

Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
Synthesis Paper Series

BEYOND POVERTY

Factors Influencing Decisions to Use Child Labour in Rural and Urban Afghanistan



Pamela Hunte

June 2009



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Photographs: Cover and Photo 1 and 2 by Marie-Louise Høilund-Carlsen. Photo 3 by the AREU Child Labour Research Team. On the cover: Boys collect brush from the mountains in rural Badakhshan for both household use and sale in the distant bazaar of Faizabad.

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About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research organisation based in Kabul. AREU's mission is to conduct high-quality research that informs and influences policy and practice. AREU also actively promotes a culture of research and learning by strengthening analytical capacity in Afghanistan and facilitating reflection and debate. Fundamental to AREU's vision is that its work should improve Afghan lives.

AREU was established in 2002 by the assistance community working in Afghanistan. Its board of directors includes representatives from donors, the UN and other multilateral agencies, and NGOs. AREU has recently received funding from: the European Commission; the governments of Denmark (DANIDA), the United Kingdom (DFID), Switzerland (SDC), Norway and Sweden (SIDA); the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); the Government of Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock; the World Bank; UNICEF; the Aga Khan Foundation; and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

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Acronyms

CDC	Community Development Council
CHW	Community Health Worker
CL	child labour
CRC	Child Rights Consortium
CSO	Central Statistics Office
IDP	internally displaced person/persons
ILO	International Labor Organization
MOE	Ministry of Education
MoLSAMD	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and Disabled
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NCL	non-child labour
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
NSDP	National Skills Development Programme
UCW	Understanding Children's Work
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
WFP FFE	World Food Programme Food for Education
WHO	World Health Organization

Glossary

<i>arbab</i>	local community leader
<i>komandan</i>	commander, village leader
<i>shura</i>	traditional village/community/neighbourhood leadership group usually comprised of local leaders and elders
<i>wakil</i>	urban neighbourhood representative (to government)
<i>wasita</i>	relations with powerful and influential people

Executive Summary

This synthesis report includes a summary of the key findings of three individual case studies undertaken by AREU that deal with the complex decision-making processes about child labour among the poor in both rural and urban Afghanistan.¹ Research was conducted in Badakhshan, Kabul and Herat, focusing on poor households that utilise child labour and those that do not. Qualitative in nature, this work complements a number of other valuable quantitative studies that have been conducted concerning child labour in Afghanistan.

The purpose of this research project has been to go beyond poverty and explore a range of additional factors that also influence the decision to use child labour. This work assists the ongoing efforts of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MOLSAMD) in dealing with the numerous issues relating to the dependence of Afghan households on child labour, along with its work to foster more secure livelihoods throughout the country. Through an examination of both the social and economic costs and benefits of work and education that inform household decision-making, specific recommendations for successful policy responses to reduce dependence on child labour in Afghanistan are presented.

The term, “child labour,” is utilised in this report to refer to children’s work activities, both paid and unpaid, across all levels of risks and hazards. This includes unpaid domestic tasks; labour in a family enterprise; unpaid work undertaken outside the household, such as collecting firewood; and remunerated work in cash or kind outside the household, such as vending, apprenticeships, or

doing housework for others. This work may be done in combination with schooling or not. For the purpose of this research, child labourers are those aged 14 and younger working in any type of context (for pay or not, at home or outside), and those aged 15-18 who are working in more hazardous occupations. However, this study does not focus upon the most dangerous forms of child labour such as sex workers, trafficking, or smuggling. It rather seeks to understand the numerous everyday forms of child labour in both villages and cities and how poor households consider different options when making decisions about who among their children will work and in what type of activities.

Since 1994 Afghanistan has been a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which protects children from economic exploitation, hazardous work, and work that might interfere with schooling. In addition, the Afghan Labour Code has recently been updated. It now defines the working age as 18, but also allows light non-hazardous work for children 15-18. In spite of these legislative commitments, however, the nation presently lacks the institutional means to implement these directives within the formal sector, much less within the informal sector where most children work.

