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Afghan Children Read



Grade 1 & 2 students received new EGR materials in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces

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Executive Summary

The *Afghan Children Read* Project is a USAID-funded primary education initiative designed to improve equitable access to education in Afghanistan. The envisioned outcome of the Project is to build the capacity of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to provide an evidence-based early grade reading (EGR) program (in Dari and Pashto) in both formal and Community-Based Education (CBE) schools for students in Grades 1 to 3. This is the 2nd annual report of the Project. It covers quarter 1-4 of FY 2017 from October 2016 to September 30, 2017.

In FY 2017, *Afghan Children Read* further strengthened its collaboration to develop the capacity of MoE. This was accomplished through the consistent meetings of the MoE EGR Steering Group (SG) and the MoE Technical Working Groups (TWGs), and through the formation of the Policy Task Force (PTF); all which support the Project's activity implementation.

Specifically, the *Afghan Children Read* made progress in developing the capacity of MoE through trainings in technical areas and in providing mentoring support focused on all levels of education delivery from policy to materials development to teacher trainings. The Project developed a comprehensive Organizational Capacity Development Plan (OCDP) based on a detailed institutional capacity assessment of MoE's key departments. OCDP addressed the capacity needs of MoE for a nation-wide scale up of EGR program. Linked to OCDP, the *Afghan Children Read* conducted a policy scan to identify the need for EGR policies. The Project also proposed steps to fill existing capacity gaps such as the development of five courses comprising of 25 modules targeted at central, provincial and district level MoE staff. Additionally, the Project formed Policy Task Force to address the policy findings, which determine critical policy gaps, and formulate relevant EGR policies.

A major activity that *Afghan Children Read* successfully completed in FY2017 was the development of EGR materials for Grade 1-3 including student textbooks, student workbooks, teacher guides, continuous assessment booklets in Dari and Pashto languages. In sum, the Project printed 272,780 for Herat and Kabul, 245,500 for Nangarhar and Laghman EGR materials for students and teachers respectively. Given the challenges around book distribution that are heightened by the ongoing insecurity and corruption, the Project wanted to ensure successful delivery of materials to the recipients. To that end, the Project piloted an ICT based book tracking and distribution (BTD) system to efficiently track the distribution of EGR materials from printer to schools. In the process, the Project trained 471 principals and *motamids* to report receipt of books using SMS service. The next phase of the material development is the revision of the materials based on the feedback from the practitioners and MoE.

Simultaneously, the *Afghan Children Read* made tremendous progress in leading trainings and workshops. As per INSET rollout, *Afghan Children Read* trained the MoE Teacher Education Department (TED) and Curriculum Development department teams and engaged them in the development of training manuals for Master Training, Training of Teacher Trainers and Teacher Training. Subsequently, in collaboration with the Teacher Education Department (TED), *Afghan Children Read* trained 74 master trainers, 419 teacher trainers and 2,924 teachers. In addition, 506 principals/head teachers and 370 academic supervisors also participated in the trainings. *Afghan Children Read's* technical experts fully comprehend that trainings and workshops alone do not lead to capacity building of the teachers and other educators. To have a lasting impact, continued professional development and a support system for the teachers needs to be created. In that respect, the *Afghan Children Read* rolled out Coaching and Mentoring (C&M) trainings. These efforts trained a cadre of 69 master trainers, who trained 602 school principals/head teachers and academic supervisors as

coaches and mentors. Trained coaches and mentors began teacher observations in the pilot schools in May 2017.

During FY 2017, *Afghan Children Read* made considerable progress towards achieving its targets. This progress was documented in the new online M&E information System (M&E-IS) developed in house by *Afghan Children Read*'s M&E staff. The new system enables the project to efficiently and effectively meet the quality data reporting requirements of USAID and to track its progress. In addition, and to establish EGRA baseline for Dari and Pashto languages, *Afghan Children Read* conducted a baseline EGRA in its pilot provinces. In order to ensure accuracy and success of baseline data collection, the Project adapted baseline instruments and digitized them in Tangerine software. The data was collected on tablets and 187 MoE assessors were trained for the job. Despite challenges, Project successfully assessed 7,319 completer students of Grade 2 and Grade 3 in both Dari and Pashto languages across the three provinces- Herat (Dari), Laghman and Nangarhar (Pashto). In addition to EGRA, *Afghan Children Read* also conducted survey of pilot schools and CBEs in Herat and Kabul to obtain baseline data for performance indicators.

To meet its grants obligations in FY 2017, *Afghan Children Read* issued four Request for Proposals (RFPs). Vetting requests were submitted to Kabul Vetting Support Unit (KVSU), and two of them are in the advanced stage of evaluation, however, due to delay in receiving the KVSU approvals the grants component has faced delays in implementation.

While the project made considerable progress in YR2, the year was not without its challenges. The most notable challenge was posed by the insecurity in the selected districts for the implementation. In consultation with the Provincial Education Directorates (PEDs) and central MoE, the Project had selected 16 districts for implementation of EGR initiatives in Herat, Kabul and Nangarhar. However, due to worsened security conditions in Nangarhar, the MoE agreed to drop the in-accessible districts of Nangarhar and replace them with two districts from Laghman province. Following the approval of districts by the EGR SG, *Afghan Children Read* facilitated the PEDs and District Education Departments (DEDs) selection of 511 schools and community based education (CBEs) (245 in Herat, 46 in Kabul, 40 in Laghman and 180 in Nangarhar).

In summary, YR2 FY2017 closed with *Afghan Children Read* having made considerable progress in its goal to develop the capacity of the MoE to take ownership of EGR programs. The Project looks forward to another year of achievements and collaboration in YR3 – FY2018.

Acronyms List

AHG	Afghanistan Holding Group
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
BTD	Books Tracking and Distribution
CA	Cluster Assessment
CAG	Content Advisory Group
CBE	Community Based Education
C&M	Coaching and Mentoring
COP	Chief of Party
CREATIVE	Creative Associates International
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
DED	District Education Department
EA	Equal Access
ECCN	Education in Crisis & Conflict Network
EiE	Education in Emergencies
EGR	Early Grade Reading
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EOI	Expression of Interest
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Program
FGD	Focused Group Discussions
FLM	Feedback Loop Mechanism
FY	Fiscal Year
GA	Gender Analysis
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GIZ	German Corporation for International Cooperation
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Resources
ICA	Institutional Capacity Assessment
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
INSET	In-Service Teacher Training
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IR	Intermediate Results
KSVU	Kabul Support Vetting Unit
LAWG	Learning Assessment Working Group
LM	Language Mapping
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoE	Ministry of Education
NTA	National Technical Assistance Salary Scale
OCD	Organizational Capacity Development
OCDP	Organizational Capacity Development Plan
PED	Provincial Education Directorate
PSA	Public Service Announcement
Q	Quarter
QR	Quarterly Report
RERA	Rapid Education Risk Analysis

RFA	Request for Application
RSC-EGR	Resources, Skills, and Capacities in Early Grade Reading
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
SG	Steering Group
SMES	School Management Effectiveness and Safety Survey
TED	Teacher Education Directorate
TF	Taskforce
TLC	Teacher Learning Circles
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
TTC	Teacher Training Colleges
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YR	Year

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
ACRONYMS LIST	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS	6
LIST OF TABLES.....	7
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND GOAL	8
SUMMARY FOR THE YEAR 2 (YR2).....	9
SUCCESSES ACHIEVED	9
PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS.....	12
MONITORING & EVALUATION	39
INDICATOR MATRIX AS OF SEPTEMBER 30, 2017.....	41
PROJECT MANAGEMENT.....	47
KEY MEETINGS/FIELD TRIPS & STTAs CONDUCTED	47
ANNEXES	ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

List of Tables

Table 1: OCD Suggested Courses.....	14
Table 2: EGRA Adaptation Workshop Participants.....	18
Table 3: Summary of MoE Assessors Engaged for EGRA	19
Table 4: Students Assessed in EGRA Baseline.....	20
Table 5: Quantity of EGR Material printed for Herat and Kabul (Vol. I & 2).....	27
Table 6: Quantity of EGR Materials printed for Nangarhar and Laghman	28
Table 7: Quantity of EGR Materials Distributed in Herat and Kabul	28
Table 8: Afghan Children Read Pilot Coverage for Cohort-I	30
Table 9: INSET Training of Master Trainers.....	31
Table 10: INSET Training of Teacher Trainers.....	32
Table 11: Cumulative Number of Participants in Teachers Training.....	32
Table 12: ToT for Coaching and Mentoring.....	34
Table 13: Coaching & Mentoring Training Participants.....	35
Table 14: Social Mobilization ToT Participants.....	37

Program Description and Goal

Overview of the Program

Afghan Children Read is a USAID-funded primary education initiative designed to improve equitable access to education and generate measurable reading outcomes for girls and boys in Afghanistan. *Afghan Children Read* will 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) for students in grades 1 to 3 in both formal and Community-Based Education (CBE) schools. Strengthened skills, systems, models and materials will also enable future development of additional local mother-tongue languages into the national reading curriculum.

This Project will build upon the foundation laid through the *Resources, Skills and Capacities in Early Grade Reading Project* (EGR Survey Project) also funded by USAID. The EGR Survey project conducted preliminary assessments, research and survey of the current climate for a national reading program and the results will shape the focus and design of *Afghan Children Read* project. *Afghan Children Read* will also complement and leverage other key USG and donor education-related investments in Afghanistan, including the CBE activity implemented by UNICEF, in-service and pre-service teacher training funded by GIZ, the coming EQUIP III (Education Quality Improvement Program) to be funded through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), and other donor investments.

The *Afghan Children Read* project period extends from April 6, 2016 through April 5, 2021. This project is contracted under an Advancing Basic Education: Access for All Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity task order. The task order results are intended to contribute to achieving USAID's strategic educational goals to:

1. Meet targets under Goals 1 and 3 of the USAID Education Strategy, 2011- achieving direct outcomes in reading, while complementing existing investments in CBE and non-formal education.
2. Minimize the development of parallel systems in the education sector by providing technical assistance and partnerships with key MoE counterparts and working through host country systems to the extent possible, resulting in a national program that the GfRMA MoE can scale up both financially and technically through the ARTF.
3. Strengthen the policies, systems, and resources that are available to the MoE, particularly in the area of EGR.
4. Foster positive gender norms, including a highlighted attention to female students and teachers, who are the least likely to have access to schooling in Afghanistan.

The Project is implemented by the consortium consisting of Creative Associates International, Inc. (Creative), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Afghanistan Holding Group (AHG) and two niche partners SIL LEAD, Inc. and Equal Access International (EA). Creative is responsible for the overall management of the team in meeting the expectations of the *Afghan Children Read* contract. On 3 July 2017 USAID made the decision to cancel the Afghanistan Holding Group (AHG)'s subcontract under *Afghan Children Read*. In direct consultation with USAID, Creative decided that the most viable approach for filling the gap created by the cancellation of the AHG's subcontract was for Creative to take over the roles previously assumed by AHG.

Summary for the Year 2 (YR2)

Successes Achieved

The *Afghan Children Read's* YR2 successfully established an evidence-based EGR program in Afghanistan. The establishment of the EGR program was achieved through a very dynamic process of capacity building for relevant MoE staff and through a full partnership and engagement of MoE departments. The following six major achievements provide a brief description of the *Afghan Children Read* successes in YR2 as key milestones for the establishment of an evidence-based EGR program in Afghanistan:

MoE's buy in, leadership and ownership of the EGR Program:

- EGR Steering Group held regular meetings to provide support and leadership for program implementation. The EGR-SG approved and endorsed all major decisions about Project design and implementation. Technical Working Groups became more active and involved in their respective thematic areas/IRs. The Project, with MoE leadership, conducted visits to Nangarhar province and organized orientation for the PED and DEDs, and finalized the selection of pilot districts and schools.
- H.E. Deputy Minister General Education presented the Project at CIES 2017 along with USAID and *Afghan Children Read* representatives.
- USAID, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE), held an official launch of *Afghan Children Read*. The ceremony was attended by Her Excellency Rula Ghani, the First Lady of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the U.S. Embassy Special Chargé Affairs, Ambassador Hugo Llorens; the Deputy Minister of Education, Honorable Rahil Mohammad Formuly; the USAID Mission Director to Afghanistan, Mr. Herbert Smith, Ministry officials, representatives of UN agencies, heads of national and international educational organizations, civil society and other stakeholders from the Education sector.

