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FINDING A WAY FORWARD: CONCEPTUALIZING SUSTAINABILITY IN AFGHANISTAN'S COMMUNITY-BASED SCHOOLS

Michelle J. Bellino, Bibi-Zuhra Faizi, and Nirali Mehta

Community-based educational (CBE) models have gained recognition across diverse contexts for closing access gaps, leveraging local assets, and shaping cost-effective and culturally relevant educational opportunities in marginalized communities. In protracted conflict contexts such as Afghanistan, CBE compensates for weak state capacity by cultivating community engagement and support. This article considers the impact of CBE in the voices of Afghanistan's educational and community stakeholders, gained through interviews and observations with parents, teachers, students, educational officers, and school shuras (councils) across eight communities in two provinces. Against a backdrop of continued insecurity, resource shortages, and uncertain projections for future government and NGO support, conceptions of sustainability emerge as salient but poorly defined, and as lacking common understanding among stakeholders about the purposes and long-term prospects of CBE. We argue that the success of CBE models depends on how various actors define sustainability and what it is the model is seeking to sustain. The study underscores three dimensions of sustainability: (1) self-reported changed attitudes toward education, (2) decisions about student transitions from community to government schools, and (3) emergent indicators of community ownership over CBE. Across these measures of sustainable attitudes, actions, and community arrangements, quality education is positioned as a mechanism for long-term community commitment. However, increased community interest and capacity to sustain CBE is at odds with the current policy approach, which anticipates the eventual handover of all community-based schools to the government.

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INTRODUCTION: "OUR CONCERNS HAVE RISEN AGAIN"

In January 2015, in the mountainous Afghan village of Chilkapa Payeen, several parents gathered to discuss the future of their children's education. As their children completed year three of primary school, the final grade offered at the nearby community-based school (CBS), parents were now confronted with a decision: should they send their children to the government school or discontinue their studies? Early in the conversation, one mother explained that the challenges of negotiating her daughter's educational access went hand-in-hand with questions about the future of community-based education (CBE) in Afghanistan, an arrangement intended to mitigate the effects of armed conflict during the country's civil war and the Taliban insurgency.[1] The woman's daughter Layla initially attended the government school, a 30-minute walk from the village through difficult terrain. As she grew older, Layla's parents withdrew her from school due to concerns about her safety during transit and the appropriateness of coeducational settings. A community-based school was established in their village several years later, and Layla was able to resume her studies. As she was now completing year three, Layla's parents were uncertain whether to continue their daughter's education, which would require that she return to the government school she had previously attended. Layla's mother explained:

> Before establishing CBS my girl was not studying, because her father had stopped her from going to school. When the CBS was established, our concerns were addressed. My daughter continued her lessons here. But now, [in the face of] handing over of this CBS, our concerns have risen again, and I know her father will never allow her to go to school.

Later in the conversation, Layla's mother raised concerns about the quality of education at the government school. She said, "We trust them [government school teachers] . . . but we do not believe that they will teach them well." Other parents in the room agreed with her assessment that the CBS teachers, most of whom had not graduated high school but were given professional training and ongoing mentorship through NGOs, were superior to the educators at the government school, even though they had formal credentials.

1 CBE has a long history in Afghanistan, dating back to the 1940s. Below, we further describe this policy trajectory, and the ways that CBE became more widely implemented and more closely linked to conflict mitigation during these two periods of increased armed conflict.

This family's experience sheds light on several important tensions in this fragile setting: the interruptions in children's education due to structural challenges, such as access and impressions of quality; the gender dynamics operating within families that influence educational decision-making; ongoing security concerns; and lingering questions about educational interventions that community members view as temporary. Although Layla's mother recognized that the availability of a CBS had influenced her husband's support for their daughter's education by providing a secure and culturally appropriate space for learning, the move to a government school posed the same dilemma they had faced three years earlier: long, risky walks to school and concerns about propriety. The decision was further complicated by concern that the instructional quality at the government school was inferior to that of the CBS.

Across the eight communities included in this study, parents, children, education officers, and school-based actors had the same questions on their mind: could "the organizations" [operating the CBSs] stay? And what would happen if and when they pulled out? Layla's mother and others articulated their worries clearly, projecting that the positive changes nurtured by CBS would leave with the organizations. Her uncertainty about whether the community's attitudes toward girls' education, and the national education system more broadly, had authentically changed generates questions about the embedded assumptions and visions for sustainability that underlie CBE models. It also reveals the different ways sustainability is conceived by different stakeholders: "One of the challenges in assessing sustainability is the diversity of views about *what* should be sustained" (Nkansa and Chapman 2006, 511, emphasis added). Within this context, Afghanistan's ministry of education (MoE) envisioned CBE as a time-bound strategy to increase school access during a period of conflict and weak institutional capacity; NGOs and donors understood it as a way to enhance state-provided education and offer additional technical inputs to improve quality; and, finally, communities and their children considered it a safe alternative to government schools, especially for girls. Efforts toward long-term improvements in educational attainment require that these stakeholders come to a common understanding about sustainable mechanisms and sustainable goals.

Based on interviews, focus group discussions, and observations carried out with various stakeholders in communities across two provinces in Afghanistan, this article considers the impact CBE has had in the region, as expressed through the voices of community actors. Inquiry into CBE in Afghanistan is vital to our understanding of community-based interventions, educational outreach, and public-private partnerships in conflict-affected contexts. CBE is

a much-lauded intervention in Afghanistan, which has led organizations and governments of other weak, under-resourced, and conflict-affected states to examine whether the joint benefits of policy integration and local involvement might bring similar benefits to isolated and marginalized communities that have been historically excluded from public education. It is well documented that CBE models in Afghanistan have dramatically increased the enrollment of both male and female children, improved learning outcomes, and reduced attacks on schools (Burde 2014; Burde and Linden 2013; Kavazanjian 2010; Kirk and Winthrop 2006b, 2008)—outcomes all stakeholders would consider worth sustaining. Documenting these gains has been influential in maintaining NGO and government support for CBE, but greater understanding is needed about how this intervention has (re)shaped community attitudes and cultural practices toward education, and the extent to which communities have taken ownership of the CBE model, particularly in the face of uncertain projections for future government and NGO support.

Burde (2004) warns that short-term community mobilization might result in long-term disempowerment if community involvement is viewed as an alternative rather than a complement to state accountability in providing for its citizens. We take up this issue here from the perspective of community members and through the lens of sustainability, asking how communities understand and enact their role in contributing to sustainable CBE structures and outcomes related to educational access, inclusivity, and quality. Sustainability is a significant dimension of educational planning in conflict-affected contexts and the cornerstone of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This framework befits the Afghanistan context, as the transition from emergency relief to (presumed) post-crisis development shifts the stakes for and the involvement of international organizations, despite the fact that state capacity remains weak and insecurity remains high.

