

SIGAR

**Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction**

OFFICE OF SPECIAL PROJECTS

AFGHAN CHILDREN READ PROGRAM:
BOOKS DISTRIBUTED WERE
RECEIVED AND USED BUT PROBLEMS
EXISTED WITH PRINTING,
DISTRIBUTION, AND WAREHOUSING



September 2019

SIGAR 19-59-SP



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

September 9, 2019

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

Mr. Peter Natiello
Mission Director for Afghanistan
U.S. Agency for International Development

Since 2002, USAID has provided support to print and distribute more than 130 million primary and secondary grade textbooks for students in Afghanistan. In 2009, the Ministry of Education (MoE) initiated a revised curriculum for general and Islamic education. Based on that curriculum, new textbooks for basic education were printed and distributed with the support of USAID and other development partners. Subsequently, in October 2017, the Afghan *Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC)*¹ published a report entitled, *Ministry-wide Vulnerability to Corruption Assessment of the Ministry of Education* that pointed out that there were numerous problems with the printing and distribution of textbooks.

Due to the issues laid out in the October 2017 MEC report, we initiated a review of USAID's Afghan Children Read project (ACR), that entailed the printing, distribution and warehousing of hundreds of thousands of student textbooks/workbooks and teacher guide/assessment books, which collectively are referred to as Teaching and Learning Material (TLM), to students in grades 1 through 3. Our objective was to determine whether Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs) were printed and delivered to the schools and are being used for their intended purposes.

Based on our inspections of 77 schools² in the four provinces that the project targeted initially, we found that almost all of the books that were ordered and shipped were received by the schools and school officials found them very useful and incorporated them into their curriculum. However we found book quality deficiencies, such as, loose or blank pages, misspellings, and low quality paper. Principals and teachers at a quarter of the schools inspected stated, "that the books were no longer in usable condition". We also found distribution problems. At the five warehouses where project TLMs were being stored, we found that over 150,000 textbooks had been in storage for up to two years. Four of the five warehouse managers also stated that they had no plans to distribute any of these books in the near future. We recommend that USAID: (1) assess the printing contractor's compliance with contract specifications; (2) inspect the storage facilities for an accurate accounting of the books and to determine if the storage facilities are adequate to both safeguard and maintain the books in good condition; and (3) develop a plan with the MOE to determine how best to utilize the books in storage.

We provided a draft copy of this report to USAID for comment on August 20, 2019. In its comments, USAID agreed with SIGAR's recommendations and stated that they will share the final SIGAR report with their implementing partner and request that they: 1) provide USAID with a current status report and milestone plan with proposed actions within ten business days from receipt of the final SIGAR report and; 2) fully resolve

¹ Afghan Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee is an independent agency, and not subject to direction from either the Afghan government or from the international community. It was established in 2011 to monitor and evaluate Government of Afghanistan's progress fighting internal corruption.

² Three schools were not inspected due to security concerns.



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SIGAR recommendations within three months from receipt of the final report. See Appendix III for agency comments. We conducted our work in Washington, D.C. and Kabul Afghanistan from November 2018 through August 2019, in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*. SIGAR performed this work under the authority of Public Law No. 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. Should you or your staff have any questions about this project, please contact Mr. Benjamin Piccolo, Director of Special Projects, at (703) 545-2192 or benjamin.j.piccolo.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Since 2002, USAID has provided support to print and distribute more than 130 million primary and secondary grade textbooks for students in Afghanistan. In 2009, the Ministry of Education initiated a revised curriculum for general and Islamic education. Based on that curriculum, new textbooks for basic education were printed and distributed with the support of USAID and other development partners.³

Despite improvements upon previous curricula, a 2014 draft of the National Education Strategic Plan III⁴ elicited critical comments concerning textbooks from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)⁵ to include: 1) content problems and typographical errors in textbooks; 2) distribution of textbooks proved to be very challenging; and 3) despite printing enough textbooks, many students have not received textbooks or had to buy their own textbooks.