Completion of the Organizational Capacity Development Plan (OCDP)

- The project completed development of Organization Capacity Development Plan (OCDP). This involved a rigorous consultative process engaging the TWGs and EGR-SG.
- The OCDP prioritizes five courses with 25 modules covering major capacities required for effective and efficient planning and implementation of EGR program at the national level.

Initiation of EGR-related rigorous research and policy development

- *Afghan Children Read* conducted the EGR Policy workshop led by Creative's Director of Education in Conflict Practice Area. The EGR policy reform dialogue started with formation of Policy Reform TF and approved later by H.E. Deputy Minister General Education.
- The Project completed a scan of EGR related policies. The scan reviewed more than 100 MoE policy/procedural documents.
- The Project completed operational research including Rapid Education Risk Assessment & Gender Analysis, Cluster Assessment, Feedback Loop Mechanism, EMIS assessment and produced the first draft of language mapping research.

Completion of EGR baseline data collection

- *Afghan Children Read* successfully completed the EGRA baseline for Dari and Pashto languages in collaboration with the MoE. The Project conducted two EGRA instrument adaptation workshops for Dari and Pashto respectively. For EGRA data collection, the Project built the capacity of 187

MoE assessors from the MoE and engaged 138 of them to collect data from a sample of 145 school and 51 CBEs in Herat, and 134 schools and 70 CBEs in Nangarhar and Laghman.

Development of the pilot G1 to G3 instructional material

- The Curriculum Development and Teacher Education departments' team completed the development of G 1-3 Pashto and Dari materials (Student book, Teacher guide, Student work book and Continuous Assessment book) with technical lead and support from international experts. The draft materials went through field testing followed by an editorial review. The MoE established an Editorial Committee that thoroughly reviewed the field-tested materials from religious, cultural, gender and pedagogical perspectives. Grades 1 and 2 materials were finalized first and development of Grade 3 materials for both the languages followed.
- The Project's curriculum development team designed a qualitative evaluation of Grades 1 and 2 materials taught in the focused schools and CBEs in Herat and Kabul since March 2017. The MoE's curriculum development teams actively participated and conducted the material evaluation in both the provinces after receiving training from the Project's international experts.

Establishment EGR pilot in four provinces

- The Project during YR2 established the EGR pilot in the four provinces of Herat, Kabul, Nangarhar and Laghman. Based in the results of the enrollment survey that was conducted during Q4, EGR pilot is established in 252 public school and 39 CBEs in the provinces of Herat and Kabul. Annex 3 provides the GIS data for the 291 public schools and CBEs in Herat and Kabul based on the data collected for the enrollment survey that have employed GPS technology to verify the spatial data for schools and CBEs.
- *Afghan Children Read* successfully printed and distributed EGR materials (student textbooks, student workbook, teacher guide and continuous assessment booklet) to cohort 1 pilot schools and CBEs in Herat, Kabul, Laghman and Nangarhar provinces with an average cost of \$3.48 USD per student. In Herat and Kabul 59,342 students and 1,367 teachers received the EGR materials. Distribution of materials to schools and CBEs in Laghman and Nangarhar is in progress. The Project successfully piloted Books Tracking and Distribution system. Based on user-friendly technological solutions, the BTDS system tracks the books from printer to schools with mid-way tracking at provincial level. The MoE has shown great interest in further improving the system and adapting it for their books distribution.
- The Project collaborated with TED and PEDs to train a cadre of 74 master trainers as part of its INSET initiatives. The trained master trainers conducted Training of 419 Teacher Trainers (ToT). The Project trained 2924 early grade teachers in Herat, Kabul, Laghman and Nangarhar through the training of teachers. Trainings were conducted at suitable locations in respective districts. In addition to teachers, 506 principals/head teachers and 370 academic supervisor and PED official also participated in the trainings based on their anticipated role in coaching and mentoring.
- The Project launched Coaching & Mentoring (C&M) as part of in-school teacher support mechanism. ToT for C&M was conducted and 69 MoE officials were trained as master trainers. Master trainers conducted training for coaches and mentors, and trained 602 school principals/head teachers and 88 academic supervisors. Trained coaches and mentors began teacher observations and provided support to teachers for the new EGR materials. Since EGR focused C&M is new to the education system in Afghanistan, it will take time to fully integrate into the system.
- In collaboration with the Social Mobilization Directorate of MoE, the Project developed the Social Mobilization Strategy for community and parental engagement to support EGR. The strategy was approved after several reviews and consultations.

- *Afghan Children Read* also produced 15 public service announcements (PSAs). The production involved rigorous consultations with the MoE and the Content Advisory Group (CAG).
- The Project completed development of Community and School Management Shura Guide in line with approved social mobilization strategy. This guide will be used in capacity building interventions at schools and community levels. The Project conducted a four-day ToT for provincial social mobilizers. 23 MoE staff from Social Mobilization department from Herat, Kabul, Laghman and Nangarhar participated. These trained staff will conduct training of social mobilizers in their respective provinces.
- *Afghan Children Read* advertised RFAs for four grants. Evaluation for two grants on awareness raising (provincial and national) were completed and submitted to Kabul Vetting Support Unit (KVSU) for approval.
- Annex 4 represent a list of deliverables, reports and material that *Afghan Children Read* developed during YR2.

Key Contributors to Project Success:

- Consistent meetings and coordination with other education players and UN agencies created synergies and laid the groundwork for smoother activity implementation. In the end, this contributes to the sustainability of the EGR program.
- The MoE TWGs and the extended meetings were effective in supporting progress towards achieving the Project's technical tasks.
- Participation of the MoE senior officials in joint provincial visits to Herat and Nangarhar added credibility and value to the events and led to open and constructive discussions.
- Events such as the *Afghan Children Read* Orientation Seminars (Central, Provincial and District) increased the Project buy-in at MoE and resulted in a high level of support and engagement in project interventions.
- Field tests were critical to informing the overall material design and ensured that the materials and time on task were contextualized for the classrooms.
- Coordination with the CBE stakeholders, along with the MoE, was crucial to effective implementation of activities in CBEs. This included understanding of local realities, variations in standards of education delivery, and use of new materials.
- When it came to securing enough female participation in trainings of Master Trainers and Trainers of Teachers, the Project sought the support of the Director of the TED.
- Instability is a persistent challenge in implementation of the Project. The Project has been flexible in reshaping implementation strategies and approaches to counter challenges posed by volatile security conditions, especially in Nangarhar.
- The Ministry has the human resources and the capacity to implement such assessments and surveys successfully when projects like *Afghan Children Read* provide the technical expertise and proper training.
- *Afghan* printing services have the capacity and the willingness to deliver textbooks at the school level while meeting quality standards.
- Illustrations in EGR materials had a pedagogical purpose and were developed only after the edited stories were drafted. The Ministry has trained illustrators with the capacity to develop all the illustrations.
- A template for each product/story/lesson was developed before the activity writing began. The process for writing is as follows: team members write the lessons in the template; the editing team checks the lessons; the typist types the lessons; the lessons are edited upon completion of the typing; and finally, the layout is approved by the Deputy Minister of General Education.
- *Afghan Children Read* had the capacity to respond quickly to the growing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees from neighboring countries.

Project Implementation Progress

Intermediate Result Specific Reporting

IR I	The Ministry of Education, from the national, provincial, district, and school levels, is able to implement an evidence-based Early Grade Reading curriculum and instruction program that benefits students in both formal and CBE classes
IR I.1	Capacity of MoE, at national, provincial, and district levels built to develop, plan/budget for, manage, implement, and monitor an early grade reading curriculum and instruction program

Progress achieved in YR2

Steering Group and Technical Work Groups:

- Afghan Children Read** held 11 meetings with the MoE Early Grade Reading Steering Group (EGR-SG). H.E. Deputy Minister for General Education chaired the meetings and General Directors attended. The meetings focused on matters pertaining to EGR and implementation of the *Afghan Children Read*. Key decisions and steps taken by the EGR-SG was as follows:
 - Finalization of the pilot provinces and districts for the project implementation
 - Approval of the Project workplans
 - Approval of Technical Working Groups for the Project
 - Approval of the EGR instructional material
 - Approval of the teacher professional development modalities and capacity building
 - Endorsement of EGRA baseline approach and design for *Afghan Children Read*
 - Approval of the OCDP and its implementation plan
 - Decision on EGR rollout of the nation-wide scale-up
 - Approval on different strategies and plans including social mobilization strategy for *Afghan Children Read*
 - Approval on formation of various TFs and working groups including EGR policy development TF and content advisory group
 - Participation in the Project's 2018 work planning retreat and acknowledgement of an agreement with the subsequent work plan submitted to USAID.
- Afghan Children Read*, with the approval from H.E. Deputy Minister General Education, invited the USAID Resources, Skills and Capacities in Early Grade Reading (RSC-EGR) project to attend the EGR-SG to ensure more synergies and cohesion among USAID's various efforts on EGR in Afghanistan.
- The project continued meetings of TWGs established in YR1. TWGs met, jointly and separately, to discuss technical aspect of their respective thematic areas of the EGR model. Specifically, the TWGs focused on and accomplished the following:
 - Agreed upon five-year overview of the *Afghan Children Read*
 - Built shared understanding on five-year vision of the *Afghan Children Read* Project



Materials Development and Teacher Training TWG meeting

- Finalized the formation and ToRs for each TWG
- Reviewed the Organizational Capacity Development Plan (OCDP) framework
- Reviewed the Policy Scan results
- Discussed modes of material distribution.
- Defined social mobilization strategy in support of EGR
- Developed EGR curriculum
- Determined the scope of teacher professional education and capacity building
- *Afghan Children Read* leadership held meetings with H.E. Deputy Minister General Education and discussed the plans for implementation in Pashto-speaking targeted pilot provinces and districts for the upcoming academic year beginning in September 2017. The Project and the MoE Leadership agreed that:
 - Piloting the EGR model requires interaction and follow-up with schools, DED and PED officials, which entails intensive training and assessment efforts. If the security situation in selected areas will not allow for such interaction and accessibility, it will not be possible to implement as planned and to allow for *Afghan Children Read's* capacity building approach to take effect.
 - Project Risk Managers conducted Risk assessments, which indicated that security conditions in areas of initially selected pilot districts were not suitable for implementation. However, the risk assessment of adjoining districts in Laghman and Kunar provinces indicated that some of these districts accessible in terms of security.
 - The MoE and Project leadership reached the conclusion to drop the inaccessible districts of Nangarhar and replace them with two districts from Laghman - Mehtarlam Baba and Qarghayee.

Organization Capacity Development:

- *Afghan Children Read* developed a rapid OCD assessment. It outlined the capacity needs of the associated entities and/or individuals with relevant roles and responsibilities. The OCD assessment, led by an international expert, also ensured relevancy of capacity building inputs at central, provincial and district levels. Findings of this assessment were foundational in developing the OCDP. The assessment was completed with the involvement of the entire MoE leadership through joint meetings of TWGs and individual interviews with General Directors.
- Based on the rapid OCD assessment, the Project developed the OCD framework and strategy, which the EGR-SG approved.
- The project developed OCD plan based on approved OCD framework and strategy. The OCDP outlines five major courses essential for building the MoE's capacity to plan and implement an effective EGR program. Each course is further divided into specific modules. Table-I below summarizes the OCDP suggested courses:

Table-I: OCDP Suggested Courses

Course	Modules	Course delivery
EGR Orientation-Planning, Implementation and Analysis for Managers (covers 5 modules)	-Learning materials -Teacher training -Budget planning -Learner assessment -Data interpretation	November 2017
Teaching reading and Writing in early Grades (covers 6 modules)	-Curriculum -Assessment and research -Teaching reading methodology -Coaching -Community mobilization -Social and emotional learning	November 2017
Developing Learning Materials for Early Grades (covers 3 modules)	-Designing -Production and distribution -Monitoring and validation	January 2018
Planning the Implementation of Early Grade Reading (covers 3 modules)	-Education reform -Budget and finance -Monitoring	February 2018
Research and Analysis (covers 4 modules)	-Principles of research, -Sampling and data collection -Analysis and reporting of learner performance -Utilization of data to inform education service delivery	April 2018

- The Project checked the OCDP framework for consistency with the National Education Strategic Plan-III and finalized it in close consultation with the MoE.
- MoE's Deputy Minister General Education, along with USAID Afghanistan and *Afghan Children Read* representatives, presented the Project at the CIES 2017 conference. The panel titled "Ingredients of Successful Partnering in Afghanistan: Laying the Foundations for Success in Scaling-up Improved Teaching and Learning "Presentation was annexed to Y2 Q2 report, discussed lessons learned from the design phase, start-up and early achievements of *Afghan Children Read*.