We begin this paper by examining the prevalence of CBE models in developing countries and considering their short- and long-term successes in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Drawing from studies of education reform and development, we theorize that achieving sustainability in institutionally fragile contexts requires continuous improvement and input from all stakeholders as the dynamics of conflict expand and constrain intervention goals. Within this framework, we pose relevant questions about the future of CBE in Afghanistan, oriented in particular around what it is we seek to sustain in a context experiencing protracted conflict. We then highlight the salient perspectives that emerged from our discussions with community members, which illuminate three sites for sustaining the

gains made through CBE: (1) changed attitudes toward education; (2) support for educational transitions from community to government schools; and (3) indicators of community mobilization to advocate for their children's educational rights. We argue that increased community interest and capacity to sustain CBE is at odds with the current policy approach, which calls for the eventual handover of all CBSs to the government.

COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION MODELS: ORIGINS, BENEFITS, AND UNCERTAIN FUTURES

Once at the center of education in developing countries, communities took on a secondary role with the growth of centralized education systems (Bray 2000). Due to a lack of resources and limited state capacity, national governments and international partners are once again leveraging community assets to meet the increasing demand for education. These collaborations are particularly relevant in conflict-affected contexts, where community engagement is needed to maintain and protect schools in hard-to-reach areas where states lack presence and oversight (Reyes 2013).

"Community-based education" is a broad term that encompasses some form of community participation, though the level of community engagement and collaboration varies greatly. Some community-based interventions are classified as alternative education programs (AEPs), in that they employ "alternative" means to reach hard-to-access learners (Farrell and Mfum-Mensah 2002). Educatodos in Honduras, for example, is an AEP developed by the country's education ministry in collaboration with USAID. It offers culturally relevant curricula and a flexible schedule to accommodate out-of-school youth and adults (Kraft 2009). It can be difficult to identify community-based models, as some local innovations have been formally integrated or mainstreamed into national systems. For instance, Escuela Nueva, which began as an NGO-led initiative in rural Colombia with a focus on training local teachers and using a flexible learner-centered curriculum, had such a high level of success that the government formally adopted the approach into its national education policy (McEwan 1998). Importantly, many of these innovations have taken root during periods of conflict and their aftermath, when state capacity to deliver social services was weakened or absent entirely. In other cases, these innovations have proven particularly successful at reaching learners who were denied access to education due to armed conflict.

The 1990 Jomtien Declaration and subsequent international declarations recognized the critical role NGOs play in providing education, particularly in weak and under-resourced settings (Bray 2000).[2] Rather than operating in parallel with government schools, most community-based schools begin as complementary systems that support children's transition into the public system, although some models are more independent from national structures than others. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is a well-established model of CBE that offers primary-level classes for more than one million children and adolescents (Chabbott 2006; Farrell 2008). BRAC has scaled-up its programming and now has a presence in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tanzania, Uganda, Philippines, and South Sudan. NGO collaboration with national actors in these contexts has ensured that community-based schools are recognized as a legitimate form of education that helps to close access gaps and gives children a way to continue their education beyond primary grades.

Although questions of quality remain, there are a number of well-documented benefits to community involvement in schooling. Studies across diverse country contexts have shown that CBS students meet or outperform their counterparts in public schools on measures of reading, writing, and numeracy (Burde and Linden 2013; McEwan 1998; Nath, Sylva, and Grimes 1999). Some studies have shown that CBE has increased community interest in and commitment to education, while expanding inclusive and equitable access for marginalized populations (Bray 2000). Colley (2005) has reported fewer disciplinary cases in the schools since PTAs were established in rural Gambia. Community participation in Ethiopia has led to the development of culturally relevant curricula for historically marginalized groups, as well as improved school access for women and people with disabilities (Edo, Ali, and Perez 2002). Cost-sharing between multiple constituents—governments, organizations, and communities—is frequently cited as an additional advantage in under-resourced contexts (Miller-Grandvaux and Yoder 2002). Finally, Reyes (2013) argues that community engagement in school management plays a critical role in reinforcing community, school, and student resilience in the face of adversity, particularly in conflict-affected contexts.

Program coordinators and researchers who have studied the efficacy of these models have identified several mechanisms that underlie the success of CBE, including school size and location, language of instruction, the curriculum's

2 In Jomtien, Thailand, delegates from 155 countries, including Afghanistan, adopted a World Declaration on Education for All, striving to make primary education accessible to all children and immensely reduce illiteracy by the year 2000. The declaration reaffirmed the notion of education as a basic human right, and urged countries to meet the basic learning needs of all through flexible and context-sensitive methods.

relevance to local identities and practices, the level of material and professional support offered, and the extent of community members' agency in decision-making (DeStefano, Moore, Balwanz, and Hartwell 2007; Farrell and Mfum-Mensah 2002; Kirk and Winthrop 2006a, 2008). Despite celebrated successes in reaching and partnering with marginalized communities, the sustainability of these alternative community-based models is an area of study that is often neglected. Sustainability presumably depends on a government takeover of the schools and adequate allocation of resources, the community's continued involvement, or both. Yet in practice, these multiple roles, as well as the nature and timing of transitions, are rarely well defined.

What We Seek to Sustain in Community-Based Interventions

Discussions of educational sustainability often center on the importance of material resources and technical capacity (Healey and DeStefano 1997; Zehetmeier 2015), with remarkably little consideration of the mechanisms that can sustain educational programming in the absence or reduction of external funding, particularly in fragile states that rely heavily on external donors. As Nkansa and Chapman (2006) have asked, "What remains [of community participation] after the money ends?" These authors point to four frameworks through which sustainability is traditionally conceived in international development work: economic models that continue service provision while maximizing economic benefits; sociopolitical models that transmit knowledge, skills, and capacity across generations; ecological models that emphasize the preservation of resources and attention to human interaction with the environment; and innovation-diffusion models that center on aligning interventions and local values in order to foster a sense of ownership (511–13). They then propose a synthesis model that draws from each of these frameworks while recognizing the importance of capacity and resources at both the community and "management" levels. Mendenhall (2014, 68) finds that this synthesis model, theorized in the context of a stable society, has "[limited] applicability to post-conflict environments," arguing that we need to think differently about sustainability in contexts undergoing the "relief-development transition." We particularly need to consider how the goals and the strategies employed to reach them shift, as the possibility of making sustainable gains is broadened and constrained by conflict and its long-term effects.