Key findings

- Poor households in both villages and cities are plagued by chronic livelihood and economic insecurity that includes high unemployment, low productivity and earnings, high costs of living, and debt. However, their poor economic situation is not necessarily the singular or most prominent consideration in decisions pertaining to child labour. The lack of an able-bodied adult male worker in the household due to death, disability, or migration may result in the utilisation of child labour, but not necessarily; local social networks may provide the required support that enables children to avoid work and attend school.

¹ With funding provided by UNICEF and the Child Rights Consortium and overall support from MOLSAMD, this triad of case studies includes the following: P. Hunte and A. Hozyainova, “Factors Influencing Decisions to Use Child Labour: A Case Study of Poor Households in Rural Badakhshan” (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008); P. Kantor and A. Hozyainova, “Factors Influencing Decisions to Use Child Labour: A Case Study of Poor Households in Kabul” (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008); and A. Sim and M. Hoiland-Carsen, “Factors Influencing Decisions to Use Child Labour: A Case Study of Poor Households in Herat” (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008).

- In households lacking adult male workers, the seclusion of adult females in the family and their subsequent inability to find productive work may also result in the utilisation of child labour. In some cases, however, mothers choose to make the sacrifice and, going against prevailing gender norms, undertake income generation that enables their children to avoid work and attend school.
- Parents, both fathers and mothers, are usually the major decision-makers concerning who among their children works and who goes to school. Children themselves also have some agency, depending upon specific family dynamics, their ability to negotiate and individual personalities. In some rural settlements, the larger community, including the local *shura*, village elders and teachers, may make the decision.
- Community norms, embedded in social networks, exert considerable influence on individual households and their respective decisions concerning child labour or schooling. In some settlements, norms pertaining to child labour predominate, while in others education-related norms prevail. A household is concerned about what others in their community think about the behaviour of its members, both male and female, and fear of negative gossip is common, with parents often anxious about how their children's behaviour, achievements, or failures are interpreted by the larger society.
- Traditionally it is usually the eldest son in a household who is called upon to work, and he often has to sacrifice his desires for the good of the household and his younger siblings. In families that have no sons, or those that have small boys too young to work, a daughter may assume the role of a breadwinner. However, gender norms severely limit income generation options for girls, especially at the onset of puberty, and thus females usually work within the private sphere of the household while boys work in the public sphere.
- A common strategy employed by many child labour households entails diversification, in which one or more children may work while their siblings attend school. The monetary cost of education is a limiting factor for many households, and a child's intelligence and interest, as perceived by his or her parents, also influences the decision about who has the opportunity to attend school among siblings.
- Households realize the importance of schooling, and the majority of parents desire education for both sons and daughters. Education is perceived as potentially resulting in valuable employment, economic security and concomitant social status for both individual and household. Thus poor households conduct a complex cost-benefit analysis as they assess the tradeoffs between work and school. Individual children may combine both, but it is often difficult to balance the competing priorities of these diverse activities, and withdrawal from school is common; working children are often unable to complete their homework and absenteeism is common. Parents of these children are often concerned about the poor quality of education, along with possible harassment and beating of their children by teachers. In the urban setting, parents prefer more flexible NGO-sponsored courses for their working children.
- For parents whose children must work there are a number of perceived positive features related to child labour that influence the decision-making process. These include the opportunity to learn a skill, which may lead to viable employment, and the perception that work provides the individual with a sense of responsibility. Work may also enhance a child's self-confidence, and communications skills with both peers and adults may develop. Children value the opportunity to socialise with their peers and parents believe that work keeps their children occupied and out of trouble.
- However, child labourers whose activities are in the informal sector do not work under conditions that meet with the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) or the Afghan Labour Code. In the unregulated milieu of the informal sector, there are numerous hazards associated with their work that put them at risk of injury, illness, dangerous social repercussions, or even death. These include

hazards that occur when travelling to and from work (road accidents, sexual harassment, etc.) and those that pertain to the physical environment of the workplace (use of dangerous tools, inhaling noxious fumes, etc.). Even in the case of a coveted apprenticeship, employers may exploit the relationship, demand long hours of work from the child with little compensation and frequently use physical punishment.