In October 2017, the Afghan *Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC)*⁶ published a report entitled, *Ministry-wide Vulnerability to Corruption Assessment of the Ministry of Education* that pointed out that there were numerous problems with the printing and distribution of textbooks. For example, the report stated that “books initially delivered to Kabul were not being effectively distributed to provincial and district warehouses and then on to schools. “A thriving and highly lucrative secondary market exists in the supply of books to students, and those families who are able to buy books on the market gain an advantage over poor and rural families with meager resources and limited access.”

Due to the problems revealed in the printing and distribution of educational textbooks, SIGAR initiated a review in November, 2018 of USAID’s Afghan Children Read (ACR) project. This review is focused on the printing and distribution of student textbooks/workbooks and teacher guide/assessment books in order to determine whether the Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs) were printed and delivered to the schools and are being used for their intended purposes. Additionally, since over 150,000 TLMs were in storage, we inspected the warehouses to determine the condition and disposition of the TLMs at these locations.

To accomplish these objectives, SIGAR randomly selected one district within each of the project’s four provinces and randomly selected 20 schools within each district to be inspected for a total of 80 schools⁷. We inspected five warehouses where TLM materials were stored and reviewed program documents, relevant correspondence, and other agency provided data. We also interviewed officials from USAID and contractors responsible for implementing the program. In addition, we interviewed Afghan principals and teachers at the 77 schools we visited and five warehouse managers. We conducted our work in Washington, D.C. and Kabul, Afghanistan, from November 2018 through August 2019.

BACKGROUND

Afghan Children Read (ACR) is a five-year project with an estimated total cost of \$69,547,810 that runs from April 2016 through April 2021. ACR goals include:

- Improve equitable access to education and generate measurable reading outcomes for girls and boys in Afghanistan.

³ These development partners included the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and the World Bank.

⁴ The National Education Strategic Plan III 2017-2021 is a plan focused on results and a better way of providing education for the Afghan people.

⁵ UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture.

⁶ Afghan Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee is an independent agency, and not subject to direction from either the Afghan government or from the international community. It was established in 2011 to monitor and evaluate Government of Afghanistan’s progress fighting internal corruption.

⁷ Three schools were not inspected due to security concerns.

- Support education service delivery through building the capacity of the MoE to provide an evidence-based early grade reading (EGR) program (in Dari and Pashto)⁸ for students in grades 1 - 3 in both formal and Community-Based Education (CBE) schools.
- Strengthen skills, systems, models and materials to enable future development of additional local mother-tongue languages into the national reading curriculum.

As of July 9, 2019, USAID has disbursed **\$33,921,175** on the project.

According to the USAID Afghan Children Read team leader, USAID initiated the ACR program in April 2016 in response to a request from the Ministry of Education (MoE) which believed at the time that “current textbooks were not designed for early reading” lessons. In initiating this program, the ACR’s implementing partner, Creative Associates, launched a five-week “training/consultation” process to design and develop the textbooks with input from MoE officials and education consultants (consisting of 100+ people). The reading and teaching materials developed through this process were then field-tested at local schools and were ultimately approved by the General Education Department of the MoE for use in teaching early-reading lessons for grades 1-3. ACR is currently implemented in 16 districts in the provinces of Kabul, Herat, Laghman, and Nangarhar.

ACR is being implemented by a consortium consisting of Creative Associates International, Inc. (CA)⁹, the International Rescue Committee (IRC)¹⁰, SIL LEAD, Inc.¹¹ and Equal Access International (EA)¹². Creative Associates International, Inc. is responsible for the overall management of the team. According to Creative Associates Chief of Party, Creative Associates International, Inc. has “joint-team field offices” with International Rescue Committee staff in each of the four provinces. International Rescue Committee is responsible for following-up at ACR pilot schools, reviewing textbook delivery, and tracking information. SIL LEAD Inc. was responsible for supporting the development process of ACR materials by conducting field-testing of ACR books and reporting “faculty, parent, student, and mullah” feedback on the materials provided. Equal Access International is responsible for awareness-building and has conducted public service announcements via radio to inform the community about the new curriculum and textbooks that were coming to their neighborhood schools. They worked closely with MoE to develop these radio announcements.

