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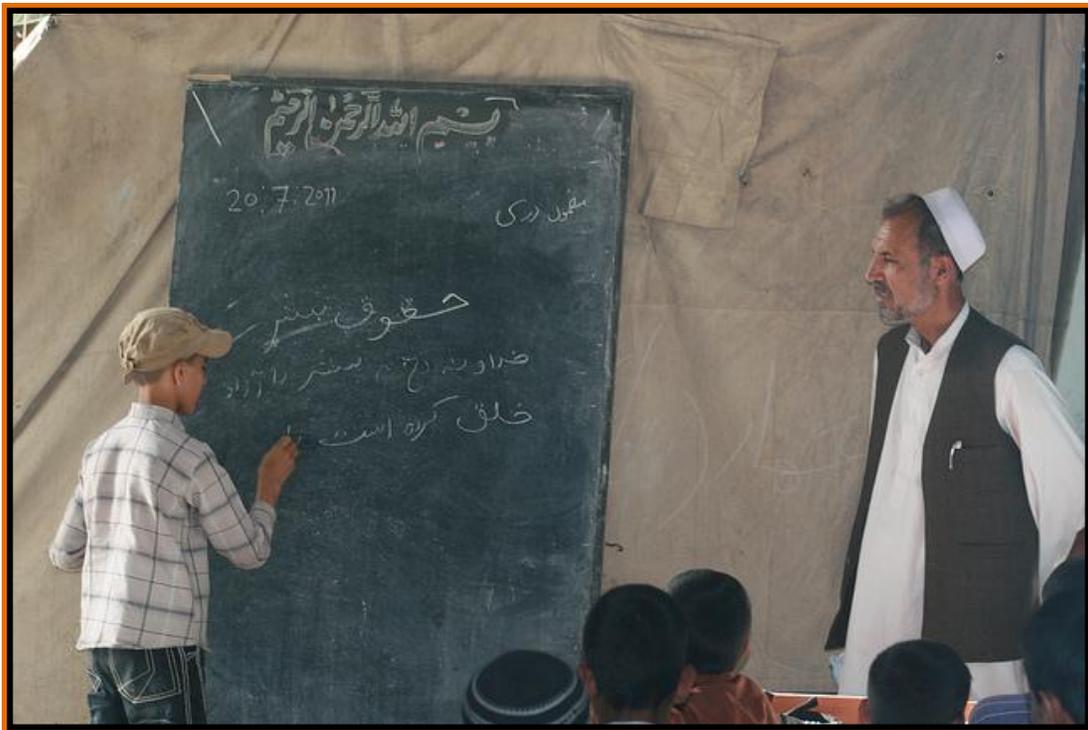


**fhi360**  
THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

# STRIVE *Learning Series*

**Report  
No. 1**

## Incorporating Supplementary Literacy and Numeracy Classes: Findings from STRIVE's Afghan Secure Futures Program



*A young beneficiary of the STRIVE Afghanistan literacy classes practices writing in Dari.*

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# Abstract

Managed by FHI 360 in partnership with Action for Enterprise (AFE), ACDI/VOCA, CARE, MEDA, Save the Children, the IRIS Center at the University of Maryland and USAID, STRIVE has implemented four field projects in Africa and Asia between 2008 and 2013. Each project has pursued a unique economic strengthening approach, ranging from savings-led finance to workforce development to value chain interventions. Coupled with a robust monitoring and evaluation framework and learning strategy, STRIVE has tracked and documented the impacts of these diverse interventions on child-level indicators related to both economic (financial), and non-economic (health, education, nutrition, etc.) vulnerability factors. As a result, STRIVE has sought to identify and demonstrate interventions that can sustainably increase household incomes and/or assets and document how such increases improve (or fail to improve) the lives of children.

This report summarizes the findings of one of the STRIVE-funded initiatives, MEDA's Afghan Secure Futures (ASF) project, in facilitating access to supplementary literacy and numeracy training for vulnerable youth in Afghanistan as part of a market-based project. First, the report finds that non-formal literacy classes can attract vulnerable youth who are unable to attend school. Second, establishing trust with workshop owners through business-related interventions can build their acceptance of initiatives such as supplementary classes for apprentices, where benefits to the business may not be immediately apparent. Third, there is greater receptivity to supplementary classes if their commercial benefits are made clear from the outset. Fourth, data collected over the course of the project suggest positive impacts for apprentices and workshop owners. Finally, independent of public funding, creating a sustainable system for supplementary classes that reaches working youth is a challenge.