- The psychosocial effects of child labour upon the individual may be positive or negative. Although some children enjoy their work and take pride in their accomplishments, others express anger towards their parents that they must work rather than go to school, and conflict within the household is common. Children who have been withdrawn from school to assume employment exhibit anger, depression and humiliation, especially if they have been good students. Others are under considerable emotional stress due to chronic worry about how they can best help to alleviate the economic problems facing their families.
- Child labour households and non-child labour households face many of the same daily challenges

and occasional crises, but exhibit different responses to their problems. In general, non-child labour households refer more to positive role models who are educated and successful and encourage their children to act similarly. There is also a greater degree of agency, or a “can-do” spirit, among non-child labour parents, and they are generally more optimistic about the future. Of special importance, these two groups of households undertake different types of risk management strategies, with child labour units exhibiting more coping or reactive strategies that deal with present-day risks and often entail the utilisation of child labour. In contrast, non-child labour units demonstrate more forward-looking strategies, investing in their children’s education today, with the hope of a better tomorrow.

- These characteristics are not immutable, however, and may change depending on the social context and economic resources of the household at a given point in time. Interventions pertaining to child labour and its elimination must employ flexible multi-pronged strategies that take into consideration the full array of both social and economic variables.

1. Introduction

Presented in this report is a synthesis of the major findings from three individual case studies undertaken by Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) in both rural and urban Afghanistan concerning the decision-making processes pertaining to child labour among the poor. Research on this complex topic was conducted during 2007 and 2008 in the provinces of Badakhshan, Kabul and Herat.² UNICEF and the Child Rights Consortium (CRC) have provided funding for this undertaking, with the support of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD). The work has resulted in a number of specific recommendations to inform MoLSAMD in its ongoing efforts to lessen the dependence of households on child labour and foster more secure livelihoods throughout Afghanistan.

This study seeks to go beyond poverty as the primary explanation for child labour through an in-depth analysis of poor households, some of which send their children to work and others who do not. The major focus is upon the decision-making process about how children spend their time. By exploring the complex and multiple considerations affecting household decisions about the use of child labour, including an assessment of both the social and economic costs and benefits of work and education, the complexity necessary for successful policy responses to reduce dependence on child labour in Afghanistan is correspondingly outlined.

The term, “child labour,” is utilised in this synthesis report to refer to children’s work activities, whether paid or unpaid and across all levels of hazards and risks. It includes unpaid domestic tasks; labour in a family enterprise; unpaid work undertaken

outside the household, such as collecting fuel; and remunerated work (in cash or kind) outside the household. This work may be done in combination with schooling or not.

For the purpose of this study, child labourers are those aged 14 and younger working in any type of context (for pay or not, at home or outside the home), and those aged 15 up to 18 who are working in more hazardous occupations. However, this study does not focus upon the most dangerous forms of child labour such as sex work, trafficking, and smuggling.³ It rather seeks to understand the numerous everyday forms of child labour, in both rural and urban Afghanistan, and how households consider different options when making decisions about who among their children will work and in what type of activities.

Since 1994 Afghanistan has been a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which protects children from economic exploitation, hazardous work and work that might interfere with schooling. In addition, the English translation of the 2007 draft version of the Afghan Labour Code defines the working age as 18, but allows light, non-hazardous work for children aged 15-18; recruiting children under the age of 18 for hazardous work is prohibited; and the working week for child labourers aged 15-18 is less than that for adults and is set at 35 hours instead of 40. In spite of these legislative commitments, however, the nation presently lacks the institutional means by which to implement these directives within the formal sector, much less within the informal sector where most children work.⁴ Indeed, UNICEF estimates that up to 30 percent of primary school

2 Individual case studies in the series include: P. Hunte and A. Hozyainova, “Factors Influencing Decisions to Use Child Labour: A Case Study of Poor Households in Rural Badakhshan” (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008) P. Kantor and A. Hozyainova, “Factors Influencing Decisions to Use Child Labour: A Case Study of Poor Households in Kabul” (Kabul: AREU, 2008) and A. Sim and M. Hoilund-Carlson, “Factors Influencing Decisions to Use Child Labour: A Case Study of Poor Households in Herat” (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008).

3 In the Afghan context, see International Organization for Migration (IOM), “Trafficking in Persons: An Analysis of Afghanistan” (Kabul: International Organization for Migration, 2003).