Official Launch of Afghan Children Read:

- USAID in collaboration with MoE, held the official launch of *Afghan Children Read* Project. The launch ceremony was attended by First Lady of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Her Excellency Rula Ghani; the U.S. Embassy Special Chargé Affairs, Ambassador Hugo Llorens; the Deputy Minister of Education, Honorable Rahil Mohammad Formuly; the USAID Mission Director to Afghanistan, Mr. Herbert Smith, Ministry officials, representatives of UN agencies, heads of national and international educational organizations, civil society and other stakeholders from the Education sector were in attendance Both Her Excellency, the First Lady, and the U.S. Ambassador emphasized the value of and their commitment to the



Official Launch of Afghan Children Read

Project, which represents an important step towards improving the quality of education for Afghan children. The honorable speakers emphasized the Project's goal to improve early grade reading skills for primary level students, both boys and girls, in Grades 1-3 in formal and community based education (CBE) schools. Her Excellency, the First Lady demonstrated her commitment to the Project by meeting with the COP twice since the launch to discuss Project activities and to re-emphasize her support and interest in ensuring its success.

MoE and Afghan Children Read Joint Visits to Pilot Provinces:

- As part of the *Afghan Children Read* Project initiation, the Project team and MoE leadership conducted a visit to Nangarhar province and facilitated an orientation on the Project and discussed the selection of districts and schools for Cohort 2 of Project implementation. The final selection of targeted pilot schools and districts focused on secure districts and areas in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces as priority provinces. Kunar province will be kept as a second option. USAID agreed that *Afghan Children Read* would implement in the majority of schools in seven districts in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces for the upcoming cohort beginning in September 2017. Other districts and areas in the two provinces will be added later depending on future security risk assessments.



ACR provincial team along with MoE DED staff make checks in Karukh district of Herat.

Challenges (including issues regarding security, gender, inclusion, and community concerns)

- In the fourth quarter, the risk assessment of Nangarhar province prepared by the Project's Risk Manager confirmed that the security situation in some of the selected districts in Nangarhar do not allow for sound implementation of *Afghan Children Read's* EGR approach.
- To improve the productivity of the TWG meetings, the MoE needed to play a stronger and more focused leadership role to set agendas for discussions and plans for actions. TWG meetings, in some instances, were not as productive as planned due to lack of planning and focused leadership from MoE.
- The increasing insecurity and the subsequent demonstrations in Kabul City during the third quarter hindered project activities and several meetings with the MoE officials, including TWG meetings.

Associated Actions

- Two districts from Laghman provinces were included in pilot implementation plan for Pashto targeted areas.
- *Afghan Children Read* leadership approached MoE General Directors to assign coordinators for the TWGs who were responsible for the coordination of the TWG agenda, prioritize and facilitate discussions, communications and to follow up on action points.
- Most of the meetings that were cancelled during the demonstrations were rescheduled and held afterwards.

IR I	The Ministry of Education, from the national, provincial, district, and school levels, is able to implement an evidence-based Early Grade Reading curriculum and instruction program that benefits students in both formal and CBE classes
IR I.2	Policies, standards, and benchmarks that support improved early grade reading instruction in public and community based education classrooms developed and adopted

Progress achieved in YR2

EGR Policy development:

- The Project completed a scan of EGR related policies at the MoE along with the OCDP assessment. The EGR policy scan covered a desk review of more than 100 MoE policy/procedural documents mainly including National Education Law, National Education Strategic Plans, Departmental procedures, guidelines, SOPs and legislations, and resulted in development of a matrix that outlined EGR in the administrative and legislative documents of MoE.
- *Afghan Children Read* conducted the EGR Policy workshop with Creative's Education in Conflict Director leading the workshop. The overall direction for the EGR policy development was discussed and policy needs were identified. The EGR policy reform dialogue began with an acknowledgement for a Policy TF composed of MOE and *Afghan Children Read* staff with the Policy and Planning Department of the MOE serving as the coordinating body (Presentation was annexed to Y2 Q2 report). H.E. the Deputy Minister for General Education subsequently approved the TF, which includes members of MoE's relevant departments and *Afghan Children Read* leadership.
- *Afghan Children Read* held a policy coordination team meeting led by the MoE's Policy and Planning Advisor including Planning Department representatives, to finalize the task force schedule, its TOR, and the plan of action towards identifying policy gaps and priorities, and developing the draft EGR policy.
- *Afghan Children Read* organized an EGR Policy TF Orientation Workshop, jointly led by the MoE Policy and Planning Department. The workshop focused on orienting the TF members with *Afghan Children Read*'s goals & objectives, the importance of an EGR program as a major quality education strategy, and approaches for policy development. The TF initiated dialogue on determining the policy gaps, prioritizing the scale-up and institutionalization of the EGR program.
- *Afghan Children Read* held two EGR Policy TF workshops which involved the MoE Policy and Planning department. The workshops focused on reviewing the policy gap analysis report produced by the project. The Policy TF members identified policy gaps, classified the policy areas and assessed the policy options and statements during the workshops.
- On the request of TF members, *Afghan Children Read*'s policy experts conducted a comparative scan of EGR policies in other countries.

EGR Operational Research:

- *Afghan Children Read* conducted operational research to inform the program design, technical approach and implementation strategies. These included:
 - Rapid Education Risk Assessment and Gender Analysis
 - Cluster Assessment
 - Feedback Loop Mechanism Assessment

- Language Mapping
- All of the above listed research reports were submitted with the respective quarterly reports to the USAID, except Language Mapping. The Language Mapping data analysis and report is being finalized at the time of this writing.
- *Afghan Children Read* also held two meetings with the Research and Evaluation (R&E) unit of Policy and Planning Department. *Afghan Children Read* and R&E unit worked out the list of potential research and studies which could best inform both *Afghan Children Read* and the MoE in planning and implementation of a quality EGR program as well as to inform the policy related initiatives planned for nation-wide EGR programing.

Challenges (including issues regarding security, gender, inclusion, and community concerns)

- MoE attendance at the Policy TF meetings has been inconsistent; in part because the MoE's Policy Unit is understaffed to deal with the substantial number of policy related events that are taking place at the MoE. This has affected implementation of the EGR Policy Development Action Plan and caused delays in the process.
- The MoE does not have a centralized system to keep track of the policy documents, manuals, guidelines, legislations and other policy related documents. This has made it difficult to identify if any document is outdated or no longer applicable. Additionally, *Afghan Children Read* observed that many policy or procedural documents were still in effect despite being voided or superseded by others.
- For security reasons, data collection for operational research was challenging in some districts in Herat and Nangarhar.
- EGR standards and benchmarks were not set as anticipated in the YR2 workplan. The Project received the National EGRA results late in YR2 and its own EGRA baseline results were not analyzed.

Associated Actions

- To ensure participation, the *Afghan Children Read* team worked closely with the MoE to organize TF meetings in a manner that is convenient for members. Moreover, the MoE focal point for EGR policy TF was requested to discuss the absence issue at a senior level.
- The *Afghan Children Read* team remained in close coordination with the MoE to discuss alternatives to keep the process of policy development on track and avoid delays. To this end, MoE and the Project have agreed upon having pre-event coordination meetings to ensure that TF events don't overlap with other priorities of the Policy and Planning Department.
- The Project team worked closely with Policy TF members to identify outdated and voided policies/procedures to ensure that EGR policy development process uses only up-to-date and active document.
- The schools or communities in insecure areas were replaced with schools in secure areas.
- The Project will work with the MoE to set benchmarks and standards in YR3. This is in the YR3 workplan.



Policy Dialogue Taskforce Workshop

IR I	The Ministry of Education, from the national, provincial, district, and school levels, is able to implement an evidence-based Early Grade Reading curriculum and instruction program that benefits students in both formal and CBE classes
IR 1.3	National and sub-national early grade reading (EGR) assessments, data collection and analysis systems established

Progress achieved in YR2

EGRA Baseline for Dari and Pashto:

- *Afghan Children Read* started planning for the baseline in Q1 of YR2 and scheduled EGRA baselines for Dari in Herat in April 2017 and for Pashto in Nangarhar in October 2017. For conducting EGRA, the Project used standard EGRA procedures and methods
- In addition to obtaining EGRA instruments from the RSC-EGR Project, *Afghan Children Read* prepared and advertised the RFP for recruitment of an external assessment firm to lead the EGRA baseline. However, the response to RFP was not encouraging. Therefore, the Project decided to lead the rest of all EGRA processes except review of



EGRA adaptation group working session

sampling framework, data analysis and report. A new RFP with reduced scope (review sampling, analysis and reporting) was advertised and American Institute of Research (AIR) was selected through a competitive process.

The EGRA instruments adapted for the baseline EGRA included:

- *Student Tests*
- *Student Questionnaire*
- *Teacher Questionnaire*
- *Principal Questionnaire*

- The Project engaged its international reading expert/STTA for EGRA instrument adaptation. Two 5-days EGRA adaptation workshops were organized in Kabul (for Dari in March 2017 and for Pashto in August 2017). To adapt the EGRA instruments, the Project engaged MoE officials from TED, Curriculum Development and Academic Supervision departments for both languages. Led by *Afghan Children Read's*

international reading expert, the MoE teams adapted the EGRA instruments developed by RSC-EGR for national EGRA in Afghanistan. Following adaptation of instruments, the Project digitized the instrument on Tangerine and field tested them in schools in Kabul. Based on field testing, the digitized instruments were finalized on Tangerine.

Table 2 – EGRA Adaptation Workshop Participants

EGRA Adaptation Workshops			
Department	Male	Female	Total
School Teachers	2	3	5
Academic Supervision Department	14	0	14
Teacher Education Department	1	1	2
Curriculum Development Department	3	2	5
Total	20	6	26

- For executing EGRA in the field, *Afghan Children Read* capitalized on the MoE's existing capacities instead of hiring private sector assessors from the market. For the Dari EGRA, the MoE nominated 110 assessors and for Pashto 95 assessors to participate in a 5-day assessors' training. Assessors trainings were held in Kabul in March 2017 for Dari and September 2017 for Pashto led by *Afghan Children Read*'s international reading experts. Out of the trained batches, 63 assessors for Dari and 72 assessors for Pashto were selected to conduct EGRA in the field. Assessors were comprised of MoE officials from central as well as provincial levels; 50% of assessors were from Dari speaking provinces and 50% were from Pashto speaking provinces.

Table-3: Summary of MoE Assessors Trained and Engaged for EGRA

Province	Department	Male	Female	Total
EGRA Dari				
Kabul (Center)	Academic Supervision	58	4	62
	Curriculum Department	0	2	2
	Teacher Education Directorate	0	1	1
Herat	Teacher Training College	11	3	14
	Provincial Education Directorate	10	4	14
	Total (Dari)	79	14	93
EGRA Pashto				
Kabul (Center)	Academic Supervision	21	2	23
	Curriculum Department	3	1	4
	Teacher Education Directorate	10	0	10
Nangarhar	Teacher Training College	5	0	5
	Provincial Education Directorate	3	1	4
	Provincial Academic Supervision	2	0	2
Laghman	Teacher Training College	0	9	9
	Provincial Education Directorate	27	0	27
	Provincial Academic Supervision	10	0	10
	Total (Pashto)	81	13	94
Grand Total		160	27	187

- Afghan Children Read* went through a rigorous consultative process for EGRA baseline planning including:
 - Briefings with MoE EGR-SG and USAID on EGRA design, sample and methodology
 - Meetings with Academic Supervision Department, TED, PEDs and provincial TTCs for nominations and selection of assessors
 - Consultation with PEDs on accessible districts for EGRA sampling and data collection
 - Coordination with PED and DED in Kabul for selection of schools for assessors' practicum
 - Reviews of sampling framework by a third-party psychometrician
 - Reviews of sample schools/CBEs by the project security teams and risk managers
 - Coordination with CBE implementers at provincial level
 - Meetings with PEDs and DEDs on sample schools/CBEs to confirm secure accessibility to those sample schools/CBE, and to adjust as required
 - Pre-data collection orientation with principals of sample schools to ensure smooth process of EGRA in schools

- Meetings and orientation with the provincial and district Academic supervisors to ensure understanding on spot checking data collection
- Regular progress review meetings with Academic Supervision Department and PEDs were held to report on data collection status updates
- H.E. Deputy Minister General Education nominated the Director of Academic Supervision to support and monitor the EGRA data collection process in the field. The nominated Director remained in Herat and Nangarhar throughout the EGRA data collection and jointly led the process with the project M&E team.
- To ensure the data quality, *Afghan Children Read* provincial monitoring teams and MoE Academic Supervisors from respective provinces jointly conducted visits to 100% sample schools. In total, over 400 spot check visits were jointly conducted. EGRA was conducted with completer students of Grade 2 and Grade 3.
- *Afghan Children Read* successfully conducted data collection for EGRA baseline in Herat (for Dari) and in Nangarhar and Laghman (for Pashto). As per baseline design agreed with the USAID, the project conducted data collection at the beginning of school year in Herat (early April) and Nangarhar and Laghman (mid-September). A strong sampling framework was used for EGRA baseline.



