

Case Study Series

**HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING
AND SCHOOL ENROLMENT
IN AFGHANISTAN**

**CASE STUDY 2:
District 13
Pul-i-Khushk
Kabul City**

Pamela Hunte

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About the Author

Pamela Hunte, an anthropologist who has experience working in Afghanistan over the past three decades, is primarily interested in sociocultural change in the areas of health and education. In recent years, she has worked as a consultant for AREU on livelihoods issues.

About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research organisation that conducts and facilitates action-oriented research and learning that informs and influences policy and practice. AREU also actively promotes a culture of research and learning by strengthening analytical capacity in Afghanistan and by creating opportunities for analysis and debate. Fundamental to AREU's vision is that its work should improve Afghan lives.

AREU was established by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, UN and multilateral organisations agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

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Pamela Hunte, December 2005

Glossary

<i>biswa</i>	1 <i>biswa</i> = 105 square feet or 0.024 acres; 20 <i>biswa</i> = 1 <i>jerib</i>
<i>chador</i>	traditional piece of cloth worn by Afghan women over clothes, revealing only the hands and face
<i>chadri</i>	an all-covering pleated garment which covers a woman from head to toe; a small netted area around the eyes allows her to see
<i>karachiwan</i>	cart vendor
<i>mowin-i-tadrisi</i>	Assistant for Teaching Affairs
<i>nazar</i>	ritual sharing of food associated with the mourning month of Moharam, the Shia month of mourning
<i>tuiana</i>	bride price
<i>wakil-i-gozar</i>	leader of the neighbourhood who coordinates with the government
<i>wakil-i-nahya</i>	district leader
<i>wasita</i>	social and political connections; access to power

Acronyms

AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
IDP	internally displaced person
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	non-government organisation
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
TISA	Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Methodology	2
3.	The Research Setting	4
3.1	Location	4
3.2	The urban community	4
3.3	The urban residents and their backgrounds	5
3.4	Household composition	6
3.5	Land and housing	6
3.6	Economic activities	7
3.7	Debts	9
3.8	Female mobility	10
3.9	Some options for education: the supply side	10
	In District 13	10
	In other parts of Kabul City	12
3.10	The cost of education in the context of the household economy	12
3.11	The schools and the community	13
4.	Who Goes to School, Who Doesn't, and Why	16
4.1	Household decision-making	17
4.2	Respondents' opinions about education: why children go to school	18
4.3	Respondents' opinions about education: why children don't go to school	21
5.	Recommendations	27
	References	30

1. Introduction

This report presents findings from a qualitative study on education conducted by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) in four sites in Afghanistan: two urban and two rural. This is a case study of District 13, Pul-i-Khushk, Kabul City.¹ The key questions the study sought to answer were:

- Why do some households decide to send their children to school, while others do not?
- Why do some children in a household go to school, while others in the same household do not?
- Why do some children stay in school, while others drop out?

The household, defined here as a group of people living and eating together, was the basic unit of analysis for the enquiry. In-depth focus on the household allowed for careful examination of its complex internal dynamics, including decision-making processes and resource allocation, which may be either cooperative or conflicting in nature. Decisions about children's school enrolment (both sons and daughters) and other important topics were explored in detail. In addition to intra-household relationships, the unit within the context of the community was also considered through the study of inter-household social networks and community decision-making, with emphasis upon the role of education, the presently available schooling options and perceived needs.

The primary focus was on demand-related issues in education (e.g. desire for girls' education, working children), while also looking at some important supply-side issues (e.g. school/classroom conditions). This approach generated valuable data in which typical Afghan city-dwellers in Pul-i-Khushk – men, women and children – presented their own detailed analyses of their life situations.

A study concerning education in Afghanistan today must also deal with specific strategies of households as they attempt to cope with the many recent changes in their lives. In the sample group from Pul-i-Khushk were households of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have come to Kabul City in recent years directly from the Hazarajat, along with returned refugees from Pakistan and Iran who were originally from the Hazarajat. Currently their strategies may or may not include seeking education for their children (of differing gender and age). Indeed, as Afghanistan struggles to rebuild, a successful Back-to-School campaign in 2002 has resulted in a striking total of 4.3 million children now enrolled in grades 1–12. However, some 2.5 million school-aged boys and girls are still not enrolled.² What are the reasons, often complex and multiple, for these differences?

¹ The three other research sites for this study included both urban and rural settings: two neighbouring villages in Chahar Asyab District of Kabul Province; a village in Belcheragh District of Faryab Province; and District 2 in Kandahar City. Case studies are available for each of these sites.

² *Securing Afghanistan's Future: Accomplishments and the Strategic Path Forward* (Technical Annex/Education), Kabul: TISA and International Agencies, 2004. Education is compulsory to grade 9 (*The Constitution of Afghanistan*, Article 43, 2003/1382).

2. Methodology

The study undertaken was qualitative, and its purpose was to gain in-depth understanding of household decision-making and school enrolment in Pul-i-Khushk. A small sample of households was chosen, not a large random sample as would be used in quantitative research. Rather than using an interview form with coded responses, this research used open-ended questions and answers. And rather than undergoing statistical analysis, the resulting data were examined for common themes or qualities, and a descriptive report was prepared.

A number of recent quantitative studies have collected data with which to examine the topic of enrolment of Afghan children in school. These include the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA).³ Data presented in this series of case studies provide in-depth insights which complement these quantitative analyses.

Prior to fieldwork, a training workshop in qualitative research methodology was conducted by the AREU education team leaders⁴ for all participating staff and partner NGOs⁵ at the AREU Office in Kabul. Ethnic diversity in the sample sites was selected for, to enable exploration of the research questions with a minority group in Kabul. The peripheral area of Pul-i-Khushk/District 13 in Kabul was chosen because its populace is comprised primarily of poor Hazaras who have arrived in the capital city in recent years. There were no NGOs working in Pul-i-Khushk when research was conducted, so the AREU team did not coordinate its activities at this site with any other organisation.

The AREU education team leader made initial contact with the *wakil-i-gozar* (leader of the neighbourhood who coordinates with the government) in Pul-i-Khushk, explained the research objectives, and obtained permission to conduct fieldwork. This was carried out in March–April 2005. According to the research design, a purposive sample of 12 households was sought out in Pul-i-Khushk containing the following:

- Four households in which *all* children of school age⁶ are enrolled in school;
- Four households in which *some* children of school age are enrolled in school; and
- Four households in which *no* children of school age are enrolled in school.

Through the *wakil* and his assistant, heads of household were contacted and introductions made. After considerable searching, the final sample included 12

³ *Moving Beyond Two Decades of War: Progress of Provinces* (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2003 Afghanistan), CSO and UNICEF: Kabul, 2003; *Results and Discussion of Education Data Collected in the Afghanistan National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2003*, WFP, APEP/USAID, Save the Children USA: Kabul, 2005.

⁴ Baser Nader was the team leader for the Pul-i-Khushk fieldwork. His field team members were Aziza Akbary, Rokhshana Badakhshe and Romal Shijah. Overall management of this research was by Gulbadan Habibi and Pamela Hunte. Jeaniene Spink compiled the training manual for this work and made initial contacts with the Ministry of Education and partner NGOs.

⁵ Partner NGOs were Sanayee Development Foundation (SDF), Save the Children USA and Oxfam/GB. These organisations assisted in fieldwork in the other three research sites, however there was no partner NGO for this case study.

⁶ For this study, the term “school age” is defined liberally and includes children and youth from 7–18 years of age. Due to the years of war and the fact that many individuals have missed some years of schooling, students’ ages do not always correspond to their grades.

households: two with *all* children in school; nine with *some* children in school; and one with *no* children in school.

Each participating household's male and female members were visited by a team of two men and two women field researchers (respectively), facilitating the collection of necessarily detailed qualitative data. While one researcher asked open-ended questions and kept the conversation going smoothly, his or her team member took extensive field notes. Following each conversation, lengthy field reports were prepared from each in-depth discussion which contained information concerning complex household social dynamics and decision-making, along with important economic data, the unit's migratory history during recent decades of war, degree of female mobility, hopes for the future and other information. Repeat visits were made to a selected sub-sample of six households to follow up on specific topics and explore additional topics. In summary, the research explored the livelihoods of these urban households, with specific focus upon the degree to which education plays a role in their complex survival strategies.

To guide conversations, each activity was organised using a series of discussion topic outlines. Daily participant observation and numerous walks through the community were undertaken, as well as the following fieldwork.