Education reform scholars embrace a dynamic conceptualization of sustainability that aims for ongoing improvement across a broad range of goals (Fullan 2006; Hargreaves and Fink 2003). Rather than aiming at the stasis of existing activities and systems, as earlier conceptions presumed, dynamic paradigms recognize that

the goals and mechanisms of sustainability evolve in tandem with the shifting social and political environments in which they are embedded. Fullan (2006), for example, defines educational sustainability as "the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement" (114). Writing about CBE in fragile and under-resourced contexts in Pakistan, Razzaq (2016) explains that sustainability requires attention to both the product and the process. She finds that sustainability entails "continued financial support," "trust and acceptance of the community," "uninterrupted services," and "integration . . . into the long-term educational vision and educational budget," along with flexibility and a readiness to adapt strategies to the specific contexts and needs of communities (760). Building on these definitions, we argue that sustainability in fragile contexts requires attention and responsiveness to the constellation of actors and structures present in the broader postconflict environment, and their interactions over time. In aiming for continuous improvement in a system that is changing simultaneously at multiple scales through global, national, and local interactions, we need to consider the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, as well as how community resources, capacities, and subjectivities shift in response to impressions of state legitimacy and capacity to provide services.

Relatedly, there is growing attention to the need for meaningful community engagement, communal partnerships, and a sense of community ownership at the outset of CBE arrangements, to help ensure that communities remain invested in the long-term (Razzaq 2015, 2016). For example, Nkansa and Chapman (2006) found that, following the withdrawal of external funding for a community-based school alliance in Ghana, effective community leadership and social cohesion emerged as critical elements in differentiating between high- and low-sustaining communities. A number of other studies (Fullan 2001; Hargreaves and Fink 2003; Rogers 1995) have also found that strong leadership and social connections are essential to sustaining long-term educational gains—in some cases even more than the acquisition of resources and technical skills. As international funding is diverted away from Afghanistan's protracted conflict to relieve more acute humanitarian crises, the MoE, district, and provincial officers are preparing for student transitions and the handover of institutions in an educational system that remains weak and under-resourced. As families and children look to their educational futures, it is urgent to determine what it is we are "seeking to sustain" within and through community-based models.[3] We turn now to the evolution

3 We borrow this phrasing from Paris and Alim (2014), who pose this question while arguing that culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy be recast as culturally sustaining pedagogy. Paris (2012) points out that "it is possible to be relevant to something or responsive to it without ensuring its continuing presence" (95). Although not a perfect metaphor for CBE, the shift from *responsiveness* to *sustainability* illustrates a critical distinction in the inclusion, longevity, and legitimacy granted to communities for their participation in their children's educational futures.

of CBE policy in Afghanistan and the ways the goals and mechanisms for sustainability have shifted in the context of enduring security threats and weak state capacity.

Conflict, Education, and International Involvement in Afghanistan's Education Sector

Decades of violence and political instability in Afghanistan have taken a toll on infrastructure throughout the country, and the education system is no exception. Public education, already met with popular skepticism due to its historical entanglement with communist propaganda (Burde 2014), suffered acutely during the Taliban years, particularly education for girls and women. By the time the Taliban fell in 2001, some Afghan citizens, particularly in rural areas, had grown distrustful of the value and relevance of the curriculum privileged in non-religious schools. Buoyed by international aid, the government of Afghanistan began reviving the education system, giving particular attention to the capacity of CBE to close access gaps in remote rural areas where Taliban influence was strong.

CBE has a long history in Afghanistan. Initially known as village schools, this community-based structure emerged in 1949 in the form of "feeder" schools, which offered classes for grades 1-3 in areas where the nearest school was five or more kilometers away (Samady 2001). Some of these village schools subsequently became government primary schools, and although they remained physically located within communities, government control provided greater access to resources. Decades later, this model of initial community involvement followed by a gradual increase in state accountability continues to influence the way NGOs and the MoE structure CBE. The MoE's CBE policy is a "clustered" approach, wherein community-based schools are established as feeders to nearby government schools. Communities are expected to provide a safe physical space for the school, maintain the structure, and supply material resources; support education and allow girls to attend school; support teachers and collaborate with government school staff when necessary; and actively participate in the school *shura* (council) (Ministry of Education [MoE] 2012, 11–12). Meanwhile, the government schools serve as hubs that link clusters of nearby communities, so that students attending CBE classes in two to five communities will transition to the nearest government hub school after year three of primary school. Accordingly, all CBE students are registered directly with their respective hub school to ensure a seamless transition. As students make the transition from one school to the other, the community-based schools undergo a parallel shift at the institutional level, from NGO funding and support to government "handover."

More recently, the formal nature of implementing partnerships has shifted, with international donors taking more responsibility for teacher training, community mobilization, and fostering community-government links. While the UN and small NGOs such as Afghans4Tomorrow have established and continue to support CBE in Afghanistan, one of the country's largest and most extensive consortiums for CBE programming was the USAID-funded Partnership for Advancing Community Education in Afghanistan (PACE-A). By 2008, the MoE reported that an estimated 20,000 community-based classes were in operation throughout Afghanistan. In 2011, when PACE-A's program ended, community demand to continue support for local schools led to the formation of Basic Education for Afghanistan Consortium (BEACON), a coalition of NGOs including CARE Canada, International Rescue Committee, Aga Khan Foundation, and Catholic Relief Services. BEACON has centered on consolidating and scaling-up the gains made under the PACE-A program.

While great strides have been made in recent years, significant challenges to access and quality remain, stemming from issues within and outside the education sector. Security interventions have failed to eliminate domestic and cross-border insurgent threats, so that targeted attacks on NGOs, government officials and facilities, including government schools, contribute to ongoing fragility. As of May 28, 2016, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction reported that only 65.6 percent of the country's districts are under Afghan government control, a decrease from the 70 percent reported in January 2016. Against a backdrop of continued insecurity, including the presence of armed opposition groups, fear of renewed conflict, and severe resource challenges, a number of elements of CBE policy implementation remain weak, in particular institutional handover and student transitions—two key measures of sustainability. The integration process and decisions about whether a particular CBS will continue as a feeder school, undergo a government handover, or close indefinitely remain ambiguous and inconsistently implemented (Guyot 2007). Issues of partial and full integration (implying MoE financial responsibility) have been equally inconsistent, introducing the possibility that the government can "'take over' more and more schools without accepting responsibility for them" (4). The MoE's resource and capacity constraints have delayed the handover process at the institutional level, and the transition from CBS classes to formal enrollment at hub schools remains a challenge for schools seeking to accommodate larger numbers of students and address the gender concerns of incoming girl students. Meanwhile, families like Layla's remain skeptical of government schools and confront the same insecurity and access barriers that gave rise to community-based schools as a viable alternative.