EGRA data collection for Dari in Zinda Jan district of Herat

Table-4: Students Assessed for EGRA Baseline

Grade	School			CBE			Grand Total
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	
For Dari Language (Herat)							
Grade-2 Students	730	720	1,450	172	218	390	1,840
Grade-3 Students	841	582	1,423	170	142	312	1,735
Total (Dari)	1,571	1,302	2,873	342	360	702	3,575
For Pashto Language (Nangarhar and Laghman)							
Grade-2 Students	616	738	1354	479	489	968	2322
Grade-3 Students	593	727	1320	75	27	102	1422
Total (Pashto)	1209	1465	2674	554	516	1070	3744
Grand Total	2,780	2,767	5,547	896	876	1772	7,319

- On completion of data collection in Herat, *Afghan Children Read's* M&E team performed a thorough data cleaning to ensure quality of data. *Afghan Children Read* provided cleaned data for Dari EGRA to AIR for analysis in August 2017. Data analysis for Dari is in progress. Data collection for Pashto was completed on September 27, 2017 and data cleaning for Pashto EGRA is in progress.

Integration of EGR Indicators into EMIS:

- *Afghan Children Read* conducted assessment of Education Management Information System (EMIS) with focus on EGR during YR2. The assessment process went ahead in close

coordination with EMIS and consultation with the Education System Management & Learning Assessment (ESMLA) TWG. The review covered the EMIS system design and structure, operationalization, data processing, and reporting.

- *Afghan Children Read* shared the draft report of EMIS review with the ESMLA TWG members for their inputs. The review report provides an insight of the system and can inform improvements in EMIS to inform planning, policy development and implementation.

Challenges (including issues regarding security, gender, inclusion, and community concerns)

- Some of TTC selected assessors for data collection in Herat were reluctant to go to schools in far districts.
- A number of districts in Herat, Nangarhar and Laghman were not included in random sample selection for EGRA data collection because of security conditions. Even PEDs were reluctant to send their officials to those districts.
- Tablets provided by another USAID project for EGRA data collection were of inferior quality and not compatible for EGRA data collection. Many of these tablets crashed during testing of instruments and assessors' training.
- Available CBEs with the required grade level remained a major challenge. There were not enough CBEs with Grade-4 beginners (i.e. Grade-3 completers) in both Dari and Pashto.
- MoE did not have the reliable data on CBEs. The initial PED data included many CBEs, which were either closed or handed over to government and were technically no longer CBEs.
- Some of CBEs were in highly insecure villages where accessibility was not possible.
- Due to the small number of CBEs in pilot provinces, assessing CBE students in a comparable size to school students was challenging. As shown in Table 4, the CBE EGRA sample was significantly smaller than the formal school EGRA sample.

Associated Actions

- The *Afghan Children Read* team and Director Academic Supervision met with TED provincial Director Herat and explained the impact of refusal on the project from assessors to travel to far districts and reiterated the MoE's commitment to a successful implementation of the EGRA baseline. The TED provincial Director issued orders to all such assessors resolving the problem to a considerable extent.
- In close consultation with PEDs, the Project selected only those districts for the EGRA baseline where the security situation permitted access for data collection.
- *Afghan Children Read* immediately procured new quality tablets with higher specifications.
- For the Dari EGRA in Herat, all accessible CBEs with active Grade-4 were covered instead of a sample.
- The *Afghan Children Read*'s provincial teams coordinated closely with the CBE implementers to get updated numbers on active CBEs with the required grades levels
- The Project replaced, and in some cases dropped CBEs in highly insecure areas where access was not possible.
- To cover more CBE students, the Project assessed 15 students per CBE class compared to 10 students per class in schools.

IR 2	An evidence-based Early Grade Reading curriculum and instruction program piloted that improves early grade reading outcomes for first through third grade public and CBE students
IR 2.1	Evidence-based early grade reading curriculum and instruction program developed

Progress achieved in YR2

Development & Field Testing of Pilot EGR Materials:

- *Afghan Children Read* accomplished the challenging task of EGR materials development for Grade 1 to 3 in Dari and Pashto languages applying the rapid production model (RPM). The set of EGR materials for each grade include a student textbook, a student workbook, a teacher guide and a continuous assessment booklet. The curriculum development team of MoE comprised of 55 material writers, designers and illustrators from the Curriculum Development and Teacher Education departments developed the materials with the technical leadership and support from international experts.
- The curriculum development team completed Grade 1 and 2 materials in a first phase and Grade 3 materials in a second phase. The team field tested developed materials in Herat and Kabul and improved them based on field test findings. Field testing comprised of the following activities:
 - Orientation and a brief training for 24 assigned teachers to perform the field testing on the major teaching and learning aspects of EGR model
 - Classroom observations of 36 Grades 1, 2 and 3 teachers during lessons delivery
 - Focus group discussions (FGDs) with 30 education leaders and teachers on their experiences with teaching the sample materials;
 - FGDs with parents, shuras and religious leader from the communities of schools where the materials were tested.
- With the support of international experts, the material development teams also incorporated gender considerations and healing classroom approaches into newly developed materials. International experts on SEL oriented the material development teams on SEL approaches and how those approaches could be incorporated into the new EGR materials.



Orientation session for grade 3 reading materials development

Editorial Review and Refinement of Pilot EGR Materials:

- The editorial board, established by the MoE, rigorously reviewed the materials from religious, cultural, gender and pedagogical perspectives. The board comprised seven experts representing culture, gender, religion, pedagogy, quality story writing and accuracy of the two

languages. The board suggested improvements which were incorporated into the final materials.

- The Project submitted the reviewed pilot materials to the MoE for approval; Grades 1 and 2 in December 2016 and Grade 3 in June 2017.
- In January 2017, the MOE provided feedback and advised the need for a second round of refinement and revision of the draft Grade 1 and 2 materials. To comply with MoE's recommendation for a second review, the Project:
 - Established an editorial group of Dari and Pashto writers comprising of eight members, including two advisors from MOE.
 - Established scientific principles for the review of reading materials and set the criteria for materials refinement.
 - Reached an agreement to refine and deliver materials in two phases in order not to miss the opening of the winter climate school year (March 2017 in Herat and Kabul). The material development team, jointly with the editorial group, refined and delivered materials covering the lessons in Weeks 1-8 by 3rd week of April (FY17 Q3) in 1st phase, and began refinement of the rest of lessons (Week 9-28) and completed the full set of EGR Grade 1 and 2 materials in late May 2017. Based on the MoE's feedback from the 2nd phase of refinement, the Project decided that the size of the student book and teacher's guide should remain at A4 and the workbook for the students at A5. The layout of the student book, teacher's guide and student workbook was also changed.
- *Afghan Children Read's* international experts conducted a scope and sequence workshop for Grade 3 during which the Project and MOE team developed the themes and the scope and sequence for Grade 3 materials.
- TED teams were part of EGR material development process right from the inception. After completion of initial draft materials (student textbooks and student workbooks), *Afghan Children Read's* international experts trained 26 experts from TED and Curriculum Development departments on the development of the teacher training manual. The teams were provided with the teacher training framework to facilitate the training manual development process.

Evaluation of Pilot EGR Materials:

- Since Grade 1 and 2 materials were in schools in Kabul and Herat for almost the whole academic year, the Project began the process of evaluating the materials for refinement and revision in Q4. The Project's international experts developed the concept note and implementation plan for materials evaluation and shared it with the Deputy Minister General Education and General Director Curriculum Development department.
- The Project developed tools for material evaluation and conducted a three-day training for MoE data collectors from TED and Curriculum departments on data



Story writing session for Pashto Grade 3 reading materials

collection using the material evaluation tool. The evaluation process in Kabul and Herat included:

- Classroom observation
- Teacher interviews
- FGDs with students
- PED/DED FGDs
- FGDs with Shura, parents and religious leaders Kabul and Herat provinces
- Afghan Children Read analyzed the data and the assessment report will be completed at the beginning of YR3.
- Following the tools development and training of MoE data collectors, the Project's technical team conducted evaluations in the field and began analyzing the data and drafting materials evaluation report.

Challenges (including issues regarding security, gender, inclusion, and community concerns)

- Convincing the MoE to bring diacritics back into the textbooks after almost thirty years required great discussion and presentation of evidence as to why this was the appropriate way forward.
- Time allocation for reading is comparatively shorter than the standard time allocation - particularly in triple-shift schools. In such schools, per lesson/class time is 30 minutes, whereas the newly developed materials require a minimum of 45 minutes per lesson/class.
- MoE leadership asked for changes and revisions to the developed materials after the original MoE-established editorial board was formed and technical committees had finalized the materials. Last-minute advice for revisions resulted in working under a tight deadline, delays in the delivery timeline and the need for additional resources.
- The deadline for the development of Grade 3 materials was very tight and the team was not able to strictly follow the scope and sequence during the development of materials.
- Digital illustration skills did not exist in the Curriculum Development Department. The deadlines for completion of materials required highly professional digital illustration skills.

Associated Actions

- *Afghan Children Read's* technical team presented EGR research to convince the MoE that diacritics helps children in reading and correct pronunciation.
- *Afghan Children Read's* leadership will work with the MoE on feasible regulations, strategies and approaches to ensure allocation of sufficient time for reading in early grades.
- *Afghan Children Read* oriented the technical team with the criteria and guidelines for materials development and provided the needed support to meet those criteria. Moreover, to avoid any possible loss of students' time due to delay in provision of materials, the project leadership decided to finalize the second review of first eight-weeks' lessons, print and provide to students and teachers. This meant the Project needed to distribute materials twice in the same school year, but ensured students and teachers could begin the program on time.
- A digital illustration expert was hired to fill-in the capacity gap of Curriculum Development Department. The illustration expert also trained the Curriculum Development Department's illustrator on digital illustrations parallel to working on materials. For Grade 3 illustrations, the trained illustrator of the department took the lead and worked independently on all illustrations.
- Editorial Committee members who were not familiar with the structure, scope and sequence of Grade 3 materials, were oriented thoroughly on scope and sequence.

IR 2	An evidence-based Early Grade Reading curriculum and instruction program piloted that improves early grade reading outcomes for first through third grade public and CBE students
IR 2.2	Evidence-based early grade reading instructional materials in use in public and CBE classrooms

Progress achieved in YR2

Establishment of Books Tracking and Distribution System:

- Since the start of the Project, MoE officials have highlighted the lack of books available for school children and their inability to trace and verify whether books reach schools. *Afghan Children Read* conducted a one-day workshop with the relevant MoE departments including, inter alia, the stock-keepers (*motamid*) from schools involved in distribution of textbooks. The workshop focused on assessing the current distribution system and discussion around loopholes in the system. Options for improving the distribution system were also discussed.
- To address this gap in the books distribution system, the *Afghan Children Read* drafted a concept note for the tracking and distributing books to its targeted schools in Kabul and



Distribution of reading materials to Nangarhar and Laghman provinces

Herat. The purpose of the concept note was to suggest a viable system that could be piloted and provide the MoE a model for a BTD system.

- The Project presented its suggested BTD to the MoE Material Development TWG for review and inputs. Following the endorsement from the TWG, the Project began developing the system.