The USAID Afghan Children Read team leader also stated that based on MoE feedback and approval, the final versions of student textbooks/workbooks and teacher guide/assessment books were then provided to Creative Associates International, Inc. Vendors were selected via an open-bid contract to produce and distribute the materials. Creative Associates International, Inc. chose the vendors they believed most capable to perform the job, but Creative Associates still provided support to ensure they could meet expectations. This support included guiding the vendor through the establishment of production timelines and providing a Creative Associates International, Inc. consultant to monitor and review the production process. A Creative Associates International, Inc. official stated that the consultant made sure that the vendors met deadlines and quality expectations. According to Creative Associates International, Inc. Chief of Party, the vendors selected met overall expectations.

⁸ Dari is the Afghan dialect of Farsi (Persian); Pashto was originally spoken by the Pashtun people, Pashto became the national language of Afghanistan in 1936.

⁹ Creative Associates International is an international development organization supporting people around the world.

¹⁰ International Rescue Committee is a global humanitarian aid, relief and development nongovernmental organization

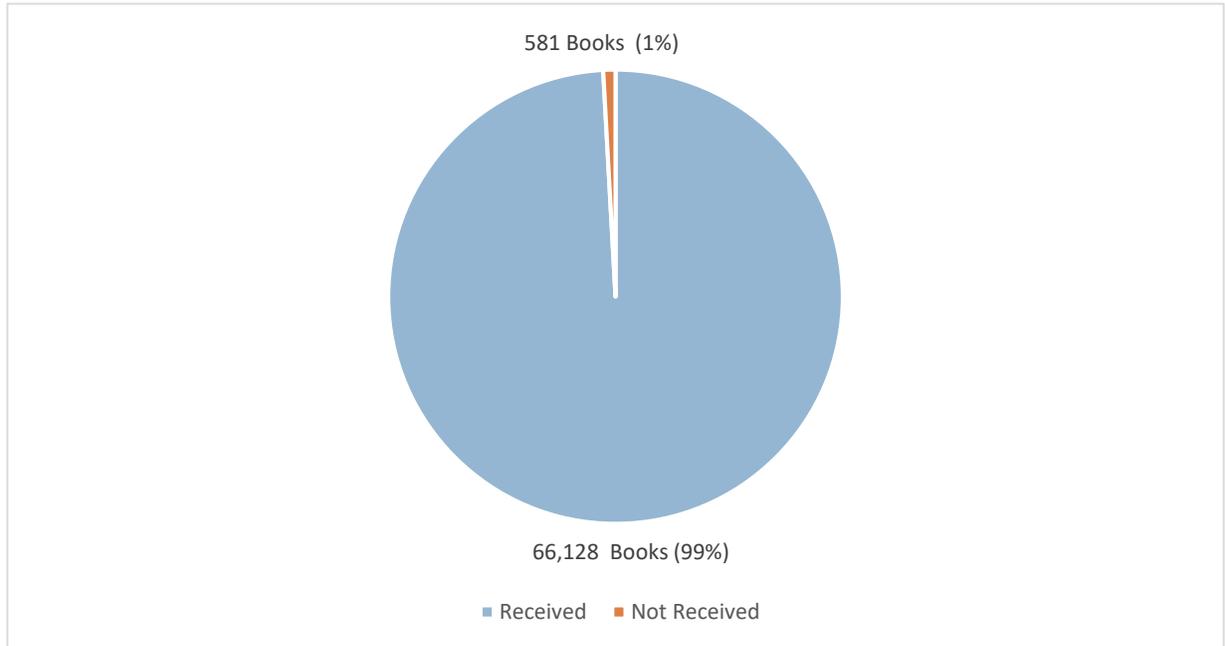
¹¹ SIL Lead Inc. is a faith-based nonprofit organization.