Individual discussions with:

- The *wakil-i-gozar* and his assistant
- 12 households
 - Discussions with men, women, and children
 - Six households with repeated visits
- The Assistant for Teaching Affairs (*mowin-i-tadrisi*) of Hodayun Shahid Government Lycee (grades 1–12)
- The Managing Officer of Marefat Private School (grades 1–12)
- The manager of Nedah-i-Qalam Private Course/Centre
- The owner of a rug weaving agency

Focus group discussions with:

- Heads of household from the sample units
- Male students (grades 7–10) at Hodayun Shahid Lycee
- Female students (grades 4–6) at Hodayun Shahid Lycee

As indicated from the above range of respondents, this study focused particularly on demand issues in education on the part of the local populace, while not forgetting important supply issues in education too.

The study's findings and concluding recommendations will help to guide current plans by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to make improvements to teacher training, curricula, outreach/media messages, and other undertakings in the area of education.

3. The Research Setting

3.1 Location

Pul-i-Khushk, a Hazara community in District 13, is located on the far western periphery of Kabul towards Ghazni, beyond the Kota-i-Sangi area and approximately 14 kilometres from the centre of the city. The Imam Zaman Mosque and the Bagh-i-Mahmud Shah are located near the busy main street, Sarak-i-Barchi, which bisects the area. It is an extremely densely populated area, with scores of small shops lining the crowded thoroughfare and equally small residential units located behind the bustling bazaar. It is a newly settled part of the fast-growing capital, and only a few years ago it was empty fields. Attesting to the mushrooming population are the scores of property dealerships located along the main road.⁷ The *wakil-i-gozar* estimates that currently the area contains a total of 3,000 households, the large majority of which are Hazara.⁸ Countless buses, vans and taxis – both public and private – ply the roads and connect this peripheral suburb with the city centre and other parts of Kabul.

3.2 The urban community

Small lanes lead in a neat grid pattern away from the main road, and it is here that the newly built residential compounds are located. Not large enough for a car, these public paths become rivers of mud in the winter months, and there are open drainage ditches in the middle of the walkways. Public water pumps set up by DACAAR (Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees) are located in the lanes and are used by all households⁹ in the area; long lines of women and children form daily, and respondents note that approximately 80 households must use one well. Also in the residential area, there are small shops which supply electricity (from 6.30–10pm) from generators to nearby households, along with a few bakeries to which households bring their uncooked dough to be made into bread for a small fee. The majority of the populace is poor, and AREU's research team was frequently approached by individuals – both men and women – pleading to be included in what they perceived to be welfare activities. No NGO is active in the community, although local leaders note that they have repeatedly requested the government to arrange for such assistance programmes.¹⁰

Leadership of the Pul-i-Khushk area is in the hands of the *wakil-i-gozar*, who is appointed by the community members and serves as representative to the government. Periodic meetings are held by the *wakil-i-nahya* (district leader) with all of the local representatives in District 13 at the local government office.

⁷ This part of District 13 is not part of Kabul's "master plan" and, despite the exchange of official-looking papers between buyers and sellers, the legality of land ownership and sale is questionable.

⁸ This ethnic group has been resident in other parts of Kabul for many years. As S.A. Mousavi notes in his detailed work, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998), in the early to mid 1900s the Hazaras primarily migrated from the Hazarajat to Old Kabul (i.e. Chindawul). Following 1978 and the beginning of widespread conflict, lack of security in central Afghanistan led to increased migration to western Kabul (areas of the city to the west of the Shir-Darwaza, Asmayee, Kafir and Afshar mountains).

⁹ Many compounds contain private wells, but due to the falling water table these are now dry and inoperable. The average cost of installing a private pump is 4,000 Afghani, and respondents repeatedly voiced their frustration with costly but dry pumps.

¹⁰ Respondents mentioned that in order to be involved in NGO activities, social and political "connections" (*wasita*) are necessary, which they are lacking.

3.3 The urban residents and their backgrounds

All of the members in the 12 sample households are Hazaras whose original homes were in the central Hazarajat region of the country in either Ghazni or Wardak Province.¹¹ Prior to the war, most units had owned small plots of land and had been subsistence farmers. Especially during the time of the Taliban, their homes had been looted, and their land and/or livestock had been taken. Other respondents had been jailed and close relatives killed. During the 1990s, many households sought refuge in either Pakistan (N=6) or Iran (N=1). In two other units the males had found employment in Pakistan and Iran while their families remained behind in the Hazarajat, while three households had never left their rural homes prior to their move to Kabul.

A complex combination of push-and-pull factors were involved in these movements. For example, a head of household (a father of three sons currently in school) who spent six years in Iran with his family after being looted by the Taliban in the Hazarajat mentioned the following:

Before the war I passed my whole life in my home town [Behsud region]. That was a nice place, but now because of the drought I've come to Kabul. And besides, Kabul is a better place for education. I won't return to my home because I don't have land there anymore.

A mother of four sons and a daughter (whose sons are in school), also from Behsud, recalled their household's past experiences:

My husband was working on the farm, and we had a cow and 23 sheep. My sons were tending the sheep in the mountains when the Taliban came and took 18 of the sheep. We had been receiving most of our food from our livestock until then. For instance, we were making oil from the milk, selling the wool and some of the oil, and keeping some for our own use... This really hurt us. Then when my husband's sickness [respiratory problems] increased, he sold his share of inherited land and we came to Kabul.

Female respondents often noted the lack of health care in the mountains, and in several cases the deaths of children/youth due to pneumonia and other ailments had precipitated their move to Kabul.

The sample households had resided in Pul-i-Khushk for periods ranging from 1–4 years. A common pattern was for a family to rent a room in Kabul prior to purchasing a small plot of land and constructing a house. No respondent voiced any interest in returning to the Hazarajat, but their ties had not completely been severed with their home regions. Rural relatives visited them often, and many units still owned land there. One quarter of the sample households continued to obtain wheat from their small holdings, with the land either farmed by relatives or leased to others.

Concerning the level of education of male adults in the sample households, two had studied to twelfth grade (one in Kabul and another in Peshawar) and two had studied to ninth grade (one in Kabul and one in Ghazni). Other male respondents noted that they had attended the local madrassa in their hometowns. No adult female in the sample units had attended school; all were non-literate.

¹¹ Some specific places mentioned included Nawar, Jagatu, Sargin and Behsud.

In spite of their many difficulties in this poor suburb of Kabul, respondents appeared satisfied with their present place of residence, as this head of household who had spent a number of years in Peshawar as a refugee noted:

Sure, Pakistan is a good place for electricity, gas and water, but the freedom one can have in one's own country you can't find anywhere else.

Another male respondent who had been a refugee in both Pakistan and Iran in recent years was of a similar opinion when it came to his present livelihood in the capital city:

Life in Pakistan was better than in Iran – at least they don't insult you there. But living in Kabul is like living in one's own kingdom! The best memory I have is the day when I returned home to my own country...

3.4 Household composition

The units in this urban sample are large, with an average of 10 members. Half of the households are nuclear in structure (containing only parents and children), while the remainder are extended (containing three generations, and very often more than one married sibling with children).¹² Although relatives (especially married daughters) may live in other parts of Kabul City and/or District 13, most households do not have close family members living nearby.

Concerning the social cohesion of Pul-i-Khushk, the fact that all residents are Hazaras (members of the Shia religious sect) and come from similar rural backgrounds in the Hazarajat provides a definite degree of unity. Residents usually know their neighbours and are on friendly terms with them, with much visiting between households for births, weddings and funerals, along with *nazar* (ritual sharing of food associated with the mourning month of Moharam). However, the lack of close nearby relatives in this urban setting causes some respondents to complain about the lack of trust existing between residents, a characteristic which is typical of the urban milieu in Kabul today. As one head of household stated, “people here are busy with their own lives and have no time for others.”

3.5 Land and housing

All sample households have moved to Pul-i-Khushk in recent years, so their compounds are “works in progress” with small houses in various stages of completion. Plots of land are also very small, with an average size of approximately 2–3 *biswa*.¹³ The cost per *biswa* was quoted by heads of household as ranging from 80,000–100,000 Afghanis.¹⁴ Total costs of house construction range from 80,000–400,000 Afghanis. Some 25 percent of the sample (three households) do not own land, however, and are renting a room or rooms in another family's compound, with their rent ranging from 900–1,500 Afghanis per month.

¹² More specifically, in the sample of 12 units: six are nuclear; one is generationally extended (three generations); and five are generationally and collaterally extended (three generations with more than one married sibling with children).

¹³ 1 *biswa* = 105 square feet or 0.024 acres; 20 *biswa* = 1 *jerib* = approximately half an acre = one fifth of a hectare.

¹⁴ Approximately 50 Afghanis = US\$1. As noted previously, the legality of such land purchase is questionable even though respondents stated they paid the money and have papers to prove it. Original ownership of the plots may, however, be disputed.