- The BTD system is based on ICT support and tracks the books from printer to school/CBE level. Key features of the system are listed below:

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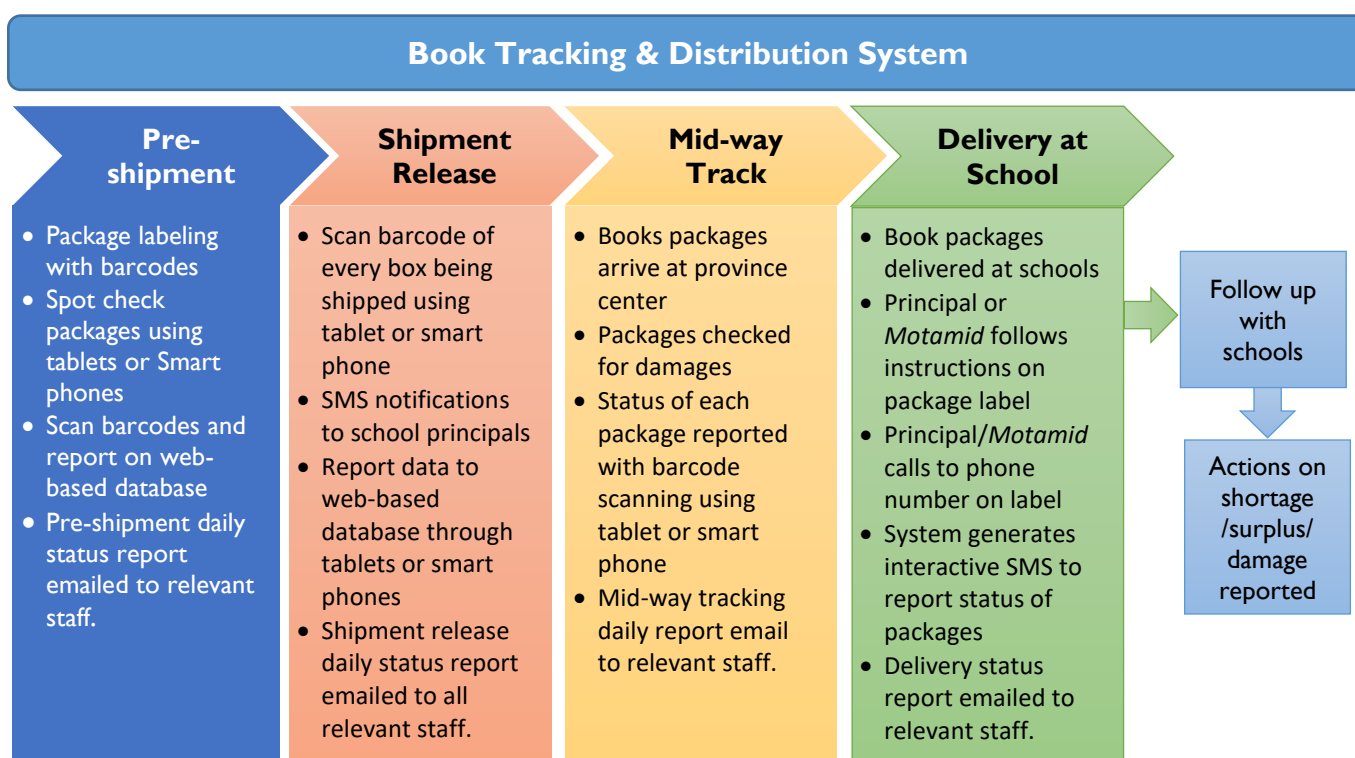
principals and *motamids* to report receipt of packages through SMS.

- Uses a verification process, which begins at pre-shipment, and continues through shipment release, mid-way tracking, and school delivery. It ends at delivery reports from schools/CBEs and includes all subsequent actions taken to rectify discrepancies.
- Provides immediate feedback on shortfalls and damage of packages.
- Uses GeoSpago and Telerivet platforms/applications.

Labels on book packages provide the following information:

- Type of books
- Number of books
- Unique school bar code
- Reporting instructions

- Provides real time data reporting on status of package tracking through daily reports..



- The **BTD** system clearly defines the roles of the Project, the printing company and the MoE:
 - Afghan Children Read – Overall administration and management of the system;
 - Printing company – Data and barcode entry on the online system at the time of dispatch of the packaged materials;
 - Afghan Children Read, PED and TED officials – Midway package tracking as shipments arrive to province center. For Kabul, midway tracking was not put in place because the shipment went to schools directly from the printing company. They used the mobile apps on tablets and mobile phones for barcode scanning and verifying details of packages in labels affixed on each package.
 - School *Motamids* and Principals – At the time of delivery at the schools, the *Motamids* or principals verified the receipt through a mobile messaging service built in the online BTD system.
- Prior to start of package deliveries, the Project conducted orientation sessions for the 471 school principals, *motamids* and DEDs in Herat, Kabul, Laghman and Nangarhar.
- *Afghan Children Read* piloted the system for three book deliveries i.e. twice in Herat and Kabul and once in Nangarhar and Laghman. Based on lessons learned from these pilots, the system was revised and improved.
- *Afghan Children Read* also trained the printer on use of BTD system including how to generate barcoded labels and to report at the various shipment stages using tablet/smart phones.
- Creative's Development Lab provided technology support for the BTD system through STTAs.
- *Afghan Children Read* established the non-technology part of BTD system to ensure evidence-based material-distribution data through the collection of distribution records and children's fingerprints. All distribution records were duly verified by the school principals/head masters. The distribution data was collected from schools and CBEs with the support of DEDs.

Printing and Distribution of Pilot EGR Materials:

- In advance of initiating the materials printing process, *Afghan Children Read* explored the in-country market capacity for book printing and it was found to be sufficient.
- Parallel to finalizing the specifications, *Afghan Children Read* engaged with the PEDs and DEDs in Herat, Kabul, Nangarhar and Laghman to agree upon the quantities of materials required for each grade and school. These numbers were based on estimates and therefore increased by seven percent to avoid any shortfall due to changes in actual enrollment.
- The specifications of the textbooks were discussed with and approved by the Deputy Minister and the Curriculum Department. Upon approval of MoE, the completed curriculum materials went for printing.
- The Project issued RFPs for in-country printing of materials. After receiving bids, *Afghan Children Read* conducted a thorough assessment of qualified printers and checked their equipment, space, human resource capacity and past experiences. Based on assessment findings the order for printing was issued to the most qualified printer.
- As mentioned under IR 2.1, due to repeated editorial reviews advised by the MoE, the printing and distribution for Herat and Kabul took place in two volumes i.e. Volume-1 covering weeks 1-8 and Volume-2 covering weeks 9-28.
- Tables 5, 6 and 7 show the quantities printed and distributed in Herat, Kabul, Nangarhar and Laghman.
- The project has printed and distributed text books to cohort #1 pilot schools with an average cost of \$3.48 USD per student. This cost is inclusive of the student text book, teacher guide, student workbook and assessment booklet and transportation and delivery to schools.

Capitalizing on in-county printing capacity, Afghan Children Read successfully printed and directly distributed the books to schools in Herat, Kabul, Laghman and Nangarhar with an average cost of \$3.48 USD per student.

Table-5: Quantity of EGR Material printed for Herat and Kabul (Vol.1 & 2)

Vol.1 Printed Materials for Herat and Kabul							
Materials	Herat		Kabul		Language		Total
	G 1	G 2	G 1	G 2	Dari	Pashto	
Student Textbooks	28,000	29,000	6,354	4,874	60,646	7,582	68,228
Student Workbooks	28,000	29,000	6,354	4,874	60,646	7,582	68,228
Teacher Guides	570	550	154	140	1,212	202	1,414
Continuous Assessment Booklets	570	550	154	140	1,212	202	1,414
Total	57,140	59,100	13,016	10,028	123,716	15,568	139,284
Vol.2 Printed Materials for Herat and Kabul							
Student Textbooks	26,494	27,491	6,354	4,874	57,631	7,582	65,213
Teacher Guides	600	641	154	140	1,333	202	1,535

Student Workbooks	26,494	27,491	6,354	4,874	57,631	7,582	65,213
Continuous Assessment Booklets	600	641	154	140	1,333	202	1,535
Total	54,188	56,264	13,016	10,028	117,928	15,568	133,496

Table-6: Quantity of EGR Materials printed for Nangarhar and Laghman in Pashto

Materials	G 1	G 2	G 3	Total
Student Textbooks	39,649	42,050	38,930	120,629
Student Workbooks	39,649	42,050	38,930	120,629
Teacher Guides	705	738	678	2,121
Continuous Assessment Booklets	705	738	678	2,121
Total	80,708	85,576	79,216	245,500

- *Afghan Children Read* and the printing company worked together to develop a detailed book distribution plan.
- The Project completed book distribution in Herat and Kabul for Volumes 1 and 2 in April and June 2017 respectively. Distribution in Nangarhar and Laghman began in late September 2017.

Table-7: Quantity of EGR Materials Distributed in Herat and Kabul

Materials	Herat		Kabul		Language		Total
	Grade-1	Grade-2	Grade-1	Grade-2	Dari	Pashto	
Student Text Book	23,722	24,670	6,279	24,670	51,788	7,554	59,342
Student Work Book	23,597	24,928	6,279	4,671	51,921	7,554	59,475
Teacher Guide	550	580	130	107	1,215	152	1,367
Continues Assessment Book	550	580	130	107	1,215	152	1,367
Total	48,419	50,758	12,818	29,555	106,139	15,412	121,551

Challenges (including issues regarding security, gender, inclusion, and community concerns)

- The Ministry's book distribution system involves many tiers of officials and departments. The current system is manual and completing documentation formalities is time consuming.
- Improving the distribution system may take longer than planned, as it will likely involve policy level decisions requiring several departments of the MoE to reach a consensus on the best way forward.
- Lack of accurate data may compromise the distribution of the exact number of needed materials to schools.
- USAID's vetting of the selected vendor for textbooks printing and distribution was considerably delayed and affected the distribution plan, as did the amended material

refinement process. As a result, distribution planned for the start of the winter climate academic year (March 2017 in Herat and Kabul) was postponed to the next quarter.

- The use of new electronic system by school store keepers still needs testing.
- Data on the number of students per classroom was collected one month prior to school opening to determine quantities for book printing. Because of last minute increased enrollments, this resulted in some schools reporting a discrepancy in the number of books versus the number of students per classroom.
- The enrollment of early-grade aged Afghan refugee children returning from Pakistan in Kabul pilot schools resulted in an unexpected increase in demand for books in Kabul.
- The delay in finalizing and printing Volume 2 textbooks led to a two-week gap for classrooms between finishing Volume 1 and receiving Volume 2.

Associated Actions

- *Afghan Children Read* piloted the book distribution and tracking system for Cohort-I. Lessons learned from this pilot addressed the issues with and concerns of the current MoE book distribution system.
- A monitoring system was put in place to follow the printing and distribution of books and to learn from the process to improve printing and distribution in future.
- In addition to the use of available data, *Afghan Children Read* and MoE decided to increase the number of materials by seven percent to accommodate for any discrepancies and to avoid shortages of materials.
- The first eight weeks' lessons (vol.1) were printed and provided to the students in mid-April and the remaining 9-28 weeks' lessons (vol.2) in late-May of Q3.
- The end users of the book distribution and tracking system will receive a more complete orientation as the MoE has expressed interest to use the book tracking system for other MoE distribution, as well.
- The Project delivered extra books to schools within a month for the Herat and Kabul schools and CBEs. In the second phase, the exact number of students and teachers was known, as school were already in session.
- Despite the delay in printing and delivery of Volume 2, the Project ensured that the teachers started the instruction of Volume 2 materials on time by distributing photocopied materials for two weeks of lessons (Weeks 9 and 10).

IR 2	An evidence-based Early Grade Reading curriculum and instruction program piloted that improves early grade reading outcomes for first through third grade public and CBE students
IR 2.3	Evidence-based early grade reading curriculum and instruction program implemented at the school level in public and CBE schools

Progress achieved in YR2

Identification of Pilot Districts and Schools:

- Identification of districts and selection of schools were among the key tasks at the outset of YR2. *Afghan Children Read*, in close consultation with its partners, conducted an internal rapid security assessment of the districts in Herat, Kabul and Nangarhar. The assessment used various sources of information including partners' field security mechanisms.
- The Project presented the status of districts to the Steering Group. The Steering Group selected eight districts in Herat, two in Kabul and eleven districts in Nangarhar in Q1.

However, due to deteriorating security conditions by the time *Afghan Children Read* was ready to implement in Nangarhar, seven of selected districts there were no longer accessible. After consultation with MoE leadership, those districts were dropped and two comparatively secure districts of Laghman province were added. This resulted in the addition of another province to *Afghan Children Read* 's geographic coverage. Thus, at the close of YR2, *Afghan Children Read* covered a total of 16 districts i.e. eight in Herat, two in Kabul, two in Laghman and four in Nangarhar.