¹² Equal Access International is an international not for profit organization.

BOOKS DISTRIBUTED WERE RECEIVED AND USED

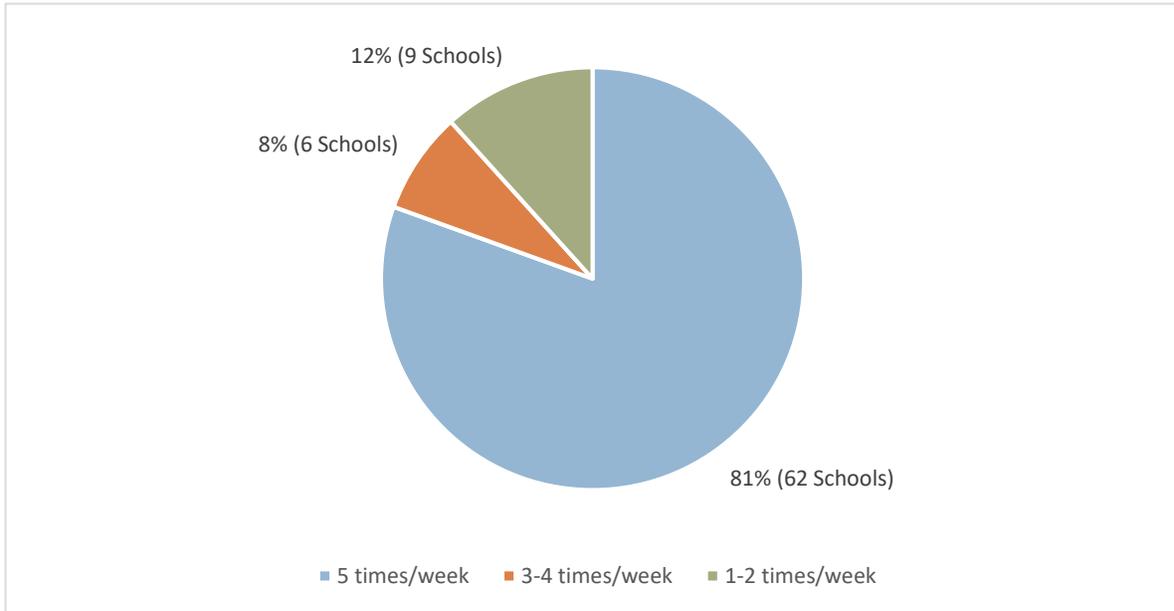
The 77 schools visited by our inspectors verified that the implementing partners had shipped 66,709 books of which 66,128 (99%) were recorded as being received by the schools. Of the 77 schools, 21 schools or (27%) responded “No” to receiving the appropriate number of books. (See figure 1).

Figure 1 - Number of Ordered Books Received



SIGAR inspectors also found that ninety-nine percent of the inspected schools reported that the books were distributed to the students and teachers; ninety-four percent of the schools stated that the books were a useful resource in classroom instruction; and eighty-nine percent of the schools stated that they used the books 3-5 times per week.