These challenges are further exacerbated by a lack of clear definitions and common understanding about the purposes and long-term prospects of CBE interventions among donors, the MoE, implementing agencies, local education officers, school actors, and communities. Envisioned as a temporary measure, Afghanistan's CBE model was designed to close access gaps in rural communities and provide secure educational opportunities to out-of-school children and adolescent girls close to home. While positioning communities as temporary service providers, the MoE planned to build its own capacity so it could later absorb these students into government schools. From the start, the aim of CBE was not to construct a parallel or shadow system but to foster "close and careful coordination with the Afghanistan MoE" (Burde 2014, 141), thus "strengthen[ing] the government system as opposed to competing against it" (Kirk and Winthrop 2006b, 2). This end goal suggests that the Afghan government recognized the need for CBE to address current challenges but did not anticipate the role communities would play in long-term educational planning and provision. According to the World Bank (2005, 36), "interim arrangements and transitional mechanisms" such as community-based schools should be leveraged during postconflict reconstruction. Characterizing CBE as a "transitional mechanism" might account for the continued attractiveness of community-based partnerships in conflict-affected contexts. Yet in Afghanistan there has been no clear transition from protracted conflict, crisis, and instability.

The MoE, in consultation with donors and NGOs, recently drafted Afghanistan's National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) III (MoE 2015–2020), which was expected to draw on lessons learned from CBE implementation while articulating strategic reforms. However, NESP III did not make substantial changes to CBE policy, nor did it outline a succession plan, budgetary needs, or a projected timeline for government handover. It also pointed to a number of ongoing resource shortages—such as that nearly half of MoE schools have no building. Meanwhile, a number of NGOs are poised to shift from their decades-long role in providing education to advisory positions. In the absence of strategic planning, CBE remains an exercise in community participation with unclear long-term dimensions.

How, then, are we to measure the sustainability of CBE when educational gains and the nature of the CBE structure remain in question? Is sustainability best conceptualized as the government's capacity and commitment to sustain an education system that serves rural communities and closes access gaps, or as the continuation of local involvement in the provision and governance of the schools? Is sustainability indexed by changed attitudes toward educational investments among community members and measured by their willingness to send their children to government schools, which was envisioned as the long-term goal for CBE? Or should we conceptualize sustainability as a measure of children's continuous access to quality learning environments irrespective of who provides the service, even if this risks contributing to a parallel system, which has been a persistent government concern?[4] However we choose to measure sustainability in this context, long-term change cannot be examined without considering the complexity of sustainability for multiple actors, the interactions between their changed attitudes and changed structures, and their interactions with a protracted crisis environment.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study draws on data collected from three school clusters located in two provinces, which consist of three government hub schools and eight community schools (see Figure 1). While not representative of all community-based schools in Afghanistan, these clusters were selected through purposeful sampling techniques, in that the logic guiding their selection was aligned with the research inquiry. In addition to security and accessibility, the main factor guiding case selection was attention to "active" clusters, where actors from the cluster hub school, CBE teachers, NGO teacher trainers, community school shuras, as well as provincial and district educational officers, regularly and meaningfully interacted with one another and with community members, including parents and students.

Carrying out this research in active clusters allowed us to explore mechanisms that potentially contributed to efficient coordination, communication, and engagement in the implementation of CBE policy, particularly in preparation for students' transition from community to hub schools and the government handover process, while also recognizing that questions about sustainability

4 Anastacio and Stannard (2011) assert that, at the time PACE-A began implementing a large-scale CBE program, Education Minister Hanif Atmar was "fearful that CBE was becoming a parallel structure to the formal education system, and he was keen to unify the community-based students and teachers within the formal structure" (120). This continued concern undergirds the plan for CBE integration as the state's vision of sustaining educational access and quality.

would remain salient even when the cluster model is working well. We draw on a combination of structured interviews with CBE teachers (n=9) and hub school principals (n=3); observations of CBE instruction (n=3); and focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents (n=10), CBE students (n=9), and school shuras (n=7) across the three clusters sampled (see Table 1). We also interviewed provincial educational officers (n=2) and district educational officers (n=2) who worked across the clusters at the province and district levels, respectively.

Figure 1: Three School Clusters in Two Provinces

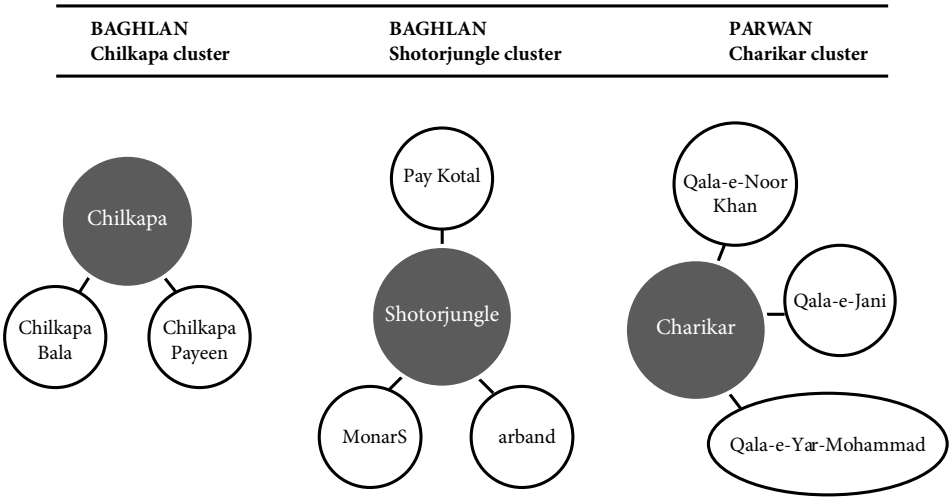

Table 1: Data Collected across Three School Clusters

	CLUSTER 1 Chilkapa, Baghlan	CLUSTER 2 Shotorjungle, Baghlan	CLUSTER 3 Charikar, Parwan
Focus groups with students	n=3 (16 female, 2 male)	n=3 (9 female, 9 male)	n=3 (7 female, 8 male)
Focus groups with parents	n=4 (18 female, 6 male)	n=3 (11 female, 7 male)	n=3 (8 female, 9 male)
CBE teacher interviews	n=3 (3 female)	n=3 (3 female)	n=3 (3 male)
Observations of TLC	n=1 (3 female)	n=1 (3 female)	n=1 (8 male)
Hub school principal interviews	n=1 (male)	n=1 (male)	n=1 (male)
Focus groups with school shura	n=2 (4 female, 4 male)	n=2 (5 female, 5 male)	n=3 (6 female, 9 male)