- Following the finalization of districts, *Afghan Children Read* reviewed and analyzed the latest available EMIS data to determine the coverage of schools, students and teachers. Using analyzed EMIS data with the target numbers of students and teachers as per contract, *Afghan Children Read* initiated a consultative process with the PEDs and DEDs in the target provinces for selection of schools for the pilot. Due to differences in academic year, *Afghan Children Read* completed the consultative process for Herat and Kabul in Q1. For Nangarhar, the Project held the consultations twice due to the reduction of the initially selected districts for security reasons. These consultations were done in one-day workshops with PEDs and DEDs in the target provinces in Q3.
- In consultation workshops, the PEDs & DEDs were requested to use the EMIS data and apply the following criteria to determine target schools:
 - Accessibility
 - Number of early grade students and classes
 - Number of schools in one cluster
 - Mobility of teachers from one to another schools in the same cluster.
- Table 8 shows the number of schools and CBEs in the target districts receiving EGR interventions under *Afghan Children Read*:

Table-8: Afghan Children Read Pilot Coverage for Cohort-I

S. No.	District	Schools	CBEs	Total
Herat Province				
1	Ghoryan	33	8	41
2	Guzara	37	7	44
3	Herat City	32	0	32
4	Injil	43	7	50
5	Karukh	17	8	25
6	Kuhsan	17	4	21
7	Kushk Rubat-e-Sangi	14	2	16
8	Zenda Jan	13	3	16
	Total Herat	206	39	245
Kabul Province				
9	Bagrami	22	0	23
10	Shakardara	24	0	24
	Total Kabul	46	0	46
Laghman Province				
11	Mehtarlam Baba	15	2	17

S. No.	District	Schools	CBEs	Total
12	Qarghayee	15	8	23
	Total Laghman	30	10	40
Nangarhar Province				
13	Behsud	47	10	57
14	Jalalabad	34	11	45
15	Kama	19	19	38
16	Kuz Kunar (Khiwa)	40	0	40
	Total Nangarhar	140	40	180
	Grand Total	422	89	511

INSET Rollout (Master Training, Training of Trainers and Teachers' Training):

- The Project engaged with the TED at central level and PEDs in the provinces for consultations around the INSET rollout. Using cluster data, the Project worked out a detailed plan for the cascade of INSET. The *Afghan Children Read* leadership shared a plan for master training (MT), training of teachers' trainers (ToT) and teacher training in each of the provinces with the MoE. MoE extended full support and ensured required officials and spaces were available for planned trainings.

Table 9: INSET Training of Master Trainers

INSET Training of Master Trainers			
Department	Male	Female	Total
School Teacher	1	0	1
Academic Supervision Department	3	0	3
Teacher Education Department	51	15	66
Curriculum Development Department	3	1	4
Total	58	16	74

- As part of the INSET rollout planning process, PEDs and DEDs in all four provinces shared detailed lists of participants from each province for both ToT and teacher training.
- Afghan Children Read* conducted the first 16-day master training in Q1 for Herat and Kabul, followed by the same for Nangarhar in Q4. TED nominated 50 master trainers from TED and TTCs for Herat and Kabul and 24 for Nangarhar. *Afghan Children Read's* international experts organized and led the MT in Kabul. Trainings included simulations.
- The Project also organized practicum sessions during the trainings in private and public schools. The practicums helped MTs to better understand the EGR teaching methodologies.
- The Project then moved to next round of INSET rollout plan and organized the 14-day ToTs for teacher trainers in Herat and Kabul. Teacher trainers from Nangarhar attended the ToT in Kabul, as well. The TED nominated 51 teacher trainers from Kabul, 167 from Herat and 162 from Nangarhar and Laghman. Following the completion of ToTs, the *Afghan Children Read* launched a large-scale teacher training plan in Kabul and Herat in Q2, and in Nangarhar and Laghman in Q4. Training of teachers in all locations began simultaneously. Teams of two trainers and quality controllers conducted the 12-day teacher training. *Afghan Children Read*, with assistance from the PEDs, identified public schools with adequate space and training

arrangements for conducting these trainings. Trainings were conducted at 45 locations in Herat, 14 locations in Kabul, and 70 locations in Nangarhar and Laghman. *Afghan Children Read* selected training venues with convenient access for teachers, especially women. School principals, head teachers and PED staff also participated in the teacher trainings.

Table 10: INSET Training of Teacher Trainers

INSET Training of Trainers			
Department	Male	Female	Total
TTC Teacher	70	42	112
Principal/Head Master	1	2	3
Academic Supervision	18	3	21
Provincial Education Directorate	5	1	6
Teacher Education Department	95	14	109
Total	189	62	251

- Due to a lack of available accurate data on the newly established early grade classes, appointments of new teachers and dropouts from the first round of teacher trainings, many teachers remained untrained. In close coordination with the PEDs and DEDs, *Afghan Children Read* identified these untrained teachers and conducted a second round of condensed teachers' training in Herat, Kabul, Laghman and Nangarhar. However, despite this second round of condensed trainings, some teachers remained untrained. In response to the PEDs' request, the Project conducted a third round of teachers' training (condensed) in Herat.

Table-11: Cumulative Number of Participants in Teachers Training

Number of Participants of Teachers Training				
Province	Participants	Male	Female	Total
Kabul	School Teachers	187	117	304
	Other Departments	98	10	108
Herat	School Teachers	325	813	1,138
	Other Departments	239	103	342
Laghman	School Teachers	232	80	312
	Other Departments	62	2	64
Nangarhar	School Teachers	946	421	1,367
	Other Departments	230	15	245
Total	Teachers	1,690	1,431	3,121
	Other Departments	629	130	759
Grand Total		2,319	1,561	3,880

- For the logistics support and monitoring of trainings, the Project hired the services of short-term Monitoring Support Officers (MSOs). Each training center was assigned one MSO. MSOs provided daily updates on the attendance, which enabled the Project to address issues of absenteeism and dropouts from the training.

- Quality controllers regularly monitored the quality of training delivery and provided on the spot support and guidance to the trainers where required. This proved to be an excellent quality assurance mechanism.

Pre-service EGR Curriculum Development:

- *Afghan Children Read* coordinated with TED and GIZ to plan the development of preservice teacher literacy curriculum and received curriculum materials previously developed by GIZ for its experts to review.
- Five courses (for a total of 18 credits) were identified, titled and shared with TED for integration to the proposed primary teacher education curriculum framework.
- *Afghan Children Read* prepared a plan for the development of the courses as per the agreement with TED and GIZ

Challenges (including issues regarding security, gender, inclusion, and community concerns)

- Uncertain and rapidly changing security conditions in Nangarhar led to implementation in only four out of the prior 11 agreed upon districts posing a challenge to the Project's ability to achieve its targets.
- Lack of local expertise in the development of EGR focused training materials required considerable time
- Cultural barriers made it difficult to put males and females in the same training section in Kohsan district of Herat, Nangarhar and Laghman provinces.
- Large scale simultaneous trainings required effective mobilization of human resources, regular monitoring and logistic support.
- A considerable number of teachers, head masters and academic supervisors did not participate in first round teacher training due to lack of exact data and dropouts from first round.
- The absence of many early grade teachers in the first-round teacher training caused pressure on time, budget, human resources, availability of training space as well as requiring the development of a condensed training program.
- It was difficult to ensure women's participation in master trainings in both Nangarhar and Laghman.
- The preservice material development process was delayed due to the evacuation of GIZ for security reasons.

Associated Actions

- In consultation with the MoE leadership and USAID, two districts from the adjoining province Laghman were included to compensate for the dropping of seven districts from Nangarhar.
- Capacity of TED and Curriculum Development department teams was built through trainings and on-the-job support by the Project's international experts during training manuals development.
- Separate training sections were arranged for female teachers in Kohsan district of Herat.
- Monitoring Support Officers (MSOs) were hired short term and assigned to each training section to provide regular and on-time reporting.
- Condensed training was conducted in two rounds for those who did not participated in the first-round teacher training.
- Teachers who missed two full days of training, were excluded from training. All such teachers

were later included in the condensed training. Afghan Children Read coordinated with TED and PEDs to nominate more women. Thus, women's participation increased from 0 to 25%.

- Afghan Children Read initiated coordination with TED and GIZ to reach a consensus on the start of the pre-service course development.

IR 2	An evidence-based Early Grade Reading curriculum and instruction program piloted that improves early grade reading outcomes for first through third grade public and CBE students
IR 2.4	Procedures and systems for supervision, coaching, and monitoring of teachers and students implemented

Progress achieved YR2

Coaching & Mentoring Support to EGR Model:

- Afghan Children Read held a series of consultative meetings with the MoE to discuss the coaching and mentoring (C&M) under the EGR model. Based on these discussions and agreements with the MoE leadership, TED and Academic Supervision department, the Project developed a concept note on its suggested C&M approach and shared it with relevant departments in a joint meeting after which it was approved.
- The approved C&M approach engages either the school principal, headmaster or head teacher as a coach for six to seven early grade teachers. Academic Supervisors provide mentoring to coaches. Based on this approach, the Project developed tools for coaches and mentors to use during C&M visits.
- The C&M model suggests one visit per month by the mentor to each school within his/her jurisdiction. Similarly, the coach is required to observe each EGR teacher in his/her school twice a month and provide support based on teacher observation findings.
- Following the approval of C&M concept note, the Project developed a C&M manual with support from its international experts. To review and finalize the C&M module, the Project conducted a 2-day workshop with TED, General Education and Academic Supervision departments. These departments provided input and finalized the manual.
- Afghan Children Read developed a C&M training plan. and developed the C&M training module for the training of coaches and mentors. The module was translated into Dari and Pashto languages.
- Afghan Children Read worked out a detailed training plan for the C&M training and trained a cadre of 39 C&M master trainers from Herat and Kabul and 30 from Nangarhar in a 3-day ToT. The MTs included TED/TTC instructors, PED and Academic Supervisors.

Table 12: ToT for Coaching and Mentoring

Training of Trainers for Coaching & Mentoring			
Department	Male	Female	Total
TTC Teachers	6	5	11
Principal/Head Masters	2	1	3
Academic Supervision	14	2	16
District Education Department	2	0	2
Provincial Education Directorate	1	1	2
Teacher Education Department	22	13	35
Total	47	22	69

- The Project, in collaboration with the TED and PEDs, organized C&M trainings and trained 602 school principals, head masters, head teachers and academic supervisors in Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar and Laghman provinces. C&M training took place for Herat and Kabul in Q3 and for Nangarhar and Laghman in Q4.

Table I3: Coaching & Mentoring Training Participants

Coaching & Mentoring Training			
Department	Male	Female	Total
Teachers	68	64	132
Principal/Head Masters	301	87	388
Academic Supervision	60	0	60
District Education Department	18	1	19
Provincial Education Directorate	2	0	2
Teacher Education Department	1	0	1
Total	450	152	602

- The MoE assigned trained coaches and mentors to teachers and head masters, and provided tools for coaches and mentors to collect data during classroom observations.
- Trained coaches began classroom observations immediately after completion of training. Since May 2017, coaches in Herat conducted 2,406 teacher observations and 442 teacher observations in Kabul.

Challenges (including issues regarding security, gender, inclusion, and community concerns)

- Coaching is new in Afghanistan and there is no background to show what kind of C&M model is most appropriate.
- *Afghan Children Read's* visits to the schools showed that teachers need to know more about the role of coaches and mentors.
- Generating or receiving accurate school data is a challenge for planning various technical activities.
- Insufficient numbers of coaches in large schools with large number of early grade classes makes it difficult to plan coaching support to teachers.
- There is still no follow-up mechanism and availability of capacity to analyze observation data for C&M.
- Busy schedule of principals for participating in C&M training may hamper their participation in trainings.

Associated Actions

- The Project conducted consultative sessions with TWGs and relevant departments of MoE to develop need-based coaching model to support reading instruction.
- *Afghan Children Read* incorporated the role of coaches in the revised and updated the teacher training manual.
- The Project suggests that school based ICT support for EGR model should be used for C&M data collection, analysis and reporting.
- Senior teachers and academic assistants were trained to address the insufficiency of available coaches.
- *Afghan Children Read* hopes to introduce ICT to support for the follow up of C&M in the

classroom. This is dependent upon approval from USAID for a grant to fund a tablet in every school.

- The Project will offer a flexible training schedule for training principals and will develop refresher training for coaches and mentors.