## Purpose of this Report

This report draws from the experience of the ASF project to highlight several important technical considerations when facilitating supplementary literacy and numeracy education to reach vulnerable youth. Its intended audiences are implementers and donors who are developing programming for vulnerable children and youth and considering entry points for interventions or pathways for economic inclusion. The report discusses each lesson in turn and then presents a few final conclusions.

# Introduction

## Background to Basic Education in Afghanistan

Despite significant economic reform and growth following 2001, many Afghans continue to struggle economically; 36% of the population was unable to meet their basic needs in 2007 and over half of the population was at risk of falling into extreme poverty.<sup>1</sup> A common coping mechanism for families is to engage their children in work. As a result, an estimated 21% (1.9 million) of Afghan children between six and 17 years old are working; this increases to 45% of males between 16 and 17.<sup>2</sup> Although some children attend school while they work, most economically active children are unable to continue balancing both commitments.

The consequences are evident in the youth literacy rates: only 50% of boys and 18% of girls possess basic literacy skills.<sup>3</sup> Though some success has been made in raising school enrollment rates, access to education remains extremely limited in Afghanistan: 48 percent of children aged seven to 12 are not attending school.<sup>4</sup> Secondary school enrollment rates are 23% for boys and 7% for girls.<sup>5</sup> Less than one percent of the Afghan population reaches higher education.<sup>6</sup> This problem is particularly relevant in Afghanistan given the size of its youth population: 68% of the population of Afghanistan is below 25 years of age<sup>7</sup> while in Kabul 48% of the workforce was under 18 years old as of 2006.<sup>8</sup>

### Youth Vulnerability in Afghanistan

- **Youth Literacy:**  
50% for boys; 18% for girls
- **Secondary school enrollment:**  
23% for boys; 7% for girls
- **Primary school enrollment:**  
Children aged 7-12: 52%

Low enrollment rates are exacerbated by a lack of suitable infrastructure and poorly trained teachers. In 2007, then Education Minister Hanif Atmar stated that only 40 percent of students had a “decent place” to study, with the majority attending school in tents or substandard buildings.<sup>9</sup> UNICEF estimates that in 2002, only 15 percent of the country’s teachers had graduated from a teacher training college<sup>10</sup> and by 2007, Minister Atmar stated that of the 143,000 school teachers on the government’s payroll, 80% were not qualified.<sup>11</sup>

Ideally, all school-aged children and youth would have access to high quality, accessible education. Where this is not widely available, young people’s long-term vulnerability is reduced when they have access to safe opportunities to learn market-oriented skills.

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank, Poverty Status in Afghanistan: A Profile Based on National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) 2007/8, 2010, 10.

<sup>2</sup>National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/8: A Profile of Afghanistan, 2009, 34.

<sup>3</sup>UNDP, National Joint Youth Program, Background. [http://www.undp.org.af/whoware/undpinafghanistan/Projects/dcse/prj\\_youth.htm](http://www.undp.org.af/whoware/undpinafghanistan/Projects/dcse/prj_youth.htm)

<sup>4</sup>National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/8: A Profile of Afghanistan, 2009, 69.

<sup>5</sup>UNDP, National Joint Youth Program, Background. [http://www.undp.org.af/whoware/undpinafghanistan/Projects/dcse/prj\\_youth.htm](http://www.undp.org.af/whoware/undpinafghanistan/Projects/dcse/prj_youth.htm)

<sup>6</sup> National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/8: A Profile of Afghanistan, 2009, 71.

<sup>7</sup>UNDP, National Joint Youth Program, Background. [http://www.undp.org.af/whoware/undpinafghanistan/Projects/dcse/prj\\_youth.htm](http://www.undp.org.af/whoware/undpinafghanistan/Projects/dcse/prj_youth.htm)

<sup>8</sup>Beall and Schutte, Urban Livelihoods in Afghanistan, Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006, 39-40.

<sup>9</sup> Mojumdar, Aunohita: "Afghan Schools' Money Problems", BBC News, 2007. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/6533379.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6533379.stm)

<sup>10</sup> Rafi, Mohammad. "Female teachers help to rebuild Afghanistan’s education system", UNICEF, 2007.