The research design and analysis were carried out through dialogue and collaboration among researchers located in Afghanistan and the U.S.[5] All data were collected by BEACON field staff in an effort to accommodate security concerns and leverage the existing relationships between staff and communities. Our research team made an explicit effort to develop research instruments that would not require technology, such as digital audio recorders. The inability to record or transcribe full transcripts is a necessary limitation of the design, given persistent concerns over surveillance in an insecure context. We also made an effort to collect data in culturally sensitive ways by ensuring that researchers and participants were the same sex, and by convening separate discussion groups for men and women whenever possible. Focus group discussions among parents and students were likely influenced by cultural and gender norms that dictated socially acceptable viewpoints. Women tended to speak less frequently than men in mixed-sex focus group discussions, and participants often repeated one another's statements verbatim. However, different opinions were indeed conveyed, leading us to believe that participants were sufficiently comfortable expressing some divergent opinions in the company of male and female community members, as well as programming staff. An added challenge of this work was the multilingual nature of the data collection and the inherent challenges of translation and transcription; all direct quotes were translated into English by field staff.

Afghan researchers who collected data in schools and communities were invited to share their emergent analysis and reflections on the data-collection process. Their reflections provided an additional source of data and facilitated deeper collaboration on an otherwise remote data-collection process. All data sources were coded by two researchers, which involved a dual process of "open" and "closed" coding, informed by emergent, inductive and established, deductive themes, respectively. Throughout the data analysis process, we paid particular attention to pragmatic and evaluative codes that captured participants' experiences with programming over time, such as parents' changed attitudes toward their children's education. We also coded for strong and weak links within the cluster system, noting indicators of collaboration and coordination among stakeholders, as well as communication gaps, anticipating that these instances offered insight into attitudes toward, and efforts to establish, sustainability.

Linking the perspectives of various stakeholders to the CBE policy deepened our understanding of the ways national and local education policies are reproduced,

5 The authors conducted this research through short- and long-term contracts with the IRC. Findings from the original research were reported in Bellino and Faizi (2015). This paper is an independent endeavor to reexamine the prior study with new questions in mind.

resisted, and reconstituted by those who implement policies in classrooms and communities. Building on sociocultural studies of education policy (Levinson and Sutton 2001), this research connects the standardized visions authored by policymakers to the everyday attitudes and experiences of those in schools, classrooms, and communities. Within this framing, questions about CBE—whether pertaining to quality, access, sustainability, or the interaction of these dimensions—depend on the attitudes, resources, and capacity of state education officers and community members, including teachers, parents, shuras, and the students themselves. Bringing these voices together in the context of an educational model that positions communities as both the stakeholders and the beneficiaries allows an exploration of the ways sustainability is "constrained and enabled by existing structures" (Levinson and Sutton 2001, 3), including the attitudes and behaviors of community actors themselves.

FINDINGS: PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY AND PERSISTENT CONCERNS

In this section, we consider three dimensions of sustainability of CBE, as conveyed by community members, which reveal tensions between community desires to contribute to sustainable gains and the lack of structural reform that supports those gains: (1) community members' self-reported attitude change toward education, (2) decisions about educational transitions from community to government schools, and (3) emergent indicators of community ownership. First we describe how community members articulated their own and other community members' changed attitudes and behaviors toward supporting formal education, specifically when it is of high quality. In some cases, parents pointed to a "cultural" shift that had taken place at the community level, with corresponding changes in their behavior, in an effort to support their children's educational aspirations. We then explore parents' uncertainty regarding their children's pending transition to government schools, linking their tentative support to perceptions that hub schools are lower quality institutions than CBSs. To complement parents' views, we explore concerns expressed by children in these communities as they considered the prospect of transitioning to government schools. Finally, we examine the extent of community ownership and emergent efforts within communities to mobilize collective action to continue CBE. Throughout we consider both the mechanisms associated with changed attitudes, decision-making, and community ownership, as well as community members' concerns that the barriers that preceded NGO involvement and the innovation of CBE are reemerging.

Cultural Continuity and Change

Parents across the communities expressed their impression of a significant cultural shift occurring in their villages, which they attributed to the innovation of CBE, particularly in terms of changing attitudes toward gender and education. In Qala-e-Yar-Mohammad, several fathers explained that seeing girls learn in a CBS had dramatically challenged their views on girls' education. They previously believed that education outside the home could only benefit boys, but now they also hoped to see girls in their community learn in schools. A father in Pay Kotal said similarly, "In the past, mothers did not allow their girls to visit even neighbors. Now they go to school. We are even considering sending them to hub school." Although this parent conveyed uncertainty about girls' continuing education, parents often expressed their changed attitudes in universal and absolutist terms, as one mother from Sarband shared: "Everyone in the village knows that they [girls] should also go to school. CBE has changed our people. Before they used to be worried about sending their daughters to school, but now they are not." A mother in Chilkapa Payeen noted that she would now feel "uncomfortable" if her daughters stayed at home rather than attending school. Another mother linked local attitudes to globalization and modernization: "The world has progressed, our boys and girls . . . should not stay behind." These parents' voices illustrate that formal education, alongside traditional religious education, has become a new cultural norm.

To support their claims that community-based schools shifted people's beliefs and everyday practices, parents described the ways domestic responsibilities now intersected with school routines. For example, parents' revised conceptions of their children's family roles now prioritized educational pursuits over traditional household duties, a cultural shift that is particularly influential in fostering support for girls' education (Lockheed 2010). One mother from Qala-e-Jani said, "One day I had to go somewhere and my other child, still a baby, was crying . . . My daughter wanted to help me in taking care of her brother. But I told her to put her brother in the cradle, your father will take care of him, but you should go to school." Another mother said similarly, "Even when I have a lot of things to do at home, I don't ask my daughter to skip school to help me at home." These statements suggest that parents have begun to support girls' education at home by readjusting practices around gendered chores and responsibilities. Although older daughters traditionally care for their younger siblings and help with the housework, these mothers encouraged their daughters to study and attend school, even when it meant less help at home. Another mother recalled that her daughter requested help taking care of her younger siblings so she could spend more time

studying, noting that, as her daughter conveyed the importance of school to her family, she came to realize how important education had become to her daughter over the course of her time at the CBS.