3.6 Economic activities

Pul-i-Khushk is a poor community. Most households in the sample (N=8) were average in economic standing with respect to other units in the area; two were above average and one was below average. The heads of household of the comparatively above average units were both two married brothers who, in one case owned a cosmetics shop and do tailoring and in the other case owned a rug weaving agency and work for UNAMA. Those heads of household of the comparatively average units were: a government employee (Ministry of Mines and Industries) and karate instructor; brick maker; day labourer; mobile street vendor; and porter.¹⁵ A number of heads of household were also jobless. As explained below, however, it was most often not the economic undertakings of these men that enable the unit to survive.

Some physical assets found in a typical urban compound in Pul-i-Khushk include the following: dishes, teapot, glasses, mattresses, Iranian rug, clock, bicycle, tape recorder, radio, water pump (dry) and rug-weaving loom (on loan from an agency). Less than half of the 12 households had televisions. Households of all economic standings displayed photos of family members (primarily male) and mujahedin political/religious leaders.¹⁶

Three households (25 percent) in the sample received remittances from abroad to supplement their income. An economically above average head of household's brother lives in France; he sent US\$600 last year, along with a computer for the four boys and two girls who were enrolled in school. Two other units of average economic standing in the community had sons working in Iran, who sent 25,000 Afghanis and 100,000 Afghanis last year which was used, respectively, for the household's land purchase and an uncle's wedding.

None of the adult females in the sample households were employed for either cash or kind, and did not undertake any home-based income generation. This is not true of the children/youth, however, most of whom were engaged in intensive rug weaving in their homes.¹⁷ Some 15 boys and 16 girls, ranging in age from 6–18 years, in a total of nine out of 12 households were rug weavers. There were only three households (one in which the adult males were a successful shopkeeper and tailor, another in which they owned a rug weaving agency and worked for UNAMA, and one where the head of household worked for the government) where the children of the unit were not required to weave due to their poor economic conditions.

Parents readily acknowledged the crucial importance of their children's contribution to the household income through this activity. For example, a jobless father of five children (four sons and one daughter), who intermittently works as a brick maker in the summer months, related the following:

Children play a very big role in the economics of a household here. My children are earning more than 60 percent of my household's money. Three of them are weaving rugs – two of my sons and my daughter.

¹⁵ A porter may be hired to carry produce for people from the bazaar to their homes. Others may transport wholesale stock to retail shops.

¹⁶ Some of the mujahedin political/religious leaders' photos displayed include those of Abdul Ali Mazari and Abdul Karim Khalili, both of the Hezb-i-Wahdat party, along with the religious leader Qurban Ali Muhaqiq.

¹⁷ When asked why adult women do not do rug weaving, respondents mentioned that they were occupied with household chores and had no time for such labour-intensive work.

Mothers also commented on the necessity of their children to do rug weaving in order for their households to survive. A poor woman (a mother of seven sons) whose husband is jobless told the following story:

We left our home [Nawar, Ghazni] nine years ago and went to Padachinar,¹⁸ Pakistan, for seven years. My sons were weaving rugs there, and one of my sons who was nine got sick from rug weaving. Since we didn't have the money to treat him, he died in that foreign land. Now five of my sons are rug weaving here in Kabul too...we have to make them work in order to make a living.

Box 1. The process of rug weaving in Pul-i-Khushk

Numerous private rug-weaving agencies are housed in small shops in the nearby bazaar. The owners, most of whom are Hazaras, have business links with others in Pakistan and Iran. Many of the owners themselves have been refugees as children in Pakistan years ago where they learned rug weaving. A head of household in the community approaches the rug agency owner and, after agreeing to complete a rug in a certain amount of time and for a certain price, is supplied with a large upright loom of metal, wool in assorted colours and printed patterns which are all transported to the home.

The upright loom is set up either inside the home, in a corridor, or outside in the yard (protected with plastic sheeting). Rug colours are usually bright red, with large white and yellow flower designs which are said to be of Kazak origin. Knots may be either single or double.

Some of the older youths in the households learned rug weaving when they were refugees in Pakistan, especially in the region of Padachinar, and they have subsequently taught other family members and neighbours. Two or three children sit at a loom weaving, often from dawn to dusk; others may continue to work until the generator-supplied electricity goes off at 10pm. A good weaver may complete 25–30 rows per day. This is extremely demanding work, and many weavers complain of respiratory problems (such as chronic cough, asthma, tuberculosis etc.) and joint pain.

A total of 2,000–2,500 Pakistani rupees is obtained by the household for each meter of carpet that is woven.¹⁹ A rug takes more than a month to complete, depending upon its size and the number of children weaving. For example, a six-metre rug typically takes two to two and a half months to finish. If the rug is not completed on time or is not of the desired quality, money is deducted from the payment by the agency owner, and it may even have to be re-woven.

When completed, the rug agency owner collects the rug and sends it via a travelling tradesman to either Pakistan or Iran where it is washed and cut, and then sold either locally or abroad. Plans for the weaving of another rug are then made by the household and agency.

A household in which its children are intensively involved in rug weaving can expect to earn approximately 6,000 Pakistani rupees monthly. Money earned from this home-based activity is the major source of income for most households in Pul-i-Khushk.

Monthly household expenditures were estimated by heads of household as ranging from 4,500–10,000 Afghanis, generally varying according to the number of members in the unit and the number of members gainfully employed. Those surviving only on income from rug weaving could earn 6,000–7,000 Pakistani rupees per month, or 5,000–6,000 Afghanis. As noted above, out of the sample of 12, a total of nine

¹⁸ Padachinar (or Parachinar), located directly across the Pakistan border in FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Northwest Frontier Province), is a town where many refugee children, especially males, learned rug weaving.

¹⁹ Transactions pertaining to rugs are usually made in Pakistani rupees rather than Afghanis. Most rugs produced are sent to Pakistan for sale and, having lived as refugees in Pakistan where they learned rug weaving, many weavers are also used to dealing in rupees.

households rely on rug weaving as their core economic undertaking, and economic diversification is not common in these cases.

Some typical household costs include the following. Each month 70 Afghanis per light bulb is paid to the neighbourhood generator shop. In most cases, a home possesses only one bulb “linked to a wire from the generator so the children can weave rugs at night”. Some 250 Afghanis per month are spent on the electricity for a colour television, and 120–280 Afghanis per month is the average cost of gas used for cooking.

Respondents consistently said that most of their household expenditures were on food²⁰ and health care/medicines.²¹ A frustrated 40-year-old mother of seven, whose husband and son are wheelbarrowers/porters and whose three daughters weave rugs, related the following:

I have high blood pressure, and I still not have had it treated. Once I went to a doctor and he said that I was weak and that I should eat fruits and vegetables. How can I? We get just bread with a lot of difficulties. We're 12 people in the household, and we spend all our money on wheat flour, potatoes, rice and sometimes beans. We have never bought any other kinds of food. The doctor also advised my mother-in-law to have soup, but we don't have the money to buy meat! ...Our expenses are very high and our economic situation is very poor.

The woman's mother-in-law who was sitting nearby then concluded the discussion with this comment: *Let's stop now – don't make us feel more pain. The more we talk the less we have said...*

Saving for their sons' costly bride price (*tuiana*) was also in the minds of many parents, although two households noted that this tradition is not practised among their kin these days. The bride price, in which the family must transfer 80,000–150,000 Afghanis (or even more) to the family of the bride, is a definite economic burden for a household. A few units noted that their sons, in their twenties, had not married yet because they had not accumulated their bride price, and some young males were still in working Iran saving for their *tuiana*.

In most households it was the related opportunity costs in connection with rug weaving which limited children's – especially daughters' – enrolment. Expenditures relating to education, including crucial opportunity costs, are covered in detail later in this report.

3.7 Debts

All of the households in the sample were in debt. These outstanding debts ranged from 6,000–170,000 Afghanis, the average being 50,000 Afghanis. The majority of funds had been obtained from relatives, except for one case in which a neighbour

²⁰ Basic foodstuffs purchased include flour, beans/chickpeas, potatoes, rice, tea and sugar. Meat is consumed once a month, if at all. Men usually make trips to the central bazaars of Kabul where prices are cheaper and purchases are made in bulk; these trips, however, involve transport costs and time due to heavy traffic. The presence of guests increases a unit's food-related expenditures, and a number of respondents noted that this is a strain on their budgets.