[http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_39946.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_39946.html)

<sup>11</sup> Mojumdar, Aunohita: "Afghan Schools' Money Problems", BBC News, 2007. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/6533379.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6533379.stm)

## Introduction to STRIVE and ASF

In October 2007, USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF), in close consultation with the USAID Microenterprise Development office, initiated the STRIVE (Supporting Transformation by Reducing Insecurity and Vulnerability with Economic Strengthening) Program, a six and a half-year, \$16 million initiative that uses market-led economic strengthening initiatives to benefit vulnerable youth and children. The program aims to fill current knowledge gaps about effective economic strengthening approaches and their impact on reducing the vulnerability of children and youth.

The Afghan Secure Futures (ASF) project operated from 2008 to 2011 with a budget of \$2.9 million. Implemented by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) and managed by FHI 360, the ASF project focused on improving the lives of as many as 1,000 vulnerable male youth (70% between the ages of 14-18<sup>12</sup>) who were living in Kabul and working as apprentices in the construction sector. Although both male and female children face significant challenges in Afghanistan, ASF focused on young males because their work outside the home made them more accessible to economic programming. In addition, they are under greater pressure than female children to develop practical skills and contribute to family income.

The project took an indirect approach to generating economic benefits for youth apprentices by focusing its economic interventions on the workshop owners that employ apprentices. The workshop owners were typically independent entrepreneurs engaged in providing services in wood- and metalwork to the construction sector in and around Kabul. The majority of workshops were small enterprises, employing between two and eight employees, a combination of apprentices and adult workers.

Project interventions sought to address the constraints within the support service markets (particularly business development services and financial services) that inhibit business growth among micro and small workshops. The project's operating assumption was that improving business opportunities in the sector, especially for workshops that are employing apprentices, will ultimately improve employment and income opportunities for vulnerable youth. In addition, interventions to improve access to non-formal education opportunities and improve workplace safety practices directly targeted apprentices.

ASF employed a research methodology that consisted of a range of quantitative and qualitative assessments that took place over the duration of the project. The following table outlines key monitoring and evaluation milestones of the project:

Assessment	Data Points	When
Baseline Registration	Information on demographic, economic, workplace health and safety of project clients (workshop owners and apprentices)	Project commencement
Most Significant Change Impact Stories	Qualitative stories of program impact collected by field staff	Life of project
Follow-up Surveys	Surveys administered to a sample of project clients	Spring 2010 Spring 2011

<sup>12</sup> In the baseline data, the ages of the apprentices ranged from 7 to 26. Nearly 70 percent were between the ages of 14 and 18 years of age.

## ASF's Supplementary Literacy and Numeracy Training Initiative

Research indicates that workplaces can be positive learning environments for young people that teach many vital skills for working life.<sup>13</sup> When young people actively participate in workplace environments they can obtain valuable skill sets that will help them support themselves in the future while increasing their self-confidence and social status within their community. Business owners and other employees teach working youth life skills, technical skills and business skills. Research indicates that young people learn best when they learn skills directly within the context in which the competency is to be used.<sup>14</sup> Workplace learning provides a skill set that is more adapted to the market than many classroom-based models and gives young people greater connections to networks of support and future business opportunities.

ASF's initial assessment recognized that workplace learning alone would be insufficient for most apprentices to reach their preferred career objectives. Despite their exposure to enterprise-based learning, many working youth in Afghanistan lack the opportunity to expand their knowledge in areas such as literacy and numeracy that are not taught in the apprenticeship setting. Though many of these young people combine work and school, they have little time for homework or studying, and many only have rudimentary literacy and numeracy skills. These skills are necessary for advancing into senior positions in a workshop or for launching their own workshop, a goal many apprentices identified in key informant interviews.