4 Eighty to ninety percent of all economic activities in Afghanistan occur within the informal sector (World Bank, “Afghanistan: State Building, Sustaining Growth, and Reducing Poverty,” (Washington DC, 2005).

age children must work to support their families in Afghanistan.⁵

In recent years, there have been a number of valuable quantitative surveys conducted that deal with child labour in various urban centres and border towns of Afghanistan.⁶ The forthcoming results of the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA), conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) and Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), will provide additional numeric data on the prevalence of child labour by region, rural and urban location, age and gender for the whole country. The work conducted by AREU that is presented here is qualitative in nature and complements these studies by uncovering the complexity behind the numbers in seeking to understand more clearly why children work. Rather than a quantitative survey approach that incorporates a large random sample and coded questionnaires as most research conducted to date has done, this research analyses in detail a small sample of households in each field site. The research then explores, through in-depth open-ended conversations with parents and children, the complex processes of decision-making pertaining to whether child labour is utilised or not.

In each of the three major field research sites of Badakhshan, Kabul and Herat, this micro-level approach has compared and contrasted poor child labour (CL) and poor non-child labour (NCL) households⁷ in both rural and urban settings. In the process, this has provided site-specific information about local knowledge and socio-cultural attitudes towards child labour. This synthesis paper draws

5 Sikandar Khan, UNICEF Deputy Representative of Afghanistan, (Kabul: UNAMA Press Conference, February 2008).

6 These include: Terre des hommes, Aschiana, and Central Statistics Office, "Needs Assessment of Children Working in the Streets of Kabul," (Kabul, 2002); Terre des hommes, "Street and Working Children Situation in Torkham, Afghanistan," (Kabul, 2006); AIHRC "An Overview on Situation of Child Labour in Afghanistan," (Kabul, 2006); Altai Consulting, "A Rapid Assessment on Child Labour in Kabul," (Kabul, 2008). Some earlier works are: Islamic Relief Agency, "Survey of Working Children/Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan," (Kabul, 1996); C. Dubble, "Needs Assessment of Working Children in Mazar-i-Sharif," (Kabul: UNICEF, 1997).

7 For ease of reference, in this synthesis report households that employ child labour will be referred to as CL, while those in which no children are working are termed NCL.

together the key themes emerging from the findings of the three separate studies; highlights some of the main similarities and differences between them; and, based upon the data, discusses important policy programming implications along with presenting specific recommendations as to how Afghanistan can reduce reliance on child labour and its related risks.

Following a descriptive summary of each research site in Section 2, Section 3 sets forth the field research methods used in site and case selection. It reviews the various qualitative field techniques utilised and discusses some basic characteristics of the combined sample. Key analytical concepts and a brief review of relevant literature pertaining to child labour are presented in Section 4, which sets the scene for subsequent analysis.

Sections 5 through 8 address the key themes and findings of this AREU research including a discussion of why some poor children work; the socio-cultural context and related variables; the experiences and impact of child labor; and a review of some key differences between CL and NCL households. Sections 9 and 10 provide conclusions and recommendations based upon the research findings on how to reduce child labour in Afghanistan for the Government, international organisations and concerned stakeholders.

Poverty is clearly a core reason why children work in both rural and urban Afghanistan, but there are a number of additional factors that are also involved in this complex phenomenon. A central objective of this paper is to go beyond the consideration of poverty as a sole determinant of child labour and to examine other possible reasons. Detailed qualitative research at the community level is well suited for this task for, as Kabeer suggests in a general review of child labour and education in South Asia, there is a pressing need "...to understand in greater detail how synergies between economic and social operate at the micro-level and what lessons can be incorporated into wider policy efforts."⁸

8 N. Kabeer, "Deprivation, Discrimination and Delivery: Competing Explanations for Child Labour and Educational Failure in South Asia," (Sussex: Institute of Development Studies, 2001)

2. Field Research Context

In order to explore the diverse contexts in which child labour occurs throughout Afghanistan, this research was conducted in three major field sites: one in northern Afghanistan with a rural focus (Badakhshan), and two with a combined urban and rural focus (Kabul and Herat). In Badakhshan, the mountainous village of Panj Ko was the only site chosen.⁹ In the capital city of Kabul, a number of different neighbourhoods were selected to reflect its diversity, along with a peri-urban/rural site in Paghman. Lastly, in Herat City, the urban neighbourhood of Koche Nasaji was chosen and the settlement of Dashte Khushk, near the Islam Qala border.¹⁰ The map on page 7 illustrates the locations of these various research sites.