²¹ Almost every household had a member suffering from a chronic ailment (high blood pressure, related heart problems, kidney problems, asthma and other respiratory problems, under-nutrition or mental illness) which requires ongoing and costly treatment. A few men had been tortured during the war and still suffered from painful after-effects. Children weaving rugs had eye problems and chronic coughs caused by dust and small particles of wool in the air near the looms. Most respondents did not feel confident with the health-related facilities (either private or public) in District 13, preferring to travel into central Kabul for perceived better treatment.

provided a loan and another case in which a loan had been obtained from the Bangladeshi organisation BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee). Most borrowed funds were being used to build new houses in Pul-i-Khushk. Two respondents also mentioned loans for medical expenses, and one loan was for a household's winter expenses (fuel, clothing etc.).

Strategies which are coping, adaptive, and/or accumulative were exhibited by the sample. For example, a number of households had sold some of their physical assets in recent years. One unit had sold a mother's jewellery and a family rug to pay for extra winter expenses, while other units had sold livestock and/or land to pay for their house construction in Pul-i-Khushk.

3.8 Female mobility

In the private sphere of the household, gender segregation is not as strict among the Hazaras in Pul-i-Khushk as among other ethnic groups such as the Pashtuns, and during fieldwork the male interviewing team was able to speak with both males and females in the homes of the sample families. In the public sphere of the neighbourhood lanes and bazaar streets, women were also often present wearing a large *chadar* or in some cases a *chadri*. Adult females in Pul-i-Khushk were largely free to go shopping in the nearby bazaars, visit neighbours and attend funerals, weddings, and *nazar*, visit friends and relatives at Eid, and collect water at the public well.

Nevertheless, as many females related, there are some definite rules of seclusion in effect for females in this urban community which limit their mobility. For example, both women and girls state that they have "never been to the city" and "haven't even seen the bazaar in Kabul". And, especially relevant to female school enrolment, women mentioned that "it is not common for our people to let females go out of the house a lot".²² As discussed more below, this conservative orientation is one of the factors (albeit not the major one) involved in a household's decision-making about schooling for their daughters.

Just as decision-making processes within households differed, female mobility varied between units – depending on the type of relationship between husband, wife and other household members, as well as distribution of power within the unit. These are key aspects of the later discussion on decision-making with respect to school enrolment.

3.9 Some options for education: the supply side

To follow are the major educational facilities currently available in District 13 and the nearby parts of Kabul. These are the core institutions primarily used and/or mentioned by the sample households.²³

In District 13

Homayun Shahid Government/Public Lycee: This large government school, with separate classes/shifts for boys and girls, is located on one of the narrow side

²² This stress on female seclusion may be due to the fact that in their rural homelands of Ghazni and Wardak (Behsud 1 and 2), respondents lived in close proximity to Pashtun communities, and from this they may have adopted a more conservative approach in recent years.

²³ No household mentioned the mosque school at the local Imam Zaman Mosque, although respondents did note that relatives (father, grandfather or uncle) had taught the Holy Quran to their children – both boys and girls.

streets, approximately 10–15 minutes' walk from Pul-i-Khushk. It is also called the Sima Samar Lycee, because the building was originally established as a women's centre by Sima Samar, a famous Hazara physician from Jaghuri who is currently head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. In response to the desires of the community, in recent years she changed the facility into a school, which has now been formally registered with the Ministry of Education. At present 8,000 students (5,200 boys and 2,800 girls) from throughout the district are enrolled in three shifts throughout the day. Boys attend classes from first–tenth grades; girls attend classes from first–sixth grades. In this rapidly growing district, school enrolment has mushroomed in recent years, and there is now a striking total of 23 first grade classes (13 for boys and 10 for girls) at this school.²⁴ Extremely overcrowded, classes are held not only in tents outside the school building but also in the street next to the school compound. The school lacks classrooms, desks, books and chalk; the well is also dry and there is no electricity. A total of 89 male and female teachers, earning approximate monthly salaries of 2,200 Afghanis, deal with huge classes of often 80 students each. Children must provide their own uniforms and school supplies. Boys and girls from seven of the 12 sample households are enrolled in this school.

Marefat²⁵ Private Lycee: On the other side of the main bazaar street, approximately three kilometres from Pul-i-Khushk, is a large co-educational private school which is funded by wealthy Hazara businessmen from the area and abroad. The spacious compound is equipped with a large classroom building with a courtyard, library, meeting room and volleyball court. Originally founded for refugees by Dr Anwar Yousufi in 1373 (1994) in Islamabad, Pakistan, it currently enrolls 1,800 students (1,100 boys and 700 girls) who come from many parts of western Kabul. Classes are in two shifts, and 53 teachers are employed (whose salaries are greater than those earned by their public school counterparts). The curriculum is based upon examples from both Iran and Pakistan, with stress placed upon developing respect for other human beings (i.e. improving relations between ethnic groups and religious sects, between genders etc.) and general peace-building. There is the normal programme of courses as well as an accelerated programme for older students who had their schooling interrupted by the years of conflict and economic considerations. Fees are 100 Afghanis per month for first–fourth grades; 130 Afghanis per month for fifth–ninth grades; and 200 Afghanis per month for tenth–twelfth grades. Scholarships exist for very poor children. For an additional 80 Afghanis per month (for girls) or 100 Afghanis per month (for boys), bus transport to and from school is provided. On Fridays special programmes for parents – both fathers and mothers – are held in the school courtyard. Children must provide their own uniforms and school supplies. This school has applied for formal registration with the government. Boys and girls from two of the 12 sample households are enrolled in this school.

Nedah-i-Qalam²⁶ Private Course/Centre: This is one of the most popular private courses in the Sarak-i-Barchi bazaar area near Pul-i-Khushk. Housed in a second floor over the bazaar, it was established in 2004 and employs three male and three female teachers, some of whom are also students at Kabul University. The centre

²⁴ The following illustrates the age/gender differences in enrolment in various grades at the school: 10th grade: one class for boys; 9th grade: one class for boys; 8th grade: two classes for boys; 7th grade: six classes for boys; 6th grade: five classes for boys and three classes for girls; 5th grade: seven classes for boys and four classes for girls; 4th grade: twelve classes for boys and seven classes for girls; 3rd grade: ten classes for boys and ten classes for girls; 2nd grade: eleven classes for boys and nine classes for girls; 1st grade: thirteen classes for boys and ten classes for girls.

²⁵ "Marefat" means enlightenment.

²⁶ "Nedah-i-Qalam" means voice of the pen.

has 10 working computers, but lacks sufficient desks and chairs. A total of 120 students are currently enrolled in the following courses: Dari/literacy, English, mathematics and computers. Fees are 150 Afghanis per month for most of the courses except computer instruction which costs 300 Afghanis for Windows and 400 Afghanis for other programmes. Classes are held in the early morning and late afternoon. This centre has applied for formal registration with the government. Male youths from five of the 12 sample households are enrolled in courses here.

Other Courses/Centres: There are a number of other courses/centres in the area such as the Eslah Private Course, the Oofaq Private Course and the Hayat-i-Darsi Course/Centre, which is a non-formal literacy centre for females established by the Ministry of Education's Department of Literacy. From three of the 12 sample households, one male is enrolled in Eslah, one male is enrolled in Oofaq, and one female is enrolled in Hayat-i-Darsi.

In other parts of Kabul City

Habilia Government Lycee: Located on Darulaman Road in Karte Sai and recently rebuilt with Indian assistance, this famous and historical school has an excellent reputation and is well known among residents of Pul-i-Khushk. One boy from the sample is enrolled in sixth grade here.

Zainab Kobra Girls' Government Lycee: After completing sixth grade in Hodayun Shahid Lycee, a girl in Pul-i-Khushk who wants to continue her schooling can attend this school, which is located towards central Kabul and requires transportation by bus. This school was mentioned in a girls' focus group at Hodayun Shahid Lycee.

Kabul University: Located in western Kabul, Kabul University is easily accessible for District 13 residents by bus. One 22-year-old from the sample is in his second year in the Faculty of Engineering here.

3.10 The cost of education in the context of the household economy

The majority of residents of Pul-i-Khushk are poor urban-dwellers struggling to make ends meet, with income used primarily for food and costly medical care. Sending children to school calls for additional direct costs for school supplies (notebooks, pens, pencils, books), uniforms and, in some cases, transportation (e.g. rickshaws utilised especially for girls) – an ongoing commitment on the part of parents and the household in general. The amount spent on these direct costs varied considerably according to the number of children in the household enrolled in school, the level of schooling, and whether the classes were public or private. The examples to follow serve as illustration.