School attendance, even if only part-time, is recognized as an important mitigating factor against the potential negative effects of child work.<sup>15</sup> In addition, education, whether formal or informal, provides young people with much more than instruction: in conflict and post-conflict settings in particular, a classroom may be one of the only spaces available for young people to interact with peers in a safe and structured space.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, the ASF project was designed to provide additional learning opportunities outside of the workplace to address these important knowledge gaps. After reviewing various options, ASF selected a “learning with work” model of supplementary literacy and numeracy classes that would complement workplace learning. The classes were non-formal and independent of the government school system, offered in seven community centers located close to the workshops. Instruction was provided by certified teachers from the formal school system, and was coordinated by Aschiana, an Afghan NGO with experience in providing non-formal education. ASF covered the costs of student stationery, transport and teacher payment for each of the centers. Tailored curriculum was identified as a priority in order to reflect and therefore validate the experiences of working youth and to create the link between the acquisition of practical skills and their application in workplace situations. ASF developed a curriculum focusing on tools and situations from the construction sector. Classes were held in the evenings after apprentices' working hours. The initiative began in October 2010 and continued until the close of the project in August 2011. Approximately 220 apprentices attended classes regularly in 2011.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>This assumes workshops meet safety and other basic standards. See, for example, PPIC Work Learning Through Work Report, 2008 ([www.ppic-work.org](http://www.ppic-work.org)); Johanna Lasonen, Workplaces as Learning Environments: Assessments by Young People after Transition from School to Work, 2005 (see [http://www.bwpat.de/skope/papers/8-ssp\\_lasonen.pdf](http://www.bwpat.de/skope/papers/8-ssp_lasonen.pdf)).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Peter Sawchuk, Following the Success: Promising Workplace Learning Practices in Marginalized Youth Employment, 2009 (see <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/fundedresearch/Sawchuk-FinalReport.pdf> )

<sup>15</sup> AREU, Confronting Child Labour in Afghanistan, 8

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Baxter and Bethke, Alternative Education: Filling the Gap in Emergency and Post-Conflict Situations, 2009 (see <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001849/184938e.pdf> ); Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies ([http://www.ineesite.org/post/about\\_education\\_in\\_emergencies/](http://www.ineesite.org/post/about_education_in_emergencies/))

<sup>17</sup> Numbers taken from unpublished Aschiana records, reported to ASF field staff on quarterly basis.

## Apprentice Profiles

During the final survey conducted in 2011, MEDA interviewed 109 apprentices.<sup>18</sup> Analysis of the survey data revealed three distinct groups of apprentices, in relation to the literacy classes.

Group 1 was composed of apprentices attending ASF's supplementary literacy classes, who ranged in age from 12 to 20 years old, with the majority between 12 and 15 years old.<sup>19</sup> Group 2, or apprentices who were already attending or had graduated from a government-run school, tended to be slightly older than the other two groups identified here, with the majority aged 16 to 18.<sup>20</sup> Group 3 was comprised of apprentices who were not currently attending school, had not graduated and did not take part in ASF supplementary classes. Their age range varied most widely, from 10 to 21 years old.<sup>21</sup> When asked why they did not attend ASF classes, 73% cited lack of time/working at their workshop and 23% could not attend due to family or personal problems.

Weekly income also varied across the three groups. Apprentices in Group 3 reported earning significantly more than their counterparts at 1,475 Afghanis per week, compared with apprentices in Group 1, who reported earning an average of 1,164 Afghanis per week and Group 2 who reported earning an average of 1,183 Afghanis per week.<sup>22</sup> Nearly half (47%) of apprentices in Group 3 ranked their income as first or second most important in the households, while only 23 to 25% of apprentices in Groups 1 and 2 ranked their income first or second.

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<sup>18</sup> Out of 1,080 apprentices in the project, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 109 during the final survey. Of those interviewed, 44 were attending ASF literacy classes (Group 1, described above), 35 were in school or had graduated (Group 2) and 30 were neither in school nor ASF literacy classes (Group 3).

The choice of apprentices for interview was largely dictated by the security situation in Kabul: interviews were conducted in workshops located in districts that were considered stable, a geographic decision that shifted rapidly and unpredictably. There is no reason to suppose that this group is any less representative than a more deliberately selected sample of project apprentices. Any interpretation needs to take these limitations into consideration.

<sup>19</sup> Out of 44 apprentices in literacy classes, 24 were between 12 and 15 years old, 16 were between 16 and 18, and four were 19 or 20 years old.

<sup>20</sup> Out of 35 apprentices attending or graduated from government-run schools, seven were between 13 and 15, 17 were 16 to 18 years old, and 19 were between 19 and 21.

<sup>21</sup> Out of 30 apprentices neither in school nor in literacy classes, three were between 10 and 12 years old, eight were between 13 and 15, twelve were 16 to 18 years old, and seven were between 19 and 21.

