR: June 10, 2018

Site Visits at 4 Schools in Paktika Province during One Shift on a Normal Day: Number of Teachers Observed

School staff reported a total of 55 teachers assigned across all schools with 45 expected to be on-site during our visits. We observed 36 teachers present across all schools, which represents approximately 80 percent of all teachers expected to be in attendance during the observed shift. At one school, we observed 100 percent of the teachers expected to attend. In fact, we observed one additional teacher than was reported for the shift. At another school we observed only 40 percent of the teachers expected to attend. At the remaining two schools we observed that 75 percent of teachers were in attendance at each school. Table 2 provides a list of reported and observed numbers of teachers at each inspected school.

Table 2 - Reported and Observed Teacher Data at 4 Schools in Paktika Province During One Shift on a Normal Day

USAID School No.	District	School Type	School Level	Observed Operational Status	Reported for current Shift ¹ (Teachers)	Approximate Number Observed in One Shift ² (Teachers)	Observed Teacher Percentage ³	Reported Number of Daily Shifts
PRTSRN018	Zarghun Shahr	Boys only	P, L, H	Operational	12	9	75%	2
PRTSRN019	Mata khan	Boys only	P	Operational	5	2	40%	1
PRTSRN023	Sharan	Boys and Girls (co-education)	P, L	Operational	12	13	108%	2
PRTSRN024	Yahya khel	Boys and Girls (co-education)	P, L, H	Operational	16	12	75%	2
Total					45	36	80%	

Source: SIGAR analysis.

Key: "H" = higher secondary school, "L" = lower secondary school, and "P" = primary school

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

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

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 compared to the total adjusted number of teachers reported by school officials during the survey interview.

SEVERAL SCHOOLS HAD STRUCTURAL AND OPERATIONAL DEFICIENCIES

During our site visits we noted some structural and operational issues, such as roof damage, broken windows and doors, exposed wiring, missing or broken light bulbs, no electricity or water, and no schools had functioning toilet facilities. Some of these deficiencies could potentially affect safety and may contribute to lower attendance of students and teachers.

Most Schools Lacked Electricity and Functioning Lights

We found that all of the four operational schools we visited lacked electricity to light the classrooms. While two schools reported that their school had access to solar or wind power, we found that classrooms were unlit because they were not connected to the school's main power source. One school with access to electricity (PRTSRN024) also had exposed wiring throughout the facility and broken lightbulbs were also observed at visited schools. Photos 7 and 8 show one of the common issues, exposed wiring and missing bulbs, at two of the schools.

Photo 7 - Exposed Wires at School PRTSRN024



Source: SIGAR: June 11, 2018

Photo 8 - Unusable Lights at School PRTSRN018



Source: SIGAR: June 7, 2018

Observations on Access to Water and Overall Sanitary Conditions at the Schools we Visited

Three of the four schools we visited had access to water. Officials at the one school that did not have access to water reported water access as one of the school's principle needs. Photo 9 shows a functioning on-site well at school PRTSRN018.

We also noted that that several schools face sanitation issues relating to toilets. Of the four schools inspected, only one had functioning toilets, and none of the schools had toilets that appeared to be cleaned or maintained. Photo 10 shows an unmaintained toilet at school PRTSRN024.

Photo 9 - Functioning Well at School PRTSRN018



Source: SIGAR: June 7, 2018

Photo 10 - Poorly Maintained Toilet at School PRTSRN024



Source: SIGAR: June 11, 2018

Structural Deficiencies At Several Schools Could Present Safety Hazards

During our site visits, we observed schools with structural deficiencies, including some deficiencies that potentially put the safety of students and teachers at risk. Specifically, we found two schools with roofs that appeared structurally unsound and leaked, and two schools with broken windows. We also found that two schools had damaged walls and three schools had damaged doors. Photos 11 and 12 show what we believe to be structural damage at two of the schools.