Household A is a comparatively well-to-do nuclear family (husband, wife and nine children), with a monthly expenditure estimated at 10,000 Afghanis. It is firmly committed to educating all of its children, and no children were involved in rug weaving. Three boys and two girls were enrolled in the Marefat Private School, and another son was in his second year at Kabul University (Faculty of Engineering). Two young sons also attended English and computer courses during winter vacation. The head of household estimated that approximately 1,000 Afghanis were expended

monthly²⁷ just for the children’s private school fees, uniforms, school supplies and daily treats. This amount increased with costs relating to the university student. Some assistance was supplied through remittances from a relative (a brother of the head of household) in France, but the children’s mother, who is in charge of the household budget, related that:

...Because we spend so much on education for my sons and daughters, we try to reduce the expenses on other things. Thus we don’t spend much money. By any means, we want our children to go to school. Their father says that he had a very poor life and it was all because he wasn’t educated. He doesn’t want his children to have a life like he has had.

Household B (a nuclear unit of husband, wife and five children), with an estimated monthly expenditure of 6,000 Afghanis, was also firmly committed to education – at least for its boys. Three sons (17, 11 and 7 years old) and one daughter (14 years old) weave rugs daily at home; all three sons also attend either a literacy course at Nedah-i-Qalam or Hodayun Shahid Public School (grades fourth and first). The literacy course costs 150 Afghanis per month, while the younger boys’ education-related costs were estimated to be approximately the same; the total for this household was approximately 450 Afghanis per month. However, their mother related that she now regrets enrolling her two young sons because, “My sons need clothes, books, notebooks and pens for school. We just don’t have the money to buy them clothes and school supplies.” Her son in fourth grade added that, “Whenever I go to school my father gives me 10 Afghanis and, if I don’t need a pen or something like that, I buy raisins, chickpeas or something else to eat...”

3.11 The schools and the community

Both of the two largest schools in the area – Hodayun Shahid Government Lycee (8,000 students) and Marefat Private School (1,800 students) – were visited during the research, along with the popular Nedah-i-Qalam Private Course/Centre (120 students). All three locations are active hubs of student activity for both males and females.

Despite the difficulties of negotiating muddy lanes and streets in District 13, security is not considered to be a pressing issue for children going to and from school in this Kabul suburb. When the research was conducted, a new school year had recently begun. Criticisms from parents and school staff about the schools and the quality of education usually focused on the overcrowded and ill-equipped classrooms of the area.²⁸ This example from Hodayun Shahid Lycee illustrates this point:

Passing through the muddy lane, the researchers entered the school compound where white UNICEF tents were set up near the school building. Some classes were also meeting in the lane, where blackboards and large plastic mats had been set up on the ground. It was mid-morning and the school was very crowded. The teachers and school staff were extremely busy. While the researchers were talking with one of the staff, a mother of one of the students came into his

²⁷ These figures are approximate estimates provided by respondents – usually the students’ fathers – and may be somewhat inflated.

²⁸ Interestingly, one young boy in sixth grade enrolled himself in the distant Habibia Lycee in Karte Sai because of its good reputation. “I chose Habibia because it has good, intelligent and kind teachers, and it’s much better than the schools in Pul-i-Khushk. This is the school that the president of Afghanistan and some other members of the cabinet graduated from, and I want to be a graduate of Habibia too.”

office and asked angrily, *Why do you enrol students when you don't have any room for them? This is wrong!*

In frustration, the staff member said to her and to the researchers: *The government tells all the people that the doors to the schools are always open, but they don't know anything about education and the problems we face in the schools these days...In every classroom 80 students are sitting beside each other like sheep...The population of this district is about two million and there aren't enough schools. The authorities don't care about us – it seems they don't think we're from Afghanistan at all! My hope and desire is that all the people – Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara – live like brothers. I request the authorities to pay attention to all the children in the country – they're the future of this country. And I want you to bring a camera to the school – take pictures of all of these crowded classes and show them to the whole world!*

A father with three sons in school, all of whom also weave rugs along with his daughter who does not attend school, focused on overcrowding and its effects on the quality of the teaching:

I suggest to the government that they should increase the number of teachers because the number of students is just too many. The teachers can't manage the children, and then they can't teach well at all.

The private school, Marefat Lycee, is able to limit enrolment and so does not have the similar problem of overcrowding. A few of the respondents (fathers of children attending the school) noted that its atmosphere and level of instruction is better than that of the public schools. However, others who do not send their children there largely due to economic constraints also wondered about its lack of accreditation with the government. Staff with whom researchers spoke at the large private school summed up its philosophy as follows, also stressing national unity:

We must develop education in Afghanistan, and in this way we'll be able to prevent violence...We must teach the young generation to respect all human beings. All Afghans – Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, Pashtun – have a role to play in the future of Afghanistan...We teach the subject of anthropology (ensanshinasi) to let students know what is human – the value of all human beings – so that blood shedding is prevented...The goal of our school is not to make money.²⁹

In a few of the households with literate members, male relatives (father, brother or uncle) assisted children with their homework in the evenings, but many non-literate parents bemoaned the fact that there was no one to help their children in this area. No mother could participate in this because they were all non-literate. Concerning parents' attendance at school-sponsored events, a concerned mother and father of three sons and two daughters who were all enrolled in the Marefat Lycee had attended Friday meetings for parents and teachers at the private school, and had enjoyed the event. As the mother noted,

Whenever there is a meeting at school on Friday mornings, children can take their parents to school as well. I went there once, and the school principal talked a lot – from 9–11am. Actually I didn't understand much of what he said –

²⁹ Jealousy does exist between those active in public and private education, however, and some individuals in public education perceived the private school as primarily interested in making money: one teacher termed private schools “an indirect type of colonialism of the poor”.

but I know that he did say that if people are very poor they will teach their children for free...

4. Who Goes to School, Who Doesn't, and Why

Table 1 shows some basic information about the children in the 12 sample households in Pul-i-Khushk. There was a total of 72 children (40 boys and 32 girls) aged 18 and under in these units.³⁰ The greater number of boys present in these categories is largely explained by the early marriages of a number of girls in their teens and their departure from the households. Looking at the second and third columns, approximately two thirds of the boys of school age in the sample are enrolled in school, while approximately one third of the girls of school age are enrolled.

Table 1. Children in and out of school in Pul-i-Khushk (12 sample households)

Number of children aged 18 years and under		Number of school-aged children (7–18 years)		Number of school-aged children in school now	
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
40	32	31	23	21	8

A total of 11 households from the sample had enrolled at least one child in school. Out of these, eight households had enrolled only boys in school, while three households had enrolled both boys and girls.

Boys enrolled in school (N=21) ranged from: first to seventh grades at Hodayun Shahid Government Lycee (N=12); from third to fifth grades at Marefat Private Lycee (N=3); one sixth grader at Habibia Lycee; and three boys at Neda-i-Qalam Private Course, one at Esla Private Course and one at Oofaq Private Course. Girls enrolled in school (N=8) ranged from first to fifth grades at Hodayun Shahid Lycee (N=5); from fifth to seventh grades at Marefat Lycee (N=2); along with one student at the Hayat-i-Darsi government literacy course.

Of those children who were not enrolled in school, which included ten boys and 15 girls, the great majority of these had never attended school at all.³¹ There were only two cases of children who had dropped out³² of school in the sample: a 14-year-old boy who had studied to fourth grade in Pakistan who was now weaving rugs, and a 13-year-old girl who had studied to third grade in Ghazni who was now weaving rugs and also attending the Hayat-i-Darsi Literacy Course.³³

Table 2. Rug weaving and school enrolment (9 out of 12 sample households)

<i>Number of children who weave rugs</i>		<i>Number of children who weave rugs and go to school</i>		<i>Number of children who only weave rugs</i>	
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
15	16	9	1	6	15

³⁰ This yields an average of approximately 6 children aged 18 and under per household – a large dependency ratio regardless of household structure.

³¹ Included here are also one boy of 7 years who will be enrolled next year, and one girl of 7 years who will be enrolled next year; she is kept at home this year to take care of her 6-month-old sibling.

³² For this study, the definition of a “dropout” has been determined by the respondents themselves, rather than by the child’s school or teacher.

³³ There is another case of a 19-year-old girl who attended the Marefat accelerated course until a year ago when she had to drop out due to serious respiratory problems, which her mother blames upon previous rug weaving. The girl notes: “I studied five classes in two years at Marefat School...and I very much liked school. I’ve been away from my studies for one year, and I’m very sad about that.”