<sup>22</sup> In August 2011, the final month of project implementation, the exchange rate was 43.33 Afghan Afghanis per US dollar, a slight dip from the 45 Afghan Afghanis per US dollar at project commencement. (<http://www.xe.com/currencytables/?from=AFN&date=2011-08-31>)

# Summary of Findings

## Finding 1: Supplementary classes attract working youth who are unable to attend formal school. Regular classes provide significant educational and psychosocial value.

ASF’s programming was designed to reach a defined group of vulnerable youth: those who needed to work outside the home from an early age and could not attend formal school full-time. However, data collected during the ASF project found that even this defined population is heterogeneous, with three distinct groups emerging (see Apprentice Profile Summary text box). Attendance at government schools and ASF literacy classes correlated with certain economic characteristics.

Though it was necessary for the youth taking the ASF supplementary classes (Group 1) to work, this group earned the lowest weekly wage and only one in four apprentices in this group ranked their income as first or second most important in the family. Qualitative interviews and focus groups held with apprentices at the program conclusion revealed that even the minimal fees and expenses required by the government schools (uniforms, stationary and transportation) were prohibitive.<sup>23</sup> By providing small subsidies to cover transportation and stationery costs, ASF enabled this group of apprentices to attend the supplementary classes.

By contrast, apprentices in Group 3 were key earners in their respective families. Activities that took time away from work, such as attending school or literacy classes, risked lowering their earning potential and their households could not forego the income. The timing and duration of government classes - two to four hours during the morning or afternoon - was often not feasible for these apprentices. It is logical that these apprentices could not attend either government schools or supplementary literacy classes.

Apprentices in Group 2 were able to attend government schools on a part-time basis, negotiating their working times around classroom hours. It should be noted that many apprentices stated during the final qualitative evaluation that they wished to attend government schools because of the perceived quality, accreditation and recognition of these schools among employers.

**Apprentice Profile Summary**

**Group 1:** apprentices attending ASF’s supplementary literacy classes  
**Age:** majority surveyed 12 to 15  
**Income:** 1164 Afghanis per week

**Group 2:** apprentices attending government schools or graduates of government primary education  
**Age:** majority surveyed 16 to 18  
**Income:** 1183 Afghanis per week

**Group 3:** apprentices not attending school, had not graduated and did not participate in ASF supplementary literacy classes  
**Age:** majority surveyed 16 to 18  
**Income:** 1475 Afghanis per week

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<sup>23</sup> The final qualitative evaluation included face to face interviews with small groups of apprentices who were attending literacy classes. Groups varied from 6 to 9 interviewees. Four interviews were conducted. In addition, qualitative information was received from the education coordinator employed by the ASF project and Aschiana’s administrative staff.

## Educational and Psychosocial Value of Supplementary Literacy Classes

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies points to the value of education in providing a sense of normalcy for young people who have experienced crises. In addition to providing a safe space for learning, classrooms can be a valuable conduit for transmitting life skills, such as cooperation and communication; providing cognitive protection through intellectual development; and mitigating the psychosocial impact of conflict by

*“Many of the youth that come to our classes come to learn and also for a respite. Many of them live in crowded housing, with families that have violence and drug abuse and domestic squabbling. The classes are a short break, for even a couple of hours three times a week in which they can enjoy some peace.”*

*Mohammed Yousef, Founder, Aschiana  
(NGO that provided literacy classes)*

giving a sense of normalcy, stability, structure and hope for the future.<sup>24</sup>

Interviews with apprentices and Aschiana staff members indicate that the ASF literacy centers provided ASF apprentices with a safe space. Aschiana founder Mohammed Yousef recounted several examples of students in his classes who were seeking temporary refuge from unstable and chaotic home environments that included drug abuse and domestic violence. Stress-related mental illness is prevalent in Afghanistan: some estimates

place the rate of post-traumatic stress at 40% or more of the population.<sup>25</sup> Alcohol and drug abuse is a hidden, but very real, problem. Domestic violence rates are high. The staff who provided the supplementary classes reported that the literacy centers served as a respite for many of those apprentices living in chaotic or abusive households, who lacked other secure environments.

The relatively short time period of operation – the literacy centers had been offered for less than seven months at the time of the interviews and assessments – makes a quantified assessment of apprentice skill acquisition difficult. However, during the end of project key informant interviews, the apprentices interviewed uniformly expressed a belief that the classes were enabling them to attain a degree of literacy that was previously closed to them, and that this literacy would enable them to more fully participate in the market economy. Further information on positive impacts for apprentices can be found in Finding 4 of this paper. ASF’s experience indicates that incorporating supplementary education to economic strengthening activities in conflict or post-conflict contexts is an effective strategy for providing both educational and psychosocial support to vulnerable youth.