IR 2	An evidence-based Early Grade Reading curriculum and instruction program piloted that improves early grade reading outcomes for first through third grade public and CBE students
IR 2.5	Partnerships with parents, school shuras, communities, the private sector, and nontraditional actors to increase equitable access to a quality education increased

Progress achieved in YR2

Media Campaigns and Public Service Announcements:

- *Afghan Children Read* conducted a rapid assessment in Herat and Kabul provinces to collect data to inform design and implementation of media campaign related activities and Public Service Announcement (PSAs). The assessment report submitted in Q3 will serve as a guide and help the Project and grantees to develop media campaign related proposals and program descriptions.
- *Afghan Children Read* also conducted media assessment survey in Kabul, Herat and Nangarhar to assess the media outlets and their production capacity. In addition to general data, the surveys asked questions about people's favorite radio/TV stations/shows and their perceptions of and access to other communication outlets such as mobile phones. In addition to surveying the existence of various media outlets, the production and technical capacity of each target media company was assessed.
- The media assessment informed the selection of six radio stations to broadcast the radio public service announcements (PSAs) in each of the four target provinces.
- Following its completion, *Afghan Children Read* conducted a half-day brainstorming workshop to finalize the key thematic areas for PSAs. Four thematic areas were identified including i) Cognitive Development, ii) Emotional Development, iii) Physical Development and iv) Social Development. The purpose of radio PSAs is to promote EGR and to increase listener awareness on the importance of children reading.
- *Afghan Children Read* established the CAG to ensure consistency of communication materials with the EGR technical approach and with MoE and USAID requirements. The CAG comprises representatives from Curriculum Development, Teacher Education, and Social Mobilization departments. The CAG members review, finalize and approve content of the videos, PSAs, Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and Short Message Services (SMS) produced under the Project.
- *Afghan Children Read* included *Herati* dialect as part of the its outreach program. The first batch of the PSAs focuses on reading support, reading culture, importance of reading, materials safekeeping and vocabulary skills of the children.
- In Q4, *Afghan Children Read* initiated production of two more batches of PSAs (15 PSAs in each). These PSAs will be finalized in Q1 of YR3.
- *Afghan Children Read* signed contract with various radio stations in Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar and Laghman provinces to broadcast the developed PSAs during different time slots.

Development of School Management Shura and Community Project Guide:

- As part of improving social mobilization to support EGR, *Afghan Children Read* held a one-day workshop with the Social Mobilization Directorate to brainstorm ideas and seek input on development of its community mobilization strategy and community development guide. The workshop provided the social mobilization team an opportunity to share their ideas on the community development guide outline.
- *Afghan Children Read* conducted an assessment in Kabul, Herat and Nangarhar to determine capacity needs of the School Management Shuras (SMS) to inform its social mobilization component. The report highlighted that the SMS structures are not functioning effectively in certain communities and a number of communities do not have an SMS. The assessment fed into the community and SMS activity guide and community engagement strategy development process.
- *Afghan Children Read* developed the Community and SMS activity guide in close coordination with the MoE's Social Mobilization Directorate based on the assessment report and meetings with Project stakeholders. The strategy is consistent with the MoE's National Social Mobilization Strategy, which will serve as a roadmap to achieve its goals at the community level and will ensure community buy-in and SMS engagement (previously submitted as an annex to Y2 Q3 report).
- The Community and SMS Guide is consistent with the approved *Social Mobilization Strategy* (previously submitted as an annex to Y2 Q3 report). The guide is a roadmap for *Afghan Children Read's* capacity building of SMSs and communities. The guide also ensures parental engagement at the community level to support reading. The overall objectives of this guide are:
 - Build the capacity of SMS to support EGR at public and CBE schools
 - Increase and support reading opportunities at the school and community levels
 - Increase and support access and safety to and in schools, in both public schools and CBEs
 - Increase SMS communication skills to establish cooperative relationships with stakeholders
 - Increase SMS capacity to develop and implement school improvement plans.
- The *Afghan Children Read Social Mobilization Strategy* was approved and became available for use. This strategy is consistent with the MoE's National Social Mobilization Strategy and will serve as a roadmap to achieve *Afghan Children Read's* goals at the community level and ensure community buy-in and SMS engagement.

Capacity Building of MoE's Social Mobilizers:

- As part of community mobilization efforts, *Afghan Children Read* conducted a four-day ToT training for provincial social mobilizers from Herat, Kabul, Nangarhar and Laghman provinces. This formed the cadre of trainers for community mobilizers that will lead and oversee *Afghan Children Read's* community mobilization strategy and activities to support EGR in all targeted districts. The cadre of trainers will train and provide ongoing support to the district community mobilizers and will ensure parental and community engagement and support to the EGR pilot

Table I4: Social Mobilization ToT Participants

Province	Male	Female	Total
Kabul	7	2	9
Herat	3	1	4

Province	Male	Female	Total
Nangarhar	6	0	6
Laghman	4	0	4
Total	20	3	23

EGR focused Grants:

- The Project team held brainstorm sessions to discuss potential ideas for grants under the identified themes of *Afghan Children Read*.
- The Grants Manual for the Project was approved by USAID.
- *Afghan Children Read* advertised RFAs for the following grants:
 - National level awareness raising through media campaigns and outreach
 - Provincial level awareness raising through media campaigns and outreach
 - Social mobilization in support of EGR
 - School based Technology Support for EGR Model
- Technical Evaluation Committees (TECs) for each grant evaluated the grant proposals.
- *Afghan Children Read* submitted vetting requests to Kabul Vetting Support Unit (KVSU) for potential grantees selected for national and provincial media grants.
- To assess the learning environment in early grade classes, *Afghan Children Read* conducted classroom physical learning environment assessment in Kabul and Herat. The assessment findings reflected that a standard classroom environment was more expensive than initially anticipated.

Challenges (including issues regarding security, gender, inclusion, and community concerns)

- In addition to the lack of district level staff in SMD, the existing capacities in the department are very limited as compared to the required level.
- KVSU has taken more than anticipated time for the vetting of national and provincial media grants. The Project submitted vetting request early July 2017, but at the time of this submission the vetting has not been completed. This has impacted on achievement of targets for grants in the second year of implementation.

Associated Actions

- *Afghan Children Read* will build the capacity of provincial social mobilization staff through social mobilization grant.
- The Project is regularly following up with the KVSU on the status of potential grantees' vetting.

Monitoring & Evaluation

Establishment of Monitoring & Evaluation System:

- Establishment and functionalization of an effective, efficient and robust monitoring, evaluation and knowledge management system were among the key priorities for *Afghan Children Read* YR2. The process of M&E and Knowledge Management system started with development of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (PMEP).
- The PMEP for *Afghan Children Read* was developed and finalized in consultation with USAID. The PMEP covers key performance indicators along with yearly targets. However, targets for some of the indicators are still to be determined. These mainly include students learning outcome-related indicators.
- *Afghan Children Read*'s PMEP was approved in Q3 YR2.
- *Afghan Children Read* assessed the data needs of the Project based on key Project documents i.e. AWP, PMEP indicators, contractual commitments, TraiNet/Visa Compliance System (VCS), and Afghan Info. This led to identification of key data needs of the Project taking both the Project management's and USAID's perspectives into account.
- Based on the identified needs, *Afghan Children Read*'s M&E team developed data collection tools compliant with the USAID reporting and data quality requirements. Participants Training Program (PTP) was one of the key tools that captures training data in compliance with TraiNet/VCS.

Data Management & Online M&E Information System (M&E-IS):

- Keeping in view the broader scope of *Afghan Children Read*, the M&E team also put in place an efficient data management system. For managing and reporting quality data, *Afghan Children Read* developed an online M&E-Information System (M&E-IS) capitalizing on its M&E team's internal capacities. Using a modular approach, *Afghan Children Read* deployed major open-source programs and applications for its M&E-IS. The online M&E-IS has the following key features:
 - Online -accessible from anywhere
 - Multi-user functionality
 - Ability to sync with mobile phones
 - USAID data compliance (PTP, duplicate participants tracking)
 - Evaluation of Capacity Gap (Pre- and Post-analysis showing training-wise learning percentage)
 - Geo-spatial data storage and visualization
 - Program areas data features such as School monitoring report cards
 - Implementation-plan Tracking
 - Multi-purpose:
 - Planning and implementation oversight
 - Data banking and evidence repository
 - Client/MoE data needs
 - Data analysis and reporting
 - Data quality assurance and security
 - Organizational learning support
 - Multi-tier data verification
 - Cost effective, in-house development and management
- In Q2, *Afghan Children Read* developed the M&E-IS key modules to meet the needs of the YR2 AWP. In Q4, the M&E team developed new modules to meet YR3's data reporting requirements.

- *Afghan Children Read* conducted two orientation sessions for the Project M&E and field teams on M&E process and tools.
- *Afghan Children Read* also developed an M&E Manual which details the approaches, methods and tools for data collection and monitoring.
- The M&E team ensured the quality of training activities by extending support through engaging short-term Monitoring Support Officers (MSOs). These MSOs were trained on monitoring and data collection tools prior to the start of training. Each training was monitored 100% by the MSOs. Engaging MSOs proved to be very effective, especially in ensuring regular attendance and logistical support for the training activities.
- *Afghan Children Read* developed an internal data quality check tool. This tool will be used to performing the data quality checks for all performance data pertaining to the Project.
- *Afghan Children Read* conducted survey for baseline and performance data.

Data Quality Assurance:

- *Afghan Children Read* developed written data collection procedures and guidelines and specific data collection tools for each type of data collection. These procedures are part of the M&E Manual.
- Rigorous checks were carried out during data collection by Monitoring Officers and other senior staff. In cases where data was collected by Ministry of Education (MoE) staff such as with the Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) and School Enrolment Surveys, a 100% spot check was carried out by *Afghan Children Read*.
- To ensure that the data collection forms were filled properly and there was no missing or duplications in data, the forms were reviewed at three different levels: 1) by Monitoring Support Officers at the field, 2) by MSOs at the provincial office, and 3) by the M&E Specialist or ICT Specialist at Kabul before entering it to the M&E – IS, which has the capability to check the data by several variables and point out the duplicates.
- The monitoring and evaluation data files were stored in folders organized by IRs, Sub-IRs, and Activities in addition to soft form in the M&E – IS which includes scanned copies of source documents. These folders are only accessible to the relevant M&E staff while the database is also only accessible to the relevant authorized personnel.
- To manage the tremendous amount of M&E data, the M&E team is working to digitize all key M&E tools. In future, the data will be collected, entered and reported directly to the database in real time from the training venues. For this purpose, tablets will be used to monitor relevant activities.

Challenges:

- Program performance data (especially training data) is enormous. This required significant time as well as additional level of effort to enter the data into the M&E-IS.
- Meeting the client's data requirements depends upon a sophisticated database.

Associated Actions:

- For the first round of teacher training and C&M data, short-term data entry officers were engaged which enabled the Project to produce reports more quickly.
- *Afghan Children Read* developed a very sophisticated database in-house using open source programs and applications.

Indicator Matrix as of September 30, 2017

S. No.	Source of data	Type of indicator	Indicator	Reporting Frequency	Baseline Value	5-year Targets	Cumulative Actuals against the 5-year targets (to date)	Annual Targets for Year 2	Cumulative Actuals for Year 2	Annual Targets for Year 3	Annual Targets for Year 4
Goal: Improved EGR outcomes for 1-3 grade public and CBE students in target regions											
1	EGRA	ES.1-1	Percent of learners who demonstrate reading fluency and comprehension of grade level text at the end of grade 2 with USG support	End line for each province (Herat & Nangarhar)	TBD	TBD					
2	School Survey	ES.1-3	Number of learners enrolled in primary schools or equivalent non-school based settings reached with USG education assistance	Annual	163,601		176,434	176,000	176,434	185,000	194,000
Purpose: Improved capacity of MoE to develop, implement and scale-up Grade 1-3 EGR curriculum and instruction program in public and CBEs											
3		Custom	Percent of public schools and CBEs where Grade 1-3 EGR curriculum and instruction have been scaled up	Annual starting year 3	0	TBD					

Result 1: The MoE, at all levels, is able to implement an evidence-based Early Grade Reading curriculum and instruction program that benefits students in both formal and CBE classes											
4	School Survey	Custom	Percent of public schools and CBEs implementing the early grade reading program.	Annual	0	55%	45%	15%	45%	25%	10%
IR 1.1. Capacity of MoE, at national, provincial, and district levels built to develop, plan/budget for, manage, implement, and monitor an EGR curriculum and instruction program											
5	M&E-IS	ES.1-12	Number of education administrators and officials who complete professional development activities with USG assistance	Quarterly	0	1,200	1,430	300	1,279	300	300
6	M&E-IS	ES.1-7	Number of primary school educators who complete professional development activities on implementing evidence-based reading instruction with USG assistance	Quarterly	0	10,000	3,120	3,500	3,120	6,500	0