Rug weaving, an essential component of the livelihoods of nine of the 12 sample households, undertaken by both boys and girls, is sometimes combined with school enrolment – much more frequently in the case of boys. As shown in Table 2, a total of 15 boys and 16 girls (aged 6–18) were weaving rugs in home-based income generation. Out of these totals, there were nine boys and only one girl who were also enrolled in school; six boys and 15 girls were not enrolled in school and instead wove rugs from morning to night in their homes.³⁴

4.1 Household decision-making

Before dealing specifically with decision-making and school enrolment, the general process of making decisions within the urban household in Pul-i-Khushk will be briefly examined. Closely linked with this is the quality of relationships between various household members, including the distribution of power within the unit. The dynamics of the interaction within these families, which contain many members of differing ages and genders and, correspondingly, different statuses and roles, are exceedingly complex and require a considerable amount of time to understand. Important clues emerged during in-depth conversations, however, and some of these are summarised here.

Discussions with both male and female respondents indicated that although decision-making power may be primarily possessed by the male head of household, as is often stereotypically thought, women are often active participants in the decision-making process and, in some cases, wield considerable power within the household themselves. This varies considerably between units, however. Family structure is sometimes an important variable here, but individual personality and negotiation skills also play a crucial role.

In more than half (N=8) of the sample of households it appeared that both males and females participated jointly in a variety of decisions pertaining to the functioning of the units – with varying degrees of cooperation and/or conflict. In the remainder (N=4), it was the male head of household who was the major decision-maker. A few examples of relationships in two of the units will illustrate this diversity.

In Household A, a generational and collaterally extended unit in which two married sons and their families live with their elderly mother, there were 11 individuals living in one room, and the decision-making process seemed somewhat confused.³⁵ Although the oldest son said that he was the head of household and that he and his brother were the major decision-makers, their mother also introduced herself as the head of household. The pale, harried woman then continued, focussing on the strained relations between the adult females in the unit:

When we lived in Sarghan [Ghazni] I was hitting my daughters-in-law every day. I had to hit them because they were not obeying me. For instance, I would tell them to milk the cows or to take them out to pasture, and they weren't doing it. So I hit them. But now I'm much better – these days one cannot say much to daughters-in-law...

³⁴ Another example of income generation undertaken by a school-aged child was a 16-year-old boy employed as a gardener/day labourer. He was not enrolled in school.

³⁵ This is an extremely poor household; the oldest son repairs bicycles. Four children (one boy, three girls) from the ages of 7–16 weave rugs. Of these, only the 16-year-old boy is in school – in the fourth grade at Sima Samar School.

[In the meantime, one of her daughters-in-law came into the room and interjected.] *We can't cook anything without the allowance of my mother-in-law, and our days are filled with sorrow and pain. Nothing in this household is based on a decision everyone agrees on...*

Household B, a nuclear family consisting of husband, wife, four sons and one daughter, exhibited more harmonious give-and-take relationships. This is also a poor unit in which the head of household is a brick maker (often jobless). Four children (three boys and one girl) from the ages of 7–17 weave rugs. All three school-aged sons are either in the Nedah-i-Qalam literacy course or attend Sima Samar School, but the 14-year-old daughter is not enrolled in school. Concerning decision-making, the father related:

I take the decisions in the family, but often I discuss things with my wife. For example, some time ago I wanted to make a brick kiln, but my wife and my son said that this would take a lot of money and it was a big risk. So I avoided getting into that. They [mother and daughter] decide what to cook – but they sometimes ask me what I want too. I manage the income for the household, but they bought these curtains a while ago. My wife goes out for buying tea and sweets in the bazaar sometimes. I'll make the decision about getting our oldest son married, but I'll discuss this with my wife too. In the end, if we don't agree on something and we're upset with each other, we talk about it and then take the decision... Actually my father was better than me because he had more control over his household!

Despite the fact that in many households it is the rug-weaving sons and daughters who are responsible for a large portion of the income used to survive in this urban setting, there were very few cases in which these children had a say in decisions relating to the household expenditures. In addition to the 17-year-old boy in the above example advising his father about the brick kiln investment, only one other example is worth noting, which concerned the purchase of a television. A 40-year-old father, who is currently jobless but hoped to obtain a position in the army, has six children and lives with them and their mother in a nuclear unit. All of his three school-aged children (one boy and two girls) weave rugs, with the son and one of the daughters currently enrolled in school. The father related the following:

Last year, due to our economic problems, I sold the colour television and our rug. But then my children were saying that "everyone else has a television but we don't," so I bought that black and white television recently...

4.2 Respondents' opinions about education: why children go to school

From the overcrowded schools in the district, and discussions with respondents about why children go to school, it was evident that the majority of households clearly perceived the value of education, especially for males, and enrolled their children where possible. When adults in the sample were asked what they thought about education, both men and women voiced their support, and noted its importance in present-day Afghanistan. These opinions heavily influenced their decisions to send their children to school. Parents – especially fathers – frequently mentioned that they wanted the lives of their children to be better than theirs. For example, a

jobless father of three sons (all of whom weave rugs and are also enrolled in school) and one daughter who only weaves rugs provided the following comment:

The major reasons why children are going to school these days is that they must become literate. I was living in the mountains and was deprived of school...I now wish that my sons reach a good position in their lives so that they can serve themselves, their households and the people.

Often parents' desires for their children's education were rather ambitious, repeatedly using the phrase "become a doctor or engineer" in response to what they would like their children to do in the future. Indeed, this phrase was used so frequently that it sometimes appeared to be just another term for "being educated". However, in the following example, a father's desires were being realised. A comparatively well-to-do man, although uneducated, with four boys and two girls enrolled in the Marefat School and an older son studying at the Faculty of Engineering at Kabul University, had this opinion:

I want my sons to continue their education as long as they can, and I really would love to see them become professionals – like doctors or engineers. I want them to serve society and the country. Then their mother and I will be satisfied...a loaf of bread and some tea is enough for us.

Most respondents' discussions about education in general seemed to apply primarily to the education of their sons, but others stressed school for daughters too. The successful but non-literate young owner of a rug-weaving agency, who is the father of two pre-school girls and whose two younger brothers were enrolled in school, also believed in the importance of education – for both males and females:

Education is very good for people – there is a huge difference between an illiterate person and an educated person. It's like the difference between ground and sky. For instance, I'm illiterate, and when I attend a gathering I cannot talk well; sometimes I don't understand all that is said. I don't want my children to be like that – I want them to study and to serve the community.

Before people believed that sending the girls to school was a bad thing, but now they don't. They went to the foreign countries and saw that men and women are working together. They learned that both have to study, and that the rights of men and women are equal. I have two daughters. They're small now, but when they grow a bit I will send them to school. I'll work hard to make it possible for my children and my brothers to go to school and to serve the society. Also an illiterate woman cannot control the household well – but if she is educated she can do that, and she can also bring up her children well to serve society.

In the next example, the household had recently expanded to 14 members with the arrival from Iran of the head of household's widowed sister and her six children, all of whom were under the age of 11 years. With all of the head-of-household's own children already enrolled in public schools, he quickly set about getting his nephews and nieces also enrolled – in spite of pressing economic problems.³⁶

³⁶ A twelfth-grade graduate, this head of household works for the Ministry of Mines and Industries and is also a karate instructor. With so many mouths to feed, however, their economic situation is not secure.

[When the researchers arrived at the home they found two children drawing pictures on white paper and a baby asleep in the room.]
I've got a lot of economic problems – so many that I could not afford to buy school bags for all my own children. One of my sisters came from Iran last Thursday and I enrolled her oldest son [11 years old] in school too. He was working in Iran, but I couldn't accept that, and so I asked her to come back to Kabul. She and her children are living with us, and now there are ten children in the house...I just want everybody in my household to be cultured and educated. And I really hope that the situation here becomes better in the next ten years so that all people are safe. If people throughout the country are safe, I am safe as will. I want my children to be educated and to have a bright future!³⁷

The matriarch of a large extended family, the mother of five sons and three daughters, was asked why the household looked so positively on the role of education. She smiled, and noted the importance of keeping up with others along with the topic of gender relations within the unit:

We see the other people in the neighbourhood whose children go to school. Their lives are getting better, and they are getting educated, so we want our family and our children to be the same as well. It is not the time for my eldest sons to study, and my daughters are married, but we do send our younger sons to school and to courses...And those of my sons who are educated have a better attitude towards us [females in household] than the ones who are not literate.

However, some parents did not see education as a panacea, and were less positive about its benefits. For example, in another household which is extremely poor none of the three school-aged children were in school. Two boys and one girl spend their days weaving rugs in their one-room rented dwelling, while their father and older brother work as wheel barrowers/porters, sometimes making 100 Afghanis per day. A mother who sorely regretted that they could not afford to send their children to school said:

Actually, I think that family relations between man and wife or with their children have nothing to do with education. One of our relatives is a very educated man, but his wife is not happy with him because his behaviour is very bad...