Figure 2 - Frequency Books Used by Instructors and Students*



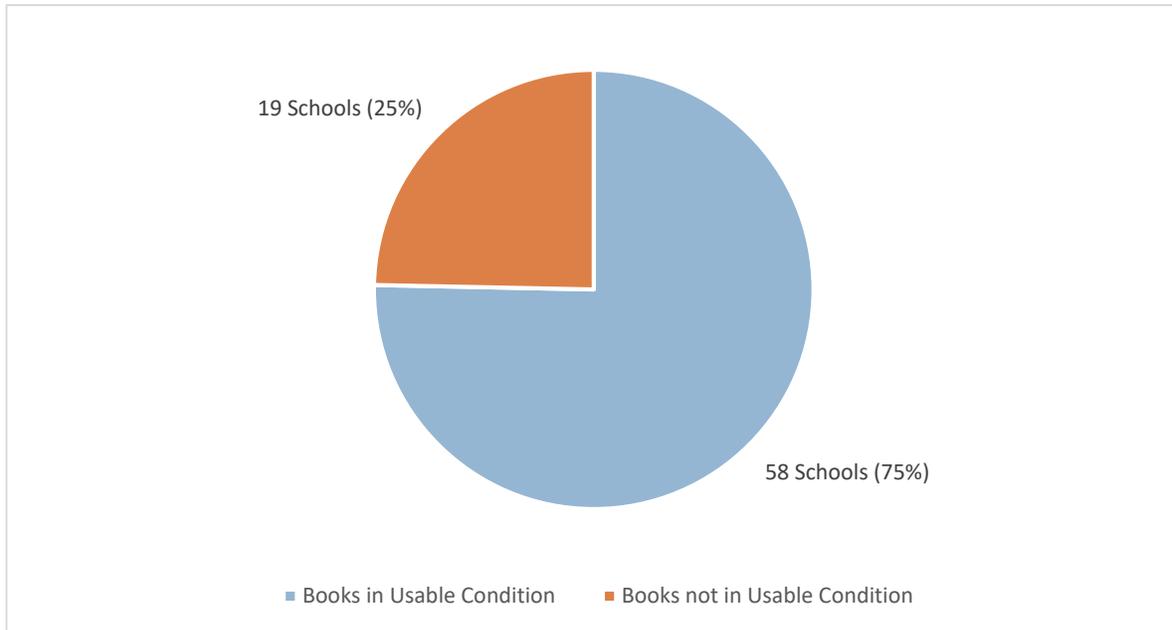
*Note: Pie chart does not add up to 100% due to rounding

While most schools reported that the books were very useful and used them extensively as part of their curriculum, school staff at 12 schools told SIGAR inspectors that the ACR book material was too difficult for their respective grade levels. Some specific complaints included lengthy stories, complex terminology, and the inclusion of pictures which did not correspond to the reading material.

BOOK QUALITY WAS AN ISSUE AT MANY OF THE SCHOOLS

SIGAR inspectors were informed by school officials at 30 of the 77 schools visited (39%) that the books they received had quality deficiencies. These quality issues ranged from loose and/or blank pages, misspellings, and low-quality paper. The quality issues were predominately in the Ghoryan District in Herat Province where 16 of 18 (89%) of the schools and the Bagrami District in Kabul Province where 8 of the 20 (40%) schools visited reported quality issues. In the inspection conducted in Kabul province, SIGAR found that all of the schools were given improperly bound textbooks which could lead to the rapid deterioration of the books.

Figure 3 - School Responses to Book Usability



Additionally, principals and teachers at a quarter of the inspected schools stated that, “the books were no longer in usable condition.” (See figure 3). For example, SIGAR inspectors noticed that some of the book pages were easily torn due to the thin and low-quality paper used during the printing process. In some cases, SIGAR discovered that loose book binding caused the pages to easily separate which led some students to rebind the books themselves using homemade string. This was a particularly serious problem in Ghoryan district in Herat province where almost all the schools (89%) reported that the books were not in usable condition within seven months or less of delivery. SIGAR inspectors confirmed these reports of low book quality after documenting the deteriorated condition of the ACR books, as shown in the following photos.

The Following Photos Show Examples of Books Found by SIGAR Inspectors Not in Usable Condition

Photo 1 - Bawa school, Ghoryan, Herat



Source: SIGAR, April 22, 2019

Photo 2 - Mangawan school, Ghoryan, Herat



Source: SIGAR, April 23, 2019

Photo 3 - Dahan Sharye school, Ghoryan, Herat



Source: SIGAR, April 27, 2019

OVER 150,000 BOOKS IN STORAGE MANY FOR TWO YEARS

SIGAR inspected the five warehouses where ACR text books were being stored. At the time of our inspections in June, 2019, the five storage facilities held about 154,000 textbooks. See Appendix II for a breakdown of the books in storage by location. At least 131,677 had been in storage for at least two years. Managers at four out of the five facilities stated that they had no plan to distribute the books in the near future.