### Key Learning

- Supplementary classes attract working youth who are unable to afford or access other options.
- Even over a relatively short period of time, apprentices reported improved literacy, opening increased future employment opportunities.
- Regular classes provide significant psychosocial benefits for vulnerable youth.

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, INEE’s “Education in Emergencies” (<http://www.ineesite.org/en/education-in-emergencies>) and “Talking Points: Education in Emergencies and the INEE Minimum Standards”

([http://www.ineesite.org/uploads/files/resources/doc\\_1\\_EmergencyResponseTalkingPoints.pdf](http://www.ineesite.org/uploads/files/resources/doc_1_EmergencyResponseTalkingPoints.pdf))

<sup>25</sup> The German-government funded International Psychosocial Organization states that between 60 and 80 percent of the Afghan population suffer from depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. See

<http://www.ipscontext.org/en/projects/afghanistan/current-projects>

## Finding 2: Establishing trust with workshop owners through business-related interventions can improve receptivity to apprentice-oriented services

Despite charging no fees for the classes, ASF's literacy partner Aschiana reported that early enrollment rates were low (exact figures not available). To understand the cause of this low uptake, the ASF team's Business Development Officers (BDOs) gathered qualitative feedback from workshop owners, with whom they interacted on a daily basis. The team found that workshop owners were blocking apprentices from attending because the afternoon class times conflicted with working hours. This was particularly true of the more informal workshops. Classes were shifted to the evening, from 5pm to 7pm, as apprentices normally finished work by that time.

*“Getting workshop owner buy-in is critical before starting such classes. It was only when the owners saw the benefits to their business that they released the apprentices to attend the classes and encourage them to attend.”*

*James Williams, Afghan Secure Futures  
Chief of Party*

In addition, BDOs determined that workshop owners doubted the intentions of ASF staff who proposed introducing supplementary education for apprentices. ASF's target workshops operated in the informal sector and owners were consequently wary of outside attention that could bring unwelcome government intervention. Activities involving the youth they employed were particularly sensitive due to concerns that ASF might encourage the apprentices to leave the workshops. Given the important role that the workshop owners played in the lives of their apprentices, their buy-in was critical for apprentices to have the opportunity to attend classes.

In response to this feedback, ASF delayed the supplementary classes until after the market-oriented interventions were well established. This revised sequencing allowed workshop owners to first experience tangible economic benefits from working with ASF. Project staff found that as workshop owners began to trust that the project team was genuinely interested in supporting their own commercial development, they became more receptive when the concept of literacy classes was introduced.

### Key Learning

- Workshop owners are often distrustful of interventions that directly target the apprentices they employ.
- Realizing financial benefits from project interventions creates greater openness to apprentice-oriented initiatives such as supplementary training.

## Finding 3: Supplemental education classes need to be promoted to workshop owners in terms of their commercial benefits

ASF's analysis of workshop owner feedback revealed that the key messages being used to promote the classes – the benefits of literacy and numeracy to the apprentices' personal growth and development – were not resonating with workshop owners. However, based on the results of follow-up interviews conducted during the final evaluation, ASF and Aschiana adjusted their outreach efforts, instead emphasizing the economic benefits to the workshop owners: apprentices would have improved capacity to perform tasks in the workshop that require reading, writing or making calculations.

Using an economic rationale to advocate for apprentices to attend supplementary classes proved to be much more successful. Initially workshop owners did not perceive an economic benefit to allowing their apprentices to attend supplementary classes alongside their work obligations. Given their precarious economic status, many workshop owners feared that class attendance would make apprentices unavailable to take on additional work during peak periods. The risk was too high when there was little obvious commercial return.

*“It was hard at first to get the owners to allow their apprentices to go (to the literacy classes). But when they did and they learned how to do things like measuring and writing (customer orders), they realized the value the classes had for their businesses.”*

*Nasir Mohammed, ASF Literacy Program Coordinator*

Subsequent follow-up interviews conducted during the final project assessment indicated that, as their apprentices gained literacy and numeracy skills, workshop owners felt more free to leave the workshop for short periods of time, allowing them to conduct sales visits to clients and to network with potential subcontractors. The number of workshop owners allowing their apprentices to attend classes rose significantly following this change in approach.