Not all fathers wish for a better future for their children. In the following example, the head of household is a day labourer who seldom finds work; his teenaged son is a gardener/labourer, and his two teenaged daughters are rug weavers. Only one eight-year-old son has recently begun first grade at the nearby Sima Samar (Homayun Shahid) School. In their rented 1-room house, his wife sadly related the following:

Our economic situation these days is terrible. My son is working as a gardener, but he just hates it, and he would love to study. His father forces him to work. I as well would love to send all my children to school, but their father does not let them study. He says that he did not go to school and didn't become anything – so why should they? He says to let them be illiterate – let them work.

An outspoken elderly mother living with two of her married sons, their wives and children was not very keen about girls' education:

³⁷ One of the sons of his sister, a nine-year-old, went to school and enrolled himself shortly after their arrival in Kabul.

Thank God I don't have any daughters. I don't like daughters...it's good for a boy to learn something and become educated, but girls shouldn't go to school. And if they do, they should just study until they're 10 or 11, learn some words and then get married. Boys should get married at the age of 16 or 17. I got my eldest son married when he was 16.

Children and youth with whom researchers spoke were all quite positive about education, however. A boy of 17 years who is now studying in sixth grade at Sima Samar (Homayun Shahid Lycee) as well as weaving carpets at home had this to say about the importance of education:

My father told me that if I don't go to school I will just end up being a karachiwan [cart vendor] like him. I want to study to become a doctor – because there is no doctor among our relatives and friends...Of course education is important. Before the leaders of Afghanistan used the illiterate and uneducated people. They made them fight, telling them that the people in Kabul had adopted atheism, and so they had to fight against them in a jihad. Everyone started fighting with everyone else. But if the people had gone to school and were educated, they never would have been deceived by their leaders.

4.3 Respondents' opinions about education: why children don't go to school

Table 3. Children who had never been enrolled in school (9 boys and 15 girls from 11 households)

Household	Child	Who decided	Reason(s)
#1	7-year-old boy	father, mother	boy is small (will enrol next year)
#3	14-year-old girl	father, mother	poor (weaves rugs) chores at home
#4	7-year-old girl 9-year-old girl 13-year-old girl	grandmother, father	poor (weave rugs)
#5	13-year-old girl 15-year-old girl 16-year-old boy	father	poor (girls weave and boy is labourer) girls are "grown up"
#6	8-year-old boy 14-year-old boy 18-year-old girl	father, mother	poor (all weave rugs) "not our custom to send girls to school"
#7	7-year-old girl	mother, father	takes care of baby brother (will enrol next year)
#8	9-year-old boy 11-year-old boy 12-year-old boy	father	poor (all weave rugs)
#9	14-year-old girl	father, mother	girl is "grown up"
#10	14-year-old girl	father, mother	poor (weaves rugs)
#11	12-year-old girl 14-year-old girl	father mother	poor (weave rugs)
#12	13-year-old girl (plus two more boys, two more girls)	grandmother, fathers	poor (three girls and two boys weave rugs)

The children of households in the sample who had never been to school (both boys and girls) ranged in age from 7–18. Different individuals had been the decision-makers in these cases, with the child’s father playing the most significant role – particularly in two households. Very often mothers actively participated in this process too, however, and in two cases it was an influential grandmother who played a large role in the decision to not send the children to school as well. Reasons involved in these decisions are shown in the last column of Table 3, are also graphically illustrated in degree of importance in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Reasons associated with decisions to not enrol children in school

Supply-related reasons	Demand-related reasons
	Poor household economy (child must weave rugs)
	(M and F)³⁸
...	Day labourer (M)
	Girl is “grown up” (F)
	“Not our custom” (F)
	Shameful (F)
	“People insult us” (F)
	Household chores (F)

Table 3 shows basic information about the school-aged boys and girls in the sample households who have never been to school (nine boys and 15 girls), while Table 4 shows similar data for those who had dropped out of school (one boy and one girl).

By far the most predominant reason for not enrolling children in school was the poor economic status of the household, and the need for both boy and girls to generate income – most often through the weaving of rugs. A second related but much less important reason pertaining only to females in their teens was the fact that they are perceived to be “grown up”, and it is seen as shameful for them to be in the public sphere. Interestingly, no supply-related reasons were mentioned by respondents as prohibiting school enrolment, although overcrowded classrooms, lack of desks/chairs, and muddy streets were noted by respondents as negative characteristics of their school-going children’s experiences.

Concerning those cases in which children were rug weavers and not enrolled in school it was clear that, although the desire for education may be very strong on the

³⁸ No supply-related reason was mentioned as being part of any decision to not send a child to school, although overcrowded classrooms, teachers’ lack of skill, lack of desks and chairs and muddy streets were noted by parents as negatively affecting the school experience of their enrolled children.

part of both parent and child, the opportunity costs involved were simply too high for their households to bear.³⁹ In order to provide food and pay the debts, these children worked long hours every day and enabled their families to survive in this suburban capital setting.

Table 4: Children who had dropped out of school (one boy and one girl from two households)

<i>Household</i>	<i>Dropout</i>	<i>Education history</i>	<i>Who Decided</i>	<i>Reason(s)</i>
#6	14-year-old boy	dropped out 1 year ago from Marefat School in Islamabad when family came to Kabul; had studied to 4th grade	father	poor (weaves rugs)
#7	13-year-old girl	studied to 3rd grade in Ghazni; dropped out when family came to Kabul 3 years ago	father, ⁴⁰ mother	poor (weaves rugs)

Boxes 2 and 3 present two detailed examples of children who are rug weavers, illustrating this point. In the first example of a girl who has no education, she has three brothers who are currently enrolled in school and weave with her when they return home. Note that although the primary reason that she is not enrolled is economic, negative social sanctions pertaining to females in the public sphere also play a secondary role in the decision-making process. In the second example, a

Box 2. *Conversation with a young girl, a rug weaver, who has never been to school*

My name is Yasmin, daughter of Mohammad Ali Khan. I'm 14 years old. I started weaving rugs when I was ten, and I learned from my brother. When we first came to Kabul three years ago from Iran we had a terrible life. Father said to weave rugs and I did, but now I'm so tired of this work. I weave from 6am until 5pm, and if I take a break I still have to do the chores at home too – like sweeping, washing the dishes and washing the clothes with my mother.

I don't have anything else to do but this boring job of rug weaving. I'm only free on Fridays, and that passes by taking a bath and washing clothes. I don't have any other sisters. Whenever I get very sad, I play the tape recorder. (The girl looked down and began to cry.)

I'm not going to school because I'm busy every day weaving rugs. I'd really like to go to school, but my father doesn't let me. He says, "If you go to school, what will happen to our life?" I'm very interested in school, and I ask my mother to convince my father. But my mother says, "Your father has no way to send you to school. You see what kind of a life we have. If you don't weave rugs, how will we make money for food? You know your father is jobless."

My younger brother goes to the Hodayun Shahid School in the morning and he weaves rugs with me in the afternoon. He tells me of his classmates and teachers sometimes, and he says that he always has lots of fun at school. He says that he plays football with the other boys and that one of his classmates helps him with his lessons. Whenever I hear these things I get very interested in going to school myself. I would love to sit with the girls and play too – even now that I'm grown.

Our people don't like a big girl going to school. They say that the daughter of so-and-so is going out to school and her age is such-and-such. That's also why my father doesn't let me go – he doesn't want to be embarrassed by relatives and friends.

³⁹ All situations are relative, however, as one mother related: "My sons are much happier here in Kabul than they were in our hometown. They were both shepherds there, and now they say that weaving rugs is at least better than rearing sheep..."

young boy has had to drop out of school because of his household's deteriorating economic status in recent years. None of the children in the unit are in school, and he weaves rugs daily along with his older sister of 18 (who has serious respiratory problems) and his younger brother of eight years.

Box 3. Conversation with a young boy, a rug weaver, who is a school dropout

My name is Karim Jon and I'm 14 years old. I really liked school, but I couldn't continue my education because of economic problems. I studied in Marefat School in Pakistan. ...It cost 80 Pakistani rupees per month and I was really trying hard to learn, and I was learning. But unfortunately I couldn't continue going to school, and it's now been one year since we came back and I've been weaving rugs here at home. I first tried to go to school and weave at the same time, but my father said I had to do one or the other – either go to school or work – and I want to help my father.

I'm very sad I can't study now. If we had a good economic situation I certainly would have been in school. If I ever get free from rug weaving, I take the bicycle and go out for some biking. But when I see my old classmates on the street sometimes, they ask me why I'm not at school. Then I make an excuse and say that I'm going to another school or to a course. Nobody from our household goes to school because my father is a wheel barrower/porter, so we have to work.