The residents of all of these localities, both rural and urban, have endured more than three decades of civil war and unrest. Many became Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) or sought refuge in Iran or Pakistan during the most serious conflicts. Indeed, in all of the research sites included in the study, households continue to experience high levels of both social and economic uncertainty and, when dealing with widespread livelihood insecurity throughout Afghanistan, many (but not all) poor households turn to the utilisation of child labour.

Table 1 presents some basic characteristics of the different research sites including approximate population, education and health facilities, other basic services, etc. These features, along with others such as major economic activities, community facilities, degree of community cohesion and prevailing social norms, vary considerably. These factors combine to determine the specific types of labour in which boys and girls are engaged in each locality. Presented here is a brief profile of each research site, which will set the scene for later discussion.

9 Throughout this synthesis, pseudonyms are used for place names of specific research communities and the names of individuals.

10 Section 3 “Methodology” details the processes by which these specific communities were selected by the research teams.

2.1 Badakhshan¹¹

Panj Ko

The Tajik village of Panj Ko is situated in a mountainous valley, which is about 25 kilometres from Faizabad, the provincial capital of Badakhshan.¹² It takes approximately three hours to reach the city by foot or on donkey, with bus transport an hour’s walk from the village. During the long winter, rain and snow severely restrict this isolated community’s contact with the outside world. Comprised of approximately 300 households, many of which are related through extensive kinship ties, Panj Ko has strong social networks and a robust local social support system. Its popular leader, a senior commander (*komandan*), is head of the village’s active *shura* or Community Development Council (CDC),¹³ and serves as primary contact with the government and development organizations. During the many decades of war, the village was on the frontline of conflict and many residents became IDPs, only to return in 2001.

In the largely subsistence economy, which includes both cash and barter exchange, village livelihoods are comprised of rainfed agriculture, livestock raising and other non-farm activities such as casual or wage labour and limited home-based handicrafts. Most households undertake a combination of these and employ complex strategies to make ends meet in a seasonally changing and insecure environment. The major crop is wheat, along with barley, corn,

11 For more details, see Hunte and Hozyainova, “A Case Study of Poor Households in Rural Badakhshan.”

12 Faizabad, with a population of 61,057 in 2003, (Central Statistics Office/UNFPA, “Badakhshan: A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile” (Kabul: 2007) is the governmental and commercial centre of the province, and is the location of a number of educational and health facilities.

13 The all-male membership is similar for both traditional *shura* and the CDC, more recently set up under the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), and includes village elders, teachers and other community leaders.