In the end of project survey, 99% of workshop owners stated that they would support their apprentices’ attendance at literacy classes in future. Approximately 220 apprentices attended classes regularly in the final months of the initiative.

### Key Learning

- Workshop owners are often reluctant to encourage their apprentices to attend other activities such as school when they conflict with working hours. This is particularly true for the least prosperous workshops.
- Advocacy efforts targeting workshop owners are more effective when they emphasize the shared benefits, particularly economic, of supplemental classes for the workshop’s business and the apprentice.

## Finding 4: Preliminary evidence suggests positive impacts for apprentices and workshop owners

The literacy classes ran for seven months, which was not long enough to be able to measure apprentice-level impacts with certainty or to determine level of educational attainment. Anecdotal evidence from interviews conducted with both teaching staff and apprentices indicate that an increase in functional literacy did occur.

However, survey results and focus group discussions with apprentices who attended the literacy centers revealed that nearly all (95% of apprentices interviewed in 2011 end-line survey) felt their ability to support themselves and their families had improved as a result of the classes, due to increased wages, an increase in their capabilities and a perceived increase in job security. Many of the apprentices who attended the literacy classes viewed improving their education as a critical input to achieving their economic

*“It is good that the apprentice learns how to measure and read. That means they can do more in the workshop and my business will be better. ... (When business is better) I can pay them more. “*

*Mohammed Khan, Metal Workshop Owner as relayed in a conversation during project follow-up activity*

goals: while the majority of apprentices interviewed stated that they saw workshop ownership as the best pathway out of poverty for them and their families, most identified literacy and numeracy skills as an important prerequisite to achieving this goal.<sup>26</sup>

Workshop owners with apprentices in the supplementary classes were also generally positive about the impacts on their businesses. Surveyed owners noted that apprentices had increased capacity to take customer orders, measure accurately, handle cash and help run the stores without the owners there, freeing them up for social events or to be offsite doing business development. Based on these experiences, over 99% of workshop owners asked during the end of project survey explained that they would continue supporting apprentices to attend literacy classes. However, it is unclear if this support would be limited to granting permission for them to attend, or if it would also include financial support.

### Key Learning

- Nearly all (95%) of apprentices in the literacy classes felt that these learning opportunities had improved their ability to support themselves and their families.
- Workshop owners observed that the supplementary classes had improved apprentices' work-related skills.

## Finding 5: Sustainability is a challenge

From the project design stage, ASF found it difficult to identify sustainable models for education services in this fragile environment. An informal literature review undertaken during the ASF planning phase found two main models for addressing cost barriers to education: in the first model, organizations provide financing to cover government school fees; alternatively, many organizations develop non-formal education or training programs on a fee-for-service basis.<sup>27</sup>

Neither of these models was appropriate for ASF. Paying or providing loans to cover school fees can be an effective way to remove barriers for students, but many youth apprentices in the target group would be unable to attend government schools even if the fee were paid for them, as their families could not forego their income. In these cases, the timing of government schools was problematic, particularly for more vulnerable apprentices, as the school day overlaps significantly with working hours. Providing a stipend to apprentices to attend formal schooling was considered, but household surveys indicated that apprentices had little control over their finances; they were expected to turn over all money to the household and would not be able to use a stipend to cover school costs.

Recognizing that these models would exclude more vulnerable youth from educational programming, ASF adopted the following strategies:

- ASF selected a local partner, Aschiana, with a long history of providing educational services to disadvantaged Afghans and an intention to continue doing so in future.

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<sup>26</sup> These findings came from face to face interviews conducted during the final qualitative evaluation. See earlier footnote for details on these interviews.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Développement international Desjardins in Haiti, the Aninga Project in Uganda and Afghan Canadian Community Center's The Afghan School Project.

- ASF and Aschiana built the capacity of local trainers, all of whom were qualified teachers, in alternative pedagogical methodologies that did not focus on rote learning, the main approach in most Afghan classrooms.
- Understanding the importance that many working youth place on government certification, ASF sought and achieved government approval for the literacy and numeracy curriculum, and made this curriculum available to the government and other development partners to encourage support for ongoing supplementary classes.

The ASF team operated the literacy centers to provide direct services to apprentices but also to gather evidence on the positive impacts of improved literacy on workshop business and employability for apprentices. The demonstration effect of the centers may yet result in external funding for ongoing operation, though nothing has materialized to date.