SIGAR inspectors also observed that some of the facilities were not in good condition. For example, at the Herat storage facility (Photos 4 thru 6) almost 42,000 books were kept in an old metal shed where the roof had holes and it looked greasy and wet. The Taimani warehouse in Kabul was not equipped with a ventilation system to preserve the books. The conditions at some of the storage facilities are shown in the photos below.

The Following Photos Show Books In Storage Facilities

Photo 4 - Herat Field Office, Enjil, Herat



Source: SIGAR, June 25, 2019

Photo 5 - Herat Field Office, Enjil, Herat



Source: SIGAR, June 25, 2019

Photo 6 - Herat Field Office, Enjil, Herat



Source: SIGAR, June 25, 2019

Photo 7 - Siraj Printing Press, Taimani, Kabul



Source: SIGAR, June 20, 2019

Photo 8 - Siraj Printing Press, Taimani, Kabul



Source: SIGAR, June 20, 2019

Photo 9 - Jalalabad Field Office, Charahi Maraston, Nangarhar



Source: SIGAR, June 24, 2019

Photo 10 - Ahmad Printing Press, Industrial Park, Kabul



Source: SIGAR, June 23, 2019

CONCLUSION

Overall SIGAR found that the Afghan Children Read Program Teaching and Learning Material received by the schools was distributed to the students and used as a major component of the teacher's curriculum. However, the poor quality of the paper used and the poor binding of the books limited the useful life of the books. In addition, inspection of warehouses showed that not all Teaching and Learning Material is being distributed timely, resulting in over 150,000 books sitting in warehouses- some of which were in poor condition- for at least two years.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend, that USAID:

- 1. In coordination with Creative Associates, assess whether printing contractors are printing teacher learning materials to contract specifications. If it is concluded that any of the printing contractors' were not printing to contract specifications, require them to reprint teacher learning materials or seek monetary restitution.**
- 2. Inspect the five warehouses where ACR textbooks are being stored to: (a) obtain an accurate accounting of all textbooks in storage; and (b) determine if the storage facilities are adequate to both safeguard and maintain the textbooks in good condition and if not have the textbooks relocated to acceptable facilities.**
- 3. Develop an action plan in conjunction with the Ministry of Education to determine how to best utilize the stored textbooks within the Afghan educational system.**

AGENCY COMMENTS

USAID agreed with SIGAR's recommendations and stated that they will share the final SIGAR report with its implementing partner and request that they: 1) provide USAID with a current status report and milestone plan with proposed actions within ten business days from receipt of the final SIGAR report and; 2) fully resolve SIGAR recommendations within three months from receipt of the final report.

APPENDIX I –SUMMARY OF SIGAR SCHOOL INSPECTION INFORMATION

| Question | Findings |
|---|--|
| Have you received the appropriate number of books? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21/77 (27%) of inspected schools responded “No” to receiving the appropriate number of books • 581/66,709 (1%) of books were not received; 18 missing Teacher Guidebooks and 563 missing Student Textbooks |
| Was there any delay in receiving the books? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 42/77 (55%) of books shipments were delayed (Average of ~31 days per delay) |
| Have the books been distributed to the students and teachers? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 76/77 (99%) of inspected schools reported that the books were distributed to the students |
| Have the books been a useful resource in classroom instruction? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 72/77 (94%) of inspected schools stated that the books were “a useful resource in classroom instruction” • 5/77 (6%) of inspected schools stated that the books were not “a useful resource in classroom instruction” |
| How often are the books used by instructors and students? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 62/77 (81%) of inspected schools stated that they used the books 5 times/week • 6/77 (8%) of inspected schools stated that they used the books 3-4 times/week • 9/77 (12%) of inspected schools stated that they used the books 1-2 times/week |
| Have there been any problems with the quality of paper used in the books? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30/77 (39%) of inspected schools had issues with the paper quality of the books |
| Are the books still in a usable condition? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19/77 (25%) of inspected schools stated that the books were not in usable condition |