But I wish to get an education and become someone...I know that if I don't go to school I'll have a lot of problems in my life. Every day I wake up early in the morning, pray, and then I start weaving until breakfast. Then after breakfast I again weave the rug until evening. I pass the day thinking about my life and what I can do...

The researchers did not find any examples of these young rug weavers taking any pride in their work; rather, they consider it drudgery – a task that must be performed – and there was a great degree of frustration involved on both the part of children and parents. In one of the initial focus groups with the heads of household in one of the homes, some children and other family members were in attendance too:

[The mother of Ali Jon, a widow, sat there with ruffled hair and a pale face. She seemed to be an experienced woman who had spent a life full of troubles.] If I send my grandchildren to school, then we won't have any food. And our water well is dry – the children fetch our water every day. Shah Wali added, I have many economic problems and so I can't send my daughter [who weaves rugs] to school. She's very willing, though, and she cries every day for me to enrol her in school.

[Tears welled up in the eyes of his daughter who was sitting nearby, and she got up and ran away. As the conversation went on, there were a few children sitting at the nearby loom weaving rugs – barefooted, with ruffled hair and chapped lips. Another father continued.] Our children are obliged to weave rugs. They work day and night to make a living, and they suffer from the dust and pollution of weaving. If I had a job to do, I would never force my children to weave rugs or labour – we would then enrol them in school.

Combining school enrolment with weaving frequently results in long and difficult hours of school, homework and rug weaving for these youngsters (nine boys and one

⁴⁰ The father of this girl had recently tried to re-enrol her in public school in Kabul, but she had not been accepted (perhaps because of her age); she now attends the Hayat-i-Darsi Government Literacy Course so, as her mother said, "she won't forget what she's learned".

girl). A few fathers and one grandmother noted that if a child both weaves and goes to school this often results in a lag in their rug completion (“...then we can’t finish our rug as fast as the neighbours can...”). On the other hand, teachers at Homayun Shahid Lycee noted that many of their rug-weaving students fell asleep in class because of lack of sufficient sleep. Nonetheless, if at all economically possible, children’s enrolment in school was seen as a top priority for these households.⁴¹ This father of two school-going and rug-weaving children (one son and one daughter) related the following:

The rug that my children are working on is four metres, and we receive 2,000 Pakistani rupees per metre. I’ve talked to the owner of the rug agency and I told him that my children can only work on it in the afternoons because they’re also in school. I don’t want the work to distract them from their education...Sure, if my son quits school and goes to work somewhere else he could make more money, but I don’t want him to stop studying for work.

His wife later continued:

My son and daughter come back from school each day and eat lunch, do their homework, and then start weaving. They weave until 10pm. Sometimes they want to watch television, but we don’t let them very often because they have to finish the rug as fast as possible...

In addition to economic constraints which limit enrolment in school, there was also an undercurrent of negative social sanctions involved in decisions pertaining to the enrolment of girls – especially when they reach puberty. As the young girl featured in Box 2 above related, relatives and friends may criticise a household that sends its older girls to school. However, not all respondents were affected by this gossip and, interestingly, it was the mothers of girls enrolled in school who brought up this point. A supportive mother of two teenaged girls who attended the Marefat Private Lycee stated:

Our relatives say that when a girl goes to school she becomes shameless and bad-tempered. Their daughters weave rugs, but ours don’t – they go to school.

Another mother whose 13-year-old girl is enrolled in the Hayat-i-Darsi literacy course also notes:

Sending a girl of more than 13 years of age to school is considered bad among our kinsmen, and if someone does send a girl, they insult the family. But we send our daughter anyway. My husband says that he wants his daughters to be educated and wise. He’s been to the twelfth grade himself...

In another household in which all children are enrolled in public school, a mother had also successfully assisted her fifth grade daughter in enrolling in an additional private English course:

Her father was not sending her and saying that he did not have the money for the course. So, without her father knowing, I sent her to the course. When the

⁴¹ This is very similar to the findings in the recent article by Eric Edmonds and Nina Pavcnik, “Child Labor in the Global Economy” (*Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Winter 2005) in which it is concluded that poverty is the major cause of child labour, and that parents usually do not want their children to work. When a household’s economic status improves and basic food needs are met, child labour declines.

month was complete and she needed the fees for the next month, I asked her father for money. When he asked me why I needed that money, I told him what I had done, and then he let her go...

In short, although social sanctions are powerful, in most households in this urban sample it is economic considerations that take precedent over any fears of negative gossip concerning girls' school enrolment. A caring but poor father of a 14-year-old girl not enrolled in school and two boys who were enrolled in school provided excellent illustration:

Due to the economic problems of my household my daughter doesn't go to school. If our economic situation gets better, I'll send her too. I don't want to discriminate between boys and girls...

5. Recommendations

This research has yielded insights into the livelihoods of the suburban residents of Pul-i-Khushk in District 13 of Kabul City. Based upon these findings, the following recommendations are made:

- 1. Increase knowledge and understanding of communities and households**
 - Teachers should know the local community and individual households, and they should use this knowledge not only to improve relations with those households which enrol their children, but also to reach out to those which do not.
 - Educators should increase their knowledge of local households' decision-making behaviour about school enrolment and should understand the interplay of supply and demand issues in their community.
 - Outreach activities should be planned which bear in mind the fact that in many households both mothers and fathers play active roles in enrolment decisions. Supportive parents should be encouraged to become local advocates for education.
 - To achieve these goals, teachers should receive basic training in community analysis, rapid appraisal and related participatory techniques.
- 2. Improve gender relations within and between households**
 - Male and female teachers should receive basic training in gender relations so that they can positively influence their students and families to enrol both boys and girls.
 - A specific curriculum should be developed which stresses positive gender relations in the home and society.
 - Both male and female educators should discuss local perceptions of social risk related to enrolling girls in school openly with students, parents and the community, and work with the community to change these perceptions.
 - Teachers should identify supportive households and parents, and encourage them to become local advocates in this area.
- 3. Improve communication between households and schools**
 - Teachers (male and female) should build upon parents' interest in and concern about their children's education by encouraging their constructive participation in the local school.
 - To foster trust and ownership, school visits by parents should be encouraged. Small-scale class functions and awards events, along with parent-teacher conferences, should be held. For secluded mothers, meetings and events could be held in local homes.
 - Teachers should identify interested fathers and mothers and encourage them to become local advocates in fostering positive relations between all households and the local school.

- 4. Improve communication between communities and schools**
 - Appropriate aspects of school management should be decentralised, and educators should encourage communities to become more involved in their local schools (e.g. monitoring and management). With the overall guidance of the Ministry of Education (MoE), the head teacher and local leadership should coordinate this and all interested parents should be involved. Roles of all participants should be clearly defined.
 - Fostering feelings of community ownership and commitment are critical, as is the accountability of the school to the community.
 - Local and district educators should initiate public awareness campaigns to make parents and communities aware of their new school-related opportunities and responsibilities.

- 5. Target outreach to children not enrolled in school**
 - Outreach is crucial for those children not enrolled in school, and for this to be successful educators must know the community and its households well. There is a pressing demand for non-formal activities such as home-based schooling, accelerated learning opportunities, literacy training etc.
 - Home-based literacy training should be targeted at specific groups. For example, in the case of rug-weavers (both male and female) an NGO could coordinate in this area with a supportive rug-weaving agency, along with bringing pressure on commercial ventures to improve the working conditions of children.
 - With the MoE focused on formal education, the involvement of experienced NGOs in these targeted programmes is necessary.

- 6. Develop government policies for private schools and courses**
 - In urban areas, the enrolment of students in private schools and courses is increasing rapidly, and explicit government policies (including formal registration) for these institutions are necessary.

- 7. Address the broader issue of poverty**
 - Poverty is one of the major factors inhibiting the enrolment of both boys and girls in urban and rural contexts. With parents unemployed, children and young people must often work in lieu of schooling. The creation of employment opportunities for adults is a necessity.

- 8. Develop supplementary reading for students**
 - A series of short, regionally specific, gender-sensitive stories of individual boys' and girls' lives should be developed, featuring children who are enrolled in school as well as those who are not, along with those who work and those who do not.

9. **Conduct longitudinal research on household dynamics and education outcomes**
 - Longitudinal research on the ever-changing dynamics of households, school-related decision-making, and education outcomes should be undertaken, utilising the sample households from this study.

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Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
Charahi Ansari (opposite the Insaf Hotel and Popolano's)
Shahr-e Naw, Kabul, Afghanistan
phone: +93 (0)79 608 548 email: areu@areu.org.af website: www.areu.org.af