IR1.2: Policies, standards and benchmarks that support improved EGR instruction in public and community-based education classes developed											
7	M&E-IS	3.2.1-38	Number of laws, policies, regulations or guidelines developed or modified to improve primary grade reading programs or increase equitable access.	Annual	0	10	0	1	0	3	3
IR 1.3. National and sub-national EGR assessments, data collection, and analysis systems established											
8	M&E-IS	3.2.1-34	Number of standardized Learning assessments supported by USG	Annual	0	2	1	1	1	0	0
Result 2: An evidence-based EGR curriculum and instruction program piloted that improves EGR outcomes for 1-3 grade public and CBE students											
9	School Survey	ES.1-5	Number of learners reached in reading programs at the primary level with USG assistance	Annual	0	500,000	72,581	60,000	72,584	270,000	170,000
10	EGRA	Custom	Percent of Grade 2 children in USG supported public schools and CBEs who are fluent in reading.	TBD	TBD		0				
11	EGRA	Custom	Percent of Grade 3 children in USG	TBD	TBD		0				

			supported public schools and CBEs who are fluent in reading.								
12	EGRA	Custom	Percent of Grade 2 children in USG supported primary schools and CBEs who are proficient in reading comprehension.	TBD	TBD		0				
13	EGRA	Custom	Percent of Grade-3 children in USG supported primary schools and CBEs who are proficient in reading comprehension.	TBD	TBD		0				
14	EGRA	Custom	Change in the mean score of grade 2 children in reading fluency	TBD	TBD		0				
15	EGRA	Custom	Change in the mean score of grade 3 children in reading fluency	TBD	TBD		0				
16	EGRA	Custom	Change in mean score of grade-2 children in reading comprehension	TBD	TBD		0				
17	EGRA	Custom	Change in mean score of grade 3 children in reading comprehension	TBD	TBD		0				

IR 2.1. Evidence-based EGR curriculum and instruction program developed											
18	Material Distribution Record	ES.1-10	Number of primary or secondary textbooks and other teaching and learning materials (TLM) provided with USG assistance	Semiannual	0	1,244,900	121,551	61,700	121,551	365,000	535,000
IR2.2: Evidence-based EGR instructional materials in use in public and CBE classrooms											
19	School Survey	Custom	Percentage of teachers using EGR instructional materials in public school and CBE classes.	Semiannual for each province.	0	Minimum 75%	99%	Minimum 75%	99%	Minimum 75%	Minimum 75%
IR2.3: Evidence-based EGR curriculum and instructional program implemented at the school level in public and CBE schools											
20	Material Distribution Record	ES.1-11	Number of primary school classrooms that receive a complete set of essential reading instructional materials with USG assistance	Semiannual for each province	0	10,000	1,367	3500	1,367	4600	1900
IR 2.4. Procedures and systems for supervision, coaching, and monitoring of teachers and students implemented											
21	School Survey	Custom	Percent of teachers satisfied with supervision, coaching and monitoring visits conducted	Semiannual for each province	0	0.75					

IR2.5: Partnerships with parents, school shuras, communities, the private sector, and non-traditional actors to increase equitable access to a quality education increased											
22	M&E-IS	ES.1-13	Number of parents Teachers associations (PTAs) or community governance structures engaged in primary or secondary education supported with USG assistance	Semiannual	0	821					
23	M&E-IS	Custom	Number of reading focus grants implemented by local NGOs	Semiannual	0	100					
24	M&E-IS	Custom	Number of public school classrooms improved physical environment with USG support.	Semiannual	0	2,600		650		1200	550

Project Management

Key Meetings/Field Trips & STTAs Conducted

Position	Date	Purpose
Quarter 1		
Senior Associate (Creative)	8-30 October 2016	OCDP tools development
Consultant (Creative)	7 November - 20 December 2016	Teacher training, educational policy, EGRA
Education Coordinator (IRC)	5-24 November 2016	Healing Classrooms integration in materials
Senior Early Grade Reading Specialist (Creative)	1-31 December 2016	Teacher training and EGR materials development
Quarter 2		
Senior Associate (Creative)	14-27 January 2017	Finalization of OCDP
Program Associate (Creative)	6 January – 2 February 2017	Organizational and technical support
Project Director (Creative)	15 February – 1 March 2017	Support to <i>Afghan Children Read</i> launch
Practice Area Director (Creative)	15 February – 1 March 2017	Support to <i>Afghan Children Read</i> launch
IDMS Consultant (Creative)	1-10 March 2017	IDMS training to Grants team
Technology Associate (Creative)	3-17 March 2017	Book tracking and EGRA support
Technology Director (Creative)	5-10 March 2017	Book tracking support
Senior Security Manager (Creative)	24-31 March 2017	Security protocol training
Multilingual Education Specialist (SIL LEAD)	31 March – 31 May 2017	Material development for Grades 1 & 2
Quarter 3		
Grants Manager (Creative)	8-18 May 2017	Grants training and support to Grants team
Senior Curriculum Development Specialist (IRC)	8-19 May 2017	SEL and Healing Classrooms integration into grade 1 and 2 materials
Senior Security Manager (Creative)	1-8 June 2017	Support to Nangarhar security plans
Quarter 4		

Project Director (Creative)	14 July – 4 August 2017	Organized and participated in the Year One Project Retreat, supported annual work planning for FY 2018 and budget realignment exercises, and attended strategic meetings with USAID and the MoE.
Program Associate (Creative)	15-28 July 2017	Organized and participated in the Year One Project Retreat, supported annual work planning for FY 2018 and budget realignment exercises, and provided necessary HR and administrative support to the field team.
Multilingual Education Specialist (SIL LEAD)	6 August – 30 September 2017	Provided technical assistance to the team in establishing Reading Labs, supported data analysis and report writing for Grades 1 and 2, prepared for the course development for pre-service teacher training, provide inputs as needed on the EGRA Herat baseline.
Senior Early Grade Reading Specialist (Creative)	18-30 August 2017	Led the development of the EGRA instrument for Pashto language database, supported planning for the delivery of enumerator training for EGRA baseline in Nangarhar and Laghman, provided technical leadership to surveying G1 and G2 instructional material in Herat and Kabul, and provided technical leadership to the development of early literacy pre-service courses as part of the TED's planned Primary Diploma program.
Technology Associate (Creative)	18 September – 3 October 2017	Supported Nangarhar book delivery, train ACR staff in Book Tracker product management and communication with MoE, transitioned the book tracker to the ACR team by providing more control over system design, troubleshooting and management, and co-created Book Tracking presentation materials for the ACR team to communicate to MoE.
Technology Associate (Creative)	10-20 September 2017	Provided in-person training to ACR staff on administrative functions of EGRA data collection via Tangerine, facilitated training for data collectors, provided support during data collection process and generated report of the Tangerine data collection.
Travel Planned for Quarter 1 Year 3		
Position	Date	Purpose
Multilingual Education Specialist (SIL LEAD)	21 October – 22 December 2017	To provide on-sight technical assistance to the in-country technical team with revision of grade 1 and 2 pilot materials, continue working with ACR's in-country team to establish Reading Labs by preparing training modules, continue preparing courses/modules for pre-service teacher training for the

		mother tongue component, and participate in the language mapping report to the MoE.
Senior Associate (Creative)	22 October – 2 November 2017	To lead the Policy Taskforce meeting with the ACR technical team and MoE officials, co-facilitate policy development meetings with the coordination team, support OCDP course development training, and present policy development progress to the MoE.
Senior Curriculum Specialist (IRC)	22 October – 2 November 2017	To support the revision of Teacher and Student Materials for grades 1 and 2 to further integrate Healing Classrooms and SEL, support the development of HC and SEL into supplementary materials, and support development of 2 credit pre-service course with ACR technical team and MoE/TED officials on SEL.
Program Associate (Creative)	12 November – 1 December 2017	To develop the ACR Gender Integration Strategy and implementation plan with the senior ACR technical team and support the review of teaching and learning materials through a gender sensitivity and inclusivity lens.
Senior Early Grade Reading Specialist (Creative)	21 November – 8 December 2017	To provide technical leadership to revisions of grades 1-3 instructional material in Herat and Kabul, liaise with MoE officials in the Curriculum Department to refine the teaching and learning materials, and provide technical leadership to the development of early literacy pre-service courses as part of the TED's planned Primary Diploma



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AFGHANISTAN

Social Mobilizers Trained to Improve Early Grade Reading in their Communities



Photo: Afghan Children Read Project

4 females and 19 male provincial social mobilizers received 4 days ToT-on social mobilization activity to support EGR in their provinces on August 13-16, 2017

“It is reality that our students cannot read and write at the end of grade 3 or even at grade 4, but now we have the capacity to raise awareness of school management Shuras and parents, regarding the Afghan Children Read activities and the role of SMS and parents in successfully implementing EGR activities”. Sayed Fawad Hashimi - Kabul Province Social Mobilization Team Leader.

Afghanistan’s decade-long conflict created a vacuum of support needed for students to excel in school. To fill the gap the Ministry of Education (MoE) has focused its attention on developing the capacity of the School Management Shuras (SMS) or “Social Mobilizers” who make decisions on how to allocate and manage available school resources in improving EGR and engaging families and community members. Playing a crucial lead role in improving children’s reading skills, training SMS mobilizers is important to sustain the project’s positive impact.

The USAID-funded Afghan Children Read project, a primary education initiative designed to improve equitable access to education in Afghanistan, conducted a four-day workshop on social mobilization and implementing SMS activities on Aug. 13-16, 2017. Twenty-three provincial Social Mobilizers from Herat, Nangarhar, Laghman and Kabul provinces attended the training.

To support the MoE’s efforts in moving toward a more supportive community, the Afghan Children Read project—in close partnership with the MoE—developed Social and School Management Shura activity guides. This will empower the Social Mobilizers with the skills needed to lead and encourage community support and parent involvement in children’s education.

Khalida Dastgir, Provincial Social Mobilization Team Leader in Herat, said, “We now have the skills to fully engage School Management Shuras, parents and communities to ensure safety in the classroom and as students and teachers travel back and forth from home to school. We also developed a further understanding of how to support student reading and activities in school and how to implement the schools’ improvement plan at the community level.”

Afghan Children Read successfully conducted trainings for the group of 23 provincial community mobilizers who are qualified as Master Trainers. They are responsible to lead, oversee the community mobilization strategy and activities to support EGR in four provinces: Herat, Kabul, Nangarhar and Laghman. After the training, the District Social Mobilizers will then rollout the training to School Management Shuras in all 419 targeted schools. About 6,320 Social Mobilizers—including District Social Mobilizers and School Shura Members—will have received training once completed.

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Teachers Receive Coaching and Mentoring Support to Adopt Early Grade Reading System



Photo: Afghan Children Read Project

Training of coaches and mentors for Early Grade Reading in Mehtarlam in the district of Laghman province on Oct. 2-8, 2017

“Because of trainings received, when I do random visits to the classes, I can see changes from the previous visit in each class. I wholeheartedly believe there is a brighter future waiting out there for the students and I really like to be part of this change,” says Noorzia Hamidi, staff in Academic Supervision Directorate-Nangarhar province

Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Afghan Children Read project works with the Ministry of Education to ensure quality education service delivery through an evidence-based early grade reading program for grades one to three students in Afghanistan.

The project focuses on empowering teachers with ongoing training and mentoring. To-date, Afghan Children Read has trained more than 867 coaches and mentors to adopt the new Early Grade Reading system.

Since April 2016, the coaching and mentoring activity have been implemented, in addition to thousands of teachers being trained in Early Grade Reading through the project. These two activities are part of the project’s teacher professional development strategy which recognizes the need for continuing professional development of all early grade reading teachers, headmasters, supervisors and school principals.

“In Afghanistan, there are several reasons for coaching and mentoring,” explains Teshome Begna, Ph.D., Senior Education Advisor with the Afghan Children Read project. “Many teachers in the early grades have had little opportunity for professional development, they do not have adequate qualifications based on the pre-service programs they have completed, or they did not receive explicit instruction in teaching children to learn to read in their mother-tongue language.”

Munira Iman, Head Master of Boland Shahi Secondary school in the Injil district of Herat province, is one of the academic professionals who has received in-depth training and mentoring. “I have never taught grade 1 to 3 classes and it was kind of difficult to monitor the lower grade students and the teachers,” says Iman. “I have improved my skills of supervising teacher at these grades, and I have improved communication with teachers and students.”

As coaching and mentoring professional development activities for teachers continues in the provinces, they have become important strategies in Afghan Children Read’s in-service teacher development programs.

As a result, the certified trainers are responsible to coach and mentor the teaching of new reading materials by visiting all of the 419 targeted schools, as well ensuring teachers have the skills to create safe and active learning environments. Teachers are trained to build Social and Emotional Learning competencies and focus on students’ well-being in Early Grade Reading.

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