Other parents suggested that education contributed to cultural continuity and increased the commitment to embedded local practices. Despite initial concerns that the foreign aid enmeshed in CBE would impose on them a Western educational model based on Western beliefs and knowledge systems, parents, teachers, and students consistently described the education they received as reinforcing culturally relevant belief systems and the values of Islam. For example, parents in Qala-e-Yar-Mohammed proudly declared that their children's literacy skills had allowed them to learn their prayers, improved discipline, and led to more visible respect toward elders, all of which are traditional and culturally appropriate dimensions of village life. One parent explained how the school routine changed their use of time, in that before attending a CBS, "some children just wasted their time playing outside [the] whole day long. Now that has changed." Accessibility to school thus has increased the social and functional value of education. One father noted that school accessibility had engendered healthy competition among village parents about their children's success. Having a school in the village shifted education from a privilege for the few to an expectation that all children would have the same chances in life. The parents' conceptions of equitable opportunities align with Burde's (2014) argument that CBE decreases perceptions of "horizontal inequality" within and across communities.

What We Mean by "Better": Parents' Impressions of Quality

Across all villages, parents' hesitation to allow their children to make the transition to the hub school began with structural barriers to access, such as the distance and insecurity of their children's route to the school. However, access issues quickly gave way to concerns about the inferior quality of instruction, lack of teacher professionalism, and material resource shortages at the government schools, which parents' compared to the visible advantages of community-based schools. Remarkably, this finding emerged in every focus group discussion with parents and students across the eight villages, which had differing CBE arrangements, and in reference to the three hub schools the local schools were clustered around. Parents and students in all locations considered the quality of instruction at the government schools inferior to that of the community-based schools.

Parents' concerns about the teachers' instructional capacity and professionalism stemmed from their impressions of the quality and legitimacy of the pre-service training provided government-certified teachers. One father in Chilkapa Bala said flatly that hub school teachers "are not expert and do not know how to teach well." Another took a softer approach, explaining that "they are good teachers and have good behaviors. But their qualifications and experience are low." Some parents pointed to specific teachers at the hub school who were working with false certificates, or who had significant knowledge and training but were nonetheless poor educators. Other parents worried that hub school teachers had poor attendance records and came to school to "only pass their time," implying that the teachers were not invested in their work and that there was little oversight to hold them accountable. Despite the hub school teachers' formal credentials, parents believed they were less likely to "engage students" than teachers at their CBS.

Student "involvement" and "engagement" were frequently referenced as instructional strengths at the community-based schools and a shortcoming of the instruction provided at the hub schools. When parents elaborated on what they meant by "engaging students," they pointed to "learning activities" and practices that incorporated elements of structured review, scaffolding, and differentiation. Although the parents did not use the terminology of inquiry-based, student-centered pedagogy, their comments indicated that they have grown fond of the more active approaches used in CBE classes, which are linked to BEACON's teacher training activities, despite the fact that most CBS teachers have incomplete formal schooling and little credentialed preparation. One mother explained that she could see the difference in educational quality when comparing her two children: "My son is studying in hub school but always [takes advice] from his sister, who attends CBS." Other parents referenced neighbors and nephews studying at the hub school who could not read or speak as well as CBS students. Parents' comments about quality were frequently informed by the juxtaposition of what they saw firsthand in the CBS classes, which they were able to visit, and what they inferred or heard second-hand about the hub schools, despite the fact that some parents had never stepped foot inside one.

Like many conversations with parents and students, the subject of transitioning to a hub school revealed a tension between implicit support for education in general and tentative support for the hub school in particular. Parents made an effort to convey that not sending their children to a hub school did not indicate a lack of support for education, and instead reflected their particular concerns about accessing hub schools and the quality of instruction offered there.

Sustained community support for the CBE model thus depends on impressions of both access and quality across educational institutions.

"How Does Your Teacher Teach?": Student Concerns about Quality

Students echoed many of their parents' concerns about resource shortages and inferior instructional quality at the hub school. Like their parents, students used their own vernacular to describe elements of active pedagogy as a positive attribute of their current learning environment and one they anticipated losing at the hub school. Students from Chilkapa Bala explained that at the hub school "teachers are not working the activities with us." Others referenced specific activities and interactive thinking routines they used in their CBS classes. Another student pointed out that "hub school teachers do not . . . ask the previous lessons from all students. They do not work with students in groups." A student from Chilkapa Payeen had a similar impression: "The government school teachers are not asking [about] the previous lessons. They beat the students and are not kind." One of the female students who had studied at the hub school for a brief period shared the following:

> When I went to government school . . . our class was in a tent. They did not have classrooms. The teacher was just reading the lessons and was not asking questions from the students. Students kept on going outside without asking the teacher. They used to fight a lot.

Students' comments about poor resources and instruction reflect a preference for the student-centered pedagogy and individualized attention they received in their CBS classes. Meanwhile, students frequently mentioned that hub school teachers were "not kind" and used corporal punishment, suggesting that disciplinary norms and expectations had also shifted for both students and teachers due to their experiences in CBE classes.

When asked to compare their CBS with the hub school—a question we anticipated would reveal concern about transitioning to larger classes with more diverse demographics—students instead reiterated the distinction between a CBS as a high-quality institution and government schools as low quality. Students reasoned that hub school teachers "pay less attention to students" and "do not explain lessons well." Similar concerns over quality emerged when we asked students what they would want to know if they were talking with a hub school student. These CBE students, on the cusp of transitioning to a hub school,

posed questions that revealed significant concerns about teacher quality, student behavior, and teacher-student relationships at the government school. Distance from home, threats to their security, and persistent access barriers were challenges the children realized they would need to negotiate with their parents. However, the quality of the educational opportunities available at the hub school mattered to them and was a central theme in student-generated questions. One student summarized the importance of instructional quality by saying, "I will ask [hub school students] about the teachers and how they teach. If they are not teaching well, we should be careful and should not go there." A girl from a different cluster echoed this concern: "I will ask, does the teacher teach you well? If it is so, I will also go with you." Students' interest in transitioning to government schools was tempered by their skepticism that educational quality would be sustained outside the CBE model.

Finding "Another Way": Community Ownership and Mobilization

Preference for CBE was further emphasized in discussions centering on the future of the schools, and the extent to which the community had autonomy to participate in these futures. In one meeting, mothers openly shared their worries that, once CBE activities come to a close in their village, the project effects would diminish over time. They pointed to enduring access barriers, such as distance, ongoing political instability, and security concerns, along with the lack of gender sensitivity at the hub school. Admittedly, CBE had brought about changes in community attitudes and practices, but a number of parents argued that these changes would lose its their potency as the community schools were closed and children, especially girls, once again were faced with enormous structural challenges in accessing educational opportunities. As parents decided whether to support their children's transitions, they faced anew the same tensions that gave rise to the innovation of CBE, although now with deeper awareness of the possibilities for instructional quality and gender equity that were possible in schools. One mother expressed her frustration: "I would not recommend any other community member to send their daughter to the hub school . . . How can we send our daughters, if the same issue persists?" Like Layla's mother, parents worried that changed attitudes would not be sustainable without changed structures in place to support them.