Table 1: Some basic characteristics of the research sites

Site Characteristic	Badakhshan	Kabul		Herat	
	Panj Ko (Rural)	Karte Naw (Urban)	Paghman (Rural)	Koche Nasaji (Urban)	Dashte Khushk (Rural)
<i>Location</i>	Village 25 km from provincial capital of Faizabad in Yaftal-i-Sufla District	Neighbourhood in eastern Kabul in District 8; informal settlement with houses built on hillside	Village one hour by car from Kabul; one hour by foot from Paghman centre	Neighbourhood near centre of Herat City, within walking distance of major commercial areas	Village 110 km west of Herat City (1½ hrs by car) and 7 km from Iranian border
<i>Approximate Population Size</i>	300 households	Kabul City population about 2 million in 2004	200 households	500-600 households	700 households
<i>Ethnicity</i>	Tajik	Majority Tajik and Pashtun, also Hazara, Uzbek and others	Majority Tajik, also Pashtun	Majority Tajik, also Turkman, Hazara and Pashtun	Majority Tajik, also Pashtun, Turkman and Baloch
<i>Major Educational Facilities</i>	Government school in village (Grades 1-9) for boys and girls; 14 male/ 2 female teachers	Government schools in city for boys and girls of all levels; also private schools, private centres and literacy courses	Government school for boys and girls one hour away by foot	Three government schools all 20 minutes away by foot (boys/ girls; Grades 1-12); private schools; private centres	Government primary school in village (Grades 1-7) for boys and girls; secondary school 15-20 minutes by foot in nearby town, private centres
<i>Health Facilities</i>	None in village; nearest clinic a few hours' walk away; male and female CHWs* in village	Government clinic a 20 minute walk away	Government clinic a 10 minute walk from village in nearby bazaar	NGO clinic 10 minutes away by foot; city hospital; private health clinics	None in village; private health clinic/pharmacy in nearby town; city hospital in Herat
<i>Electricity</i>	None	No city power; can buy into private generator scheme	Households may buy into private generator scheme	70 percent of households have city power; remainder cannot afford meter installation	Electricity supplied by Iranian company 3 years ago now under government control; very expensive
<i>Water</i>	Two natural springs in village; water reservoirs built by GTZ** and CFA***	Public wells but water comes only every 3 days; supplemented by purchasing water	Public wells	Public wells and pumps; private wells and also piped water	Private wells and public water pumps

*CHW – Community Health Worker; **GTZ – German Technical Cooperation (GTZ); *** CFA – Child Fund Afghanistan

pulses, and oil seeds.¹⁴ Cows, sheep and goats are grazed in nearby mountain pastures, where children gather fuel (bushes or dung) for the village household. Casual or wage labour is undertaken locally and, due to serious drought in recent years, there has been an increase in the participation of both men and boys in the non-farm informal economy in the city of Faizabad in construction, and other jobs when available. Viable employment is nonetheless severely lacking in both village and town, and the community itself suffers from a severe lack of local capital and markets.

The successful local government school is from grades one to nine (1,200 students). The majority of the village's children—both boys and girls—are enrolled there, along with others from neighbouring communities.¹⁵ The *komandan* and *shura* encourage enrolment of all children, and the community complies. A minority of boys may later attend secondary school in a distant settlement (which is one to two hours walk away) or in Faizabad. Development organizations active in Panj Ko in recent years include the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED): road construction; German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and Child Fund Afghanistan (CFA): water and sanitation; World Food Programme (WFP): Food For Education; World Health Organisation: female literacy course; and CAF/MERLIN: Community Health Worker (CHW) training.

2.2 Kabul¹⁶

Karte Naw, Dehmazang, Etc.

The capital city of Kabul, with an estimated population of 1,928,752 in 2004,¹⁷ exhibits great

¹⁴ The cultivation of opium poppies was previously common in Panj Ko, but due to a successful government eradication campaign and a drop in its price, this had decreased at the time of this research.

¹⁵ Girls and boys attend separate classes or shifts throughout the day.

¹⁶ For more details, see Kantor and Hozyainova, "A Case Study of Poor Households in Kabul."

¹⁷ Central Statistics Office/UNFPA, "Kabul: A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile" (Kabul: 2007).

social and economic diversity. Many returning refugees have arrived in the city in recent years in search of employment and public services. The chosen research sites for this study include the neighbourhoods of Karte Naw and Dehmazang, among others, all of which are densely populated and ethnically mixed. In this poorly planned urban environment, settlements are often informal, with mud homes built illegally on the hillsides that surround the capital. Lying outside Kabul's urban development plan, these informal settlements often lack public facilities such as water and electricity, although households on the lower hillsides may have access to these services. In eastern Kabul, Karte Naw boasts a busy bazaar at the lower end of the settlement that includes a variety of informal sector activities—mechanic, stationery, grocery and tailoring shops abound, along with others selling construction materials. Many new apartment blocks also line the main road. In western Kabul, the neighbourhood of Dehmazang similarly illustrates Kabul's rapid expansion. There are a number of metal workshops making doors, gates, and carts, as well as other construction shops in the nearby bazaar.