### **Key Learning**

- Creating sustainable market-based systems for basic education that do not include public funding is a significant challenge, particularly when trying to reach vulnerable youth. However, ASF's literacy centers have generated data on the positive impacts of even basic improvements in literacy and numeracy on apprentices and the businesses in which they work.

# Conclusions

The Afghan Secure Futures project offers several conclusions for project designers and implementers.

Supplementary literacy classes provided working youth with educational opportunities that would otherwise have been closed to them. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are critical for youth to progress in the labor market, and are seen as essential for entrepreneurs to open their own businesses. Literacy and numeracy are rarely learned in the workplace, so wherever possible, economic program designers could consider providing classes or linking youth to existing educational opportunities.

Data gathered during the project depicted a well-defined group of youth who were not able to attend the classes: apprentices belonging to Group 3, described earlier in this document, were out of school and working full-time. In addition, nearly half provided the first or second most important source of income for their families. For these youth, it may not be appropriate to try and intervene at the workshop level. Their role as household income earners is seen as too important to risk compromising their value as employees. Program designers may want to consider providing psychosocial and educational support at the family level.

Informal literacy and numeracy centers are most appropriate in contexts with low rates of enrollment in the formal school system, substantial barriers – including the opportunity cost of foregone earnings for youth workers – precluding access to the formal system and a lack of alternative educational providers. Nevertheless, informal centers are not sustainable without long-term sources of funding. Project designers should consider strategies to support ongoing access to resources from project start-up. Project designers must also consider the real cost of attendance for youth, including transportation, stationery and foregone income. These factors may influence when, where and how often educational opportunities occur.

Finally, despite numerous challenges in offering supplementary education, the ASF team would strongly assert the value that classes have for working with other vulnerable youth. Nearly all apprentices attending the classes stated that their ability to support themselves and their families had improved as a result, and felt that improving their education was a critical step toward achieving their economic goals. Despite initial skepticism, workshop owners almost universally expressed support of their apprentices continuing to receive literacy instruction in end-of-project interviews.

Programmers and donors designing economic growth interventions should consider including educational support for working and other vulnerable youth.

# Annex 1: Summary of Lessons

This report presents five findings and associated lessons learned for practitioners designing programming to improve the economic welfare of vulnerable children and youth. The following table summarizes these findings and provides guidance for practitioners on how to apply them to the design and implementation of their own projects:

Finding	Lessons Learned	Implications for Application
1: Supplemental classes can attract more vulnerable youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supplementary classes attract working youth who are unable to attend formal school.</li> <li>Regular classes provide significant educational and psychosocial value.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the ability of vulnerable youth to access existing educational opportunities and the barriers they may face.</li> </ul>
2: Establishing trust with workshop owners through business-related interventions can improve receptivity to apprentice-oriented services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshop owners are often mistrustful of interventions that directly target the apprentices that work for them, particularly when they are not a part of the formal sector.</li> <li>Realizing financial benefits from project interventions creates greater openness to apprentice-oriented initiatives such as supplementary training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for potential sensitivity when seeking to impact younger apprentices directly and seek to first build trust with employers.</li> </ul>
3: Supplemental education classes need to be promoted to workshop owners in terms of their commercial benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshop owners are often reluctant to encourage their apprentices to attend other activities such as school. This is particularly true for the least prosperous workshops.</li> <li>Engagement with workshop owners needs to emphasize the shared benefits of supplemental classes for the workshop's business and the apprentice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and emphasize 'win-win' aspects of supplementary education for apprentices to build a shared vision of mutual gain.</li> </ul>
4: Preliminary evidence suggests positive impacts for apprentices and workshop owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nearly all apprentices felt that the supplementary classes had improved their ability to support themselves and their families.</li> <li>Workshop owners observed that the supplementary classes had improved apprentices' abilities within the workshops.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document and disseminate benefits resulting from supplementary education to build support.</li> </ul>
5: Sustainability is a challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating sustainable market-based systems for basic education that do not include public funding is a significant challenge, particularly when trying to reach vulnerable youth. However, ASF's literacy centers have generated data on the positive impacts of even basic improvements in literacy and numeracy on apprentices and the businesses in which they work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for ways to link to the public sector and other long-term bodies to increase the likelihood of sustainable access to supplementary education.</li> </ul>