Gender sensitivity emerged as another prominent concern among parents, one that had no clear prospects for immediate or eventual reforms. For example, parents in the Charikar cluster did not view hub schools as an option for their daughters, since no public effort was made to accommodate female students'

transition. The hub school continued to be perceived as an all boys' school, not only by the community members facing decisions about their children's education but also by the school actors themselves. As parents waited for signals of institutional readiness before making decisions about their girls' pending move, hub school leaders remained uncertain of the timing and likelihood of student transitions. Restructuring school spaces to be more gender sensitive (e.g., hiring female teachers, constructing separate bathrooms for boys and girls) remained in limbo, upheld by the logic that female student enrollment and the social demand for girls' education would need to precede costly institutional reforms. These uncertainties about local "supply and demand" intersected with larger concerns about the extent to which the government would support necessary reforms, and at times directly implicated NGOs. In one case, a hub school principal explained that most CBE students are girls and the hub school lacked sufficient space for them. He explained, "If the organization builds [another] school for the girls, then we are ready to take them, otherwise we cannot." Unanswered questions about the likelihood and nature of sustaining the CBE model were frequently posed in the form of requests to NGOs that "the organization . . . stay," rather than as demands on the state, whose lack of support and oversight in hub schools had presumably reduced them to inferior institutions.

As the actors and structures involved in community-based schools enter a time of transition, it is unclear how much autonomy community members will have over the maintenance of the CBS classrooms, their potential government handover, and the need to transition students to hub schools for their education beyond year three. Parents routinely expressed plans to support their child's transition to a hub school even while insisting that this transition would be impossible for them. A mother from Chilkapa Payeen explained that she would allow her daughter to transition to the hub school "by trusting in God. But I am afraid that something might happen to my girl . . . I am not happy to send my girl to hub school. But if this [community] school completely finishes, then I have no other option." Other parents echoed this determination to support education and find ways to address access challenges. One explained, "If this CBS school is not anymore, then we have to accept to send our children to hub school because of their education." One mother explained: "I told [my daughter] if there is no alternative, I will find a solution." Another said that "if the organization cannot help us, then we have to find another way." Many parents in these communities expressed determination that they would find "another way" to support their children's education, including girls, even if they had not yet resolved their concerns about access and expressed some degree of resignation about hub school quality.

Amid these shared worries, parents voiced a resolve to leverage their options by drawing on community resources, including their organizational capacity as structured through the CBE model. Through CBE involvement, some community members had developed relationships with hub school teachers and leaders, as well as district and provincial education officers. According to parents in the Shotorjungle cluster, Pay Kotal, Sarband, and Monar were in the midst of community dialogues over the future of CBE, which involved the traditional local leadership of mullahs, as well as the shuras that had served as CBE school-community liaisons. Other CBE actors also planned to become involved, such as teachers who were managing their own sustainability challenge over job security. One father explained, "We all agreed that we will raise the possibility of continuation of class in our village." What is unclear is to whom these community members will raise these concerns, especially given widespread doubts about the government's interest and capacity to support CBE beyond the primary level.

One possibility is that collective action might take the form of resistance. Parents in Pay Kotal explained that community decisions about school were linked in important ways, so that the decision of one parent could easily impact the decisions of others. Speaking to a hypothetical community member, he said, "If you don't send your children to school, the other community people will also not send their children to school." Another parent echoed this, saying, "if your children don't go to school, my children also will not go to school." These comments suggest that communities might respond to educational decisions as collectives, so that support for a handover and transition to government schools will need to go beyond that of individual families.

DISCUSSION: QUALITY, PROTECTION, AND SUSTAINABLE DEMANDS

In the previous section, we described three dimensions of change that were raised by community members, which serve as measures of sustainable attitudes, actions, and community arrangements. Importantly, these voices remind us that how we measure the sustainability of CBE depends on how we define sustainability and what we seek to sustain. If we are seeking to sustain community attitudes toward education, in particular long-term support for girls' education and government schools, this attitudinal shift comes up against persistent structural barriers, such as the distance to and security concerns at the hub schools, as well as institutional barriers such as a lack of gender sensitivity. Parents explained that these barriers were mitigated by CBE. However, if left unchanged, communities will not be able to sustain this cultural shift, which in their view was facilitated by an

enabling structure that brought schools to the communities, rather than obliging communities to go to the schools. If the educational transition of children from primary CBS classes to the hub school and their continued learning trajectories are what we seek to sustain, then we must grapple with the prevalent impressions of quality that currently hinder parents' support for government schools. In this sense, CBE might have generated sustainable attitudes toward the value of formal education for boys and girls, along with increased skepticism about the government as a service provider. If, however, community participation and ownership over the local education structures are what we seek to sustain, then communities could face resistance from governments that have long envisioned a CBE system undergirded by assimilation into the national system. In this scenario, the changes CBE has generated regarding community ownership are in tension with the long-term plan that community schools would eventually be handed over to the state—an approach that current policies support.

As the vision for sustainability remains unclear in this context, questions about how and why change occurs come into relief. Afghanistan's CBE policy was designed as an "alternative [way] of delivering education to meet . . . demand in the short to medium term" (MoE 2012, 9). Envisioned as temporary, one of the underlying assumptions was that communities would come to support government schools because CBE provided a positive educational experience. This theory of change is embedded in the MoE's plans for student transitions and the eventual handover process. It is also evident in the rationales offered by school leaders and education officers who presumed that community support for CBE would translate into support for students' commitment to further schooling, regardless of instructional quality. However, this study suggests that the long-term prospects for community support are more complex, with community members critically inquiring about the educational opportunities available for students who transition and the level of local involvement in community-based schools once they are handed over to the ministry. In some ways, the positive experiences communities have had with CBE are serving as a hindrance rather than an enticement to sending children to government schools. This is not to be mistaken for skepticism about education but as increased awareness of communities' right to an education that is accessible, protective, and high quality. This finding points to communities' growing interest in and capacity for advocating for their educational rights. It also speaks to their efforts to forge sustainable goals in the context of a weak state, where communities' increased demand for education is met with poor quality, under-resourced schools and no clear vision for the long-term absorption of CBE students. To sustain the gains they have made, community members see their role as advocates for structural reforms that align with their increased commitment to formal education.

Community impressions of CBE quality are linked to their knowledge of NGO involvement and contrast with perceptions of lower quality government schools, and families thus make decisions about educational support with the service providers in mind. Burde's (2014) long-term research in Afghanistan revealed that "most inhabitants of the villages were not aware that an international NGO supported the community-based school and believed, instead, that it was supported by the government" (148). Perhaps due to the passage of time or to the communities included in this study having had more direct experience with NGOs, a large majority of parents, teachers, and even students we met with spoke with clarity, and often concern, about the distinctions between community-based schools supported by "the organization" and those operated and maintained by "the government." This community attentiveness to educational actors falls in line with Glad's (2009) finding that there was an "extremely high level of awareness amongst communities on where the funding for their school comes from" (52).