There is relatively easy access to government primary schools for urban children of all ages from these neighbourhoods, and there are public education facilities throughout the city. In addition, NGO-sponsored private centres and literacy courses are available. Agencies providing assistance in the areas of education or the improvement of livelihoods to the communities included in our research sites include: Afghanistan Demain, Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTF), Children in Crisis, Cooperation Center for Afghanistan (CCA), Enfants du monde - Droits de l'Homme (Children of the World - Human Rights) (EMDH) and Ora International.¹⁸

Paghman

The peri-urban/rural community in Paghman included in this study is located an hour's walk from Paghman centre and an hour by car from Kabul City. With approximately 200 households, the majority of

¹⁸ These agencies also assisted the research team in case selection for this study.

which are Tajik, the livelihoods of the community include daily wage work, masonry, carpentry, and service-type work, with daily commuting to and from Kabul very common. A minority of households are also engaged in farming, gardening, or sharecropping. Most of the community migrated during the past decades of conflict, and currently Paghman is a popular destination for returnees and internal migrants due to its proximity to Kabul. Most of the village children—both boys and girls—attend a government school that is an hour’s walk from the community.

2.3 Herat¹⁹

Koche Nasaji

The urban neighbourhood of Koche Nasaji is located in the heart of Herat City within walking distance of the major commercial areas of the city.²⁰ During the Soviet invasion and civil war, most residents of Koche Nasaji fled to neighbouring countries, in particular Iran. After 2001, the bulk of the residents returned home, a process that continues to this day. Comprised of 500-600 households, most of the residents are Tajik, along with a minority of Turkman and smaller Hazara and Pashtun representations. Local leadership consists of two *wakils*, one Tajik and one Turkman, who are representatives to the municipality of Herat. A *mullah* serves as leader of the community *shura*, whose mandate is to resolve local disputes.

Local leaders estimated that poor households make up 30 percent of the population of Koche Nasaji. Their livelihoods are characterised by work and income insecurities; there is high unemployment and little opportunity for regular or salaried jobs. Thus self-employment in the informal sector, including casual wage labour, cart-pulling and mobile vending, along with home-based production (carpet weaving, pistachio shelling, and seed sorting), are the most common forms of livelihood

19 For more details, see Sim and Hoiland-Carlsen, “A Case Study of Poor Households in Herat.”

20 In 2003, the population of Herat City was 457,278 (Central Statistics Office/UNFPA, “Herat: A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile” (Kabul: 2007).

activities. Labour migration of males to Iran is a common response and remittances are an integral parts of households’ livelihood portfolios. Drug dealing and addiction are other characteristics of this urban scene.

A number of educational options are available to the children of Koche Nasaji, including nearby government and private schools catering to all ages. Two NGO-sponsored private centres are also active offering subjects including literacy, English, computers, tailoring and Holy Quran recitation. A third centre for primarily Turkman children is involved in outreach to children working on the streets.

Dashte Khushk

Dashte Khushk is a community located 110 km west of Herat City (1½ hours by car) and 7 km from the Iranian border (Islam Qala).²¹ During the intense fighting of past decades, the majority of its residents fled to Iran. In recent years, many have returned and settled once again in the area, along with a substantial number of Pashtun Kuchi nomads and other new arrivals. Due to the current repatriation of Afghan refugees from Iran and its proximity to the border, the settlement is currently experiencing strains from the influx of returnees. Existing livelihoods and the current infrastructure lack the capacity to absorb the extra demand for jobs and resources. At present, the ethnicity of the approximately 700 households is a mix of Tajik, Pashtun, Turkman and Baloch. Local leadership includes two *arbabs*, one Tajik and the other Pashtun, and two ethnically segregated traditional *shura* (village councils). Community Development Councils (CDC) have been established by the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), which include a separate CDC for community women.