APPENDIX II – WAREHOUSE BOOK STORAGE

| Warehouse Name | How many ACR books are stored at the warehouse? | How long have the books been in storage? | Is there a distribution plan? |
|------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------|
| Siraj Printing Press | 81,997 | 2 Years | No |
| Kabul ACR Villa | 10,799 | 1 Year | No |
| Ahmad Printing Press | 11,550 | 3 Months | No |
| Jalalabad Field Office | 7,951 | 2 Years | Yes |
| Herat Field Office | 41,729 | 2 years | No |
| Total | 154,026 | | |



USAID | **AFGHANISTAN**
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

MEMORANDUM

September 5, 2019

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

FROM: Jeffery Cohen, Acting Mission Director *for GAChambers*

SUBJECT: Mission Response to Draft SIGAR Special Project Report titled: "Afghan Children Read Program: Books Distributed were Received and Used but Problems Existed with Printing, Distribution, and Warehousing." (SIGAR-19-XXX-SP/SP-211)

REF: SIGAR Transmittal Email dated August 20, 2019

USAID would like to thank SIGAR for the opportunity to comment on the draft "Afghan Children Read Program: Books Distributed Were Received and Used But Problems Existed with Printing, Distribution, and Warehousing" draft report.

USAID noted that SIGAR observed and reported that the 77 schools visited by SIGAR's inspectors verified that the implementing partners had shipped 66,709 books, of which 66,128 (99 percent) were recorded as being received by the schools. In addition, SIGAR's inspectors found that ninety-nine percent of the inspected schools reported that the books were distributed to the students and teachers; ninety-four percent of the schools stated that the books were a useful resource in classroom instruction; and eighty-nine percent of the schools stated that they used the books three to five times per week.

In the draft report, SIGAR states that its inspectors were informed by school officials at 30 of the 77 schools visited (39 percent) that the books they received had quality deficiencies that ranged from loose and/or blank pages, misspellings, and low-quality paper and that principals and teachers at a quarter of the schools inspected stated that, "the books were no longer in usable condition." SIGAR's inspectors also found that at the five warehouses where project teaching and learning materials were being stored, there were 154,000 textbooks of which 131,677 had been in storage for up to two years.

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Additionally, four of the five warehouse managers stated that they had no plans to distribute any of these books in the near future.

As a result of these observations, SIGAR made the three recommendations below:

We recommend, that USAID:

- 1. In coordination with Creative Associates, assess whether printing contractors are printing teacher learning materials to contract specifications. If it is concluded that any of the printing contractors' were not printing to contract specifications, require them to reprint teacher learning materials or seek monetary restitution.*
- 2. Inspect the five warehouses where ACR textbooks are being stored to: (a) obtain an accurate accounting of all textbooks in storage; and (b) determine if the storage facilities are adequate to both safeguard and maintain the textbooks in good condition and if not have the textbooks relocated to acceptable facilities.*
- 3. Develop an action plan in conjunction with the Ministry of Education to determine how to best utilize the stored textbooks within the Afghan educational system.*

USAID agrees with SIGAR's recommendations and will share the final SIGAR report with Creative Associates' *Afghan Children Read* activity, requesting Creative Associates to:

- 1) Provide USAID with a current status report and milestone plan with proposed actions within ten business days from receipt of the final SIGAR report; and
- 2) Fully resolve SIGAR recommendations within three months from receipt of the final report.

cc: Ahmad Jawid, Acting Controller, USAID/Afghanistan
U.S. Embassy/Kabul
OAPA Audit
Peter Cronin, Education Office Director, USAID/Afghanistan

This project was conducted
under project code SP-211.

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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