However, these impressions of educational actors and quality are likely entangled with understanding of conflict and risk. For example, is the shared perception of NGO involvement in education—and a subsequent distancing from government provision—serving as an intentionally protective display aimed at preventing attacks on local schools? Because community-based schools are often set in private homes, mosques, or community spaces, the structures are less identifiable, and therefore less targetable, than regular school structures. However, it seems it is the national schools' "connection to government, not the physical infrastructure per se, [that] contributes to the increased risk of attack" (Burde 2014, 147). Alternatively, is the disparate school quality community members perceive linked to a broader distrust of government? Additional research is needed to untangle the level of community awareness of educational funding from perceptions of security and the level of trust in government.

This study demonstrates that, when schools come to communities, access is the draw and quality is the mechanism for sustainability. When communities have to go to the schools, however, such as the hub school linking each CBS cluster, quality is the draw but access remains a challenge to sustainability. These parents and community members described how quality education in community-based schools has shifted their conceptions of formal education, particularly around gender. However, whether impressions of quality are sufficient to overcome access barriers is not yet clear, as the hub schools offer these parents neither access nor perceptions of quality. Nevertheless, the possibility that the desire for quality education could mobilize communities to both sustain CBE models in their communities and collectively organize to overcome physical and security access

barriers is an insight worth exploring, in Afghanistan and in other contexts. It also calls for alternative policy approaches to CBE, so that sustainability concerns are developed over time in concert with the capacity and commitment of the communities involved.

Afghanistan's CBE policy outlines a third and often unacknowledged option that falls between government takeover of the schools and community autonomy. Schools embedded in communities can become semi-autonomous "satellite" extensions of the hub school, which entails shared oversight by the MoE and community members. Such schools would be subject to state standards, including the required credentials for teachers. Remaining a community-based school located in a village would allow for continued secure access and local involvement, and likely protect against attacks that target government schools. This arrangement also would allow for local autonomy, flexibility, and innovation that adapt to specific local needs. Given the findings of this study, the satellite model is most likely to achieve sustainable access to quality education in the context of increased community investment and weak state capacity. However, owing to resource constraints and the challenge of operating additional schools, this model has not been adequately considered as a way to move forward.

An alternative way of interpreting these data might be to examine how CBE has helped to reduce barriers to educational access and quality, thus treating community attitudes toward education, assessments of school quality, perceptions of insecurity, and community advocacy efforts as potential barriers to the state's vision for sustaining CBE gains through the handover process. Yet this classification risks simplifying and framing community views through a deficit lens—that is, as a barrier to be overcome by a structure within which communities are expected to participate as clients rather than active agents. Honoring community members' views allows us to query not only conceptions and visions of sustainability but also how these conceptions intersect with impressions of access, quality, security, and inclusiveness, as well as the systems that have historically shaped the opportunity structure within and outside of schools. Asking community members what they are seeking to sustain foregrounds their visions for sustainability as stakeholders and beneficiaries of these interventions.

CONCLUSION: SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

An urgent question comes into focus at the center of this analysis: are community-

based models more successful when they are integrated into the public system, or when they remain rooted in communities, function in parallel to the government system, and offer the potential for innovation and adaptation that eludes fixed systems, particularly in times of reduced state capacity and resources? On the one hand, if community-based models are to retain elements of local autonomy, they need to be separate from the constraints of mainstream government systems. On the other hand, government support and credentialing are essential to the long-term educational prospects of community members, realities that are recognized by parents in particular. If communities exert ownership over their community-based schools as NGOs step into different educational roles, they might retain control over the curriculum, pedagogy, and selection of educators, but at the expense of government support, trained teachers, and national credentials (albeit of questionable quality).

In a study of community-based models in Pakistan, Razzaq (2015) suggests that "the adaptability and flexibility of these models is essential for accommodating the needs of communities, yet at the same time these aspects make these models hard to fit into existing government structures" (5). Rogers (2005) similarly argues that attention to context differentiates these forms of schooling from formal education systems, while scaling-up moves them toward standardization at the expense of context-specific approaches. In Afghanistan, community ownership and adaptation to meet local needs are at odds with policies aimed at assimilating community-based schools into the government system. One question no one seems to be asking is whether integration is the ultimate form of legitimizing knowledge, with community voices folded into the national system, or another form of local subjugation and homogenization. In other words, is a CBS only "community based" when it remains outside the national system? Relatedly, if communities opt to take full ownership of these schools, is the state absolved of its responsibility for the provision and quality of education, particularly a state with limited resources? These questions reveal tensions about sustainability in terms of what we are seeking to sustain, according to whom, and how best to accomplish it.

Despite the wealth of research and documentation on community-based practices, there appears to be little consensus around what constitutes a successful and sustainable model for community-based education, which often is conceived as a provisional structure to cope with conflict, instability, and weak capacity. Answering this question fundamentally depends on the way sustainability is defined within a system. We do not suggest that there is a single model for sustainability in CBE but, rather, that sustainability must be considered

in context and in dialogue with all stakeholders, including children, in pursuit of both "continuous improvement" (Fullan 2006, 114) and what Razzaq (2015, 6) calls "inclusive sustainability frameworks" that resonate with local values and practices. Whether educational opportunities are sustainable is relevant to all actors—not solely those with the power to author policy but also those whose everyday actions shape and reshape policy.

As CBE student cohorts prepare to transition to hub schools, it will be important to document their experiences and challenges. The sheer number of boys and girls who travel outside their communities to continue their education will be an important indicator of long-term commitments under challenging conditions, yet these numbers will not tell the full story. Despite parents' and students' expressed enthusiasm for continued learning opportunities, this study suggests that, if additional measures are not taken, there will be a severe drop in enrollment, particularly among girls. If CBE schools are eventually absorbed into the hub school, as educational officers intend, this drop in enrollment and gender disparities stand to become starker during the handover process. In analyzing what happens next, we might be tempted to question the sustainable gains of CBE and ask whether this community-based intervention allowed for continuous access to, and support for, education among community members. And yet these enrollments should not stand in for a full understanding of the changes that have taken root in communities, including greater discernibility of educational quality. For every child who, like Layla, does not transition to the hub school there is a family and a community opposing schools that remain insensitive to gender and low quality, and to the unchanged structural arrangements of inaccessible and insecure schools. Sustaining a commitment to quality education therefore stands to conflict with persistent barriers.

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