Photo 11 - Leaking Roof at School PRTSRN024



Source: SIGAR: June 11, 2018

Photo 12 - Structural Damage at School PRTSRN019



Source: SIGAR: June 10, 2018

Photos 13 and 14 show examples of broken windows and broken doors at Schools PRTSRN019 and PRTSRN018.

Photo 13 - Broken Windows at School PRTSRN019



Source: SIGAR: June 10, 2018

Photo 14 - Broken Door at School PRTSRN018



Source: SIGAR: June 7, 2018

CONCLUSION

We conducted site visits at six schools in Paktika province that USAID paid to construct or rehabilitate and that are now operated by the Afghan MOE. We found that four of the six schools were open and in generally usable condition, while two of the schools were closed and not in a condition suitable for use as an educational facility. We observed that of the four schools that were open approximately 54 percent of students were in attendance across all four schools. We also observed that approximately 80 percent of teachers were present at the time of our inspections. In addition, we observed that some of the schools we visited lacked access to water, had poor sanitary conditions, and/or showed signs of potential structural damage and safety hazards, which could potentially impact the safety of teachers and students.

RECOMMENDATION

To help ensure that students and teachers in Paktika attend schools that are safe and have access to basic utilities, we recommend that USAID share the results of this review with MOE, so that the structural and other deficiencies we identified can be brought to the attention of those responsible for addressing them.

AGENCY COMMENTS

We provided a draft of this review to USAID for comment on February 13, 2019. USAID provided comments on February 24, 2019. In its comments, USAID stated that in addition to sharing this report with the Ministry of Education (MOE), USAID “will request that the MOE provide USAID with an update of the actions taken to address the deficiencies within 90 days of the receipt of the report.” USAID’s comments are reproduced in appendix I.



USAID | AFGHANISTAN

MEMORANDUM

February 24, 2019

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

FROM: Peter Matello, Mission Director

SUBJECT: Mission Response to Draft SIGAR Special Project Report
titled: "Schools in Paktika Province, Afghanistan:
Observations from Site Visits at Six Schools" (SIGAR-19-
XX-SP/SP-205)

REF: SIGAR Transmittal Email dated February 13, 2019

USAID would like to thank SIGAR for the opportunity to comment on the draft "Schools in Paktika Province, Afghanistan: Observations from Site Visits at Six Schools" report.

USAID is pleased to learn that SIGAR reported and observed that four of the six Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) schools visited by SIGAR were open and in generally usable condition, and that approximately 80 percent of teachers were present at the time of the inspections.

In the draft report, SIGAR also states that two of the six schools were closed and not in a condition suitable for use. Specifically, SIGAR states that one school was reportedly destroyed by the Taliban, while the other was never completed.

SIGAR's draft report also states that some operational schools were experiencing structural and electrical deficiencies, a lack of water and/or working bathrooms, and a lack of power, all of which could potentially impact health and safety. As a result of these observations, SIGAR made the following recommendation:

U.S. Agency for International Development
Great Meadows Road
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Tel: 202-216-0260 / 0700-108-001
Email: afghanistan@usaid.gov
<http://afghanistan.usaid.gov>

“To help ensure that students and teachers in Paktika attend schools that are safe and have access to basic utilities, we recommend that USAID share the results of this review with MOE, so that the structural and other deficiencies that we identified can be brought to the attention of those responsible for addressing them.”

USAID agrees with this recommendation and will share a copy of SIGAR’s final report with the MOE. USAID will also request that the MOE provide USAID with an update on the actions taken to address the deficiencies within 90 days of the receipt of the report. Based on the above, USAID requests that this recommendation be closed by SIGAR upon receipt of this USAID memorandum.

cc: Elizabeth A. Chambers, Controller, USAID/Afghanistan
Kristian Moore, U.S. Embassy/Kabul
OAPA Audit
Peter Cronin, Education Office Director, USAID/Afghanistan
Paige Miller, Acting OPPD Office Director, USAID/Afghanistan

This project was conducted
under project code SP-205.

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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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