Livelihood opportunities in Dashte Khushk are scarce and mainly consist of border-related activities,²²

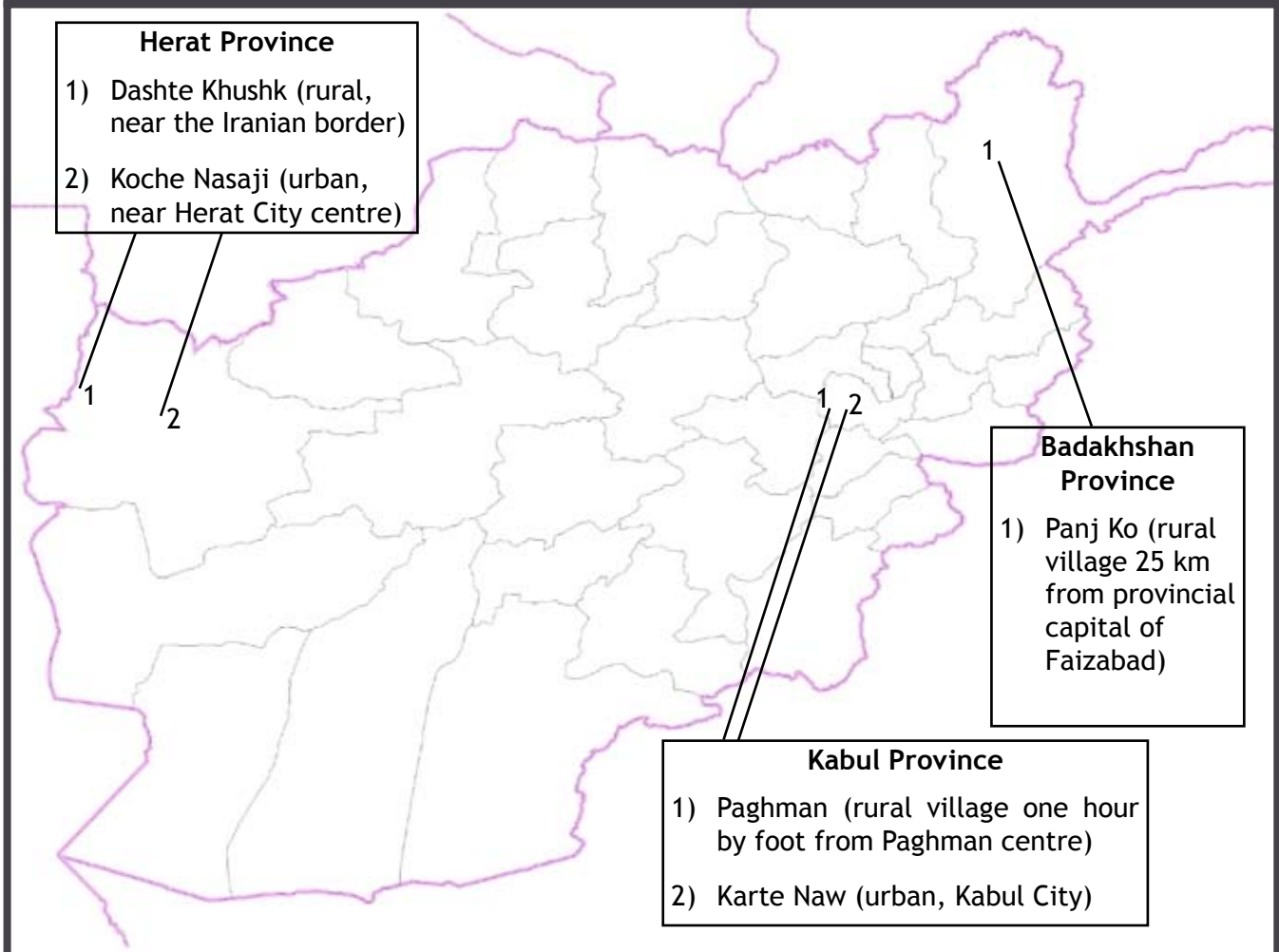
21 The border is commonly referred to as *gomrok*, or customs area.

22 These border-related activities include: manual labour in groups formed by the customs office; and self-employment such as mobile card vending and portering, along with illicit fuel-related work and drug trafficking. These will be reviewed in more detail in later discussion.

casual wage labour (construction, roadwork, etc.), labour migration to Iran and agriculture (rain-fed cultivation of black cumin, wheat and watermelon). In a saturated job market combined with recent years of drought, unemployment is widespread and there is high competition for work. Most villagers must therefore combine border-related activities with wage labour and farming to afford their basic needs.

The government school in Dashte Khushk (Grades 1-7) is attended by 600 female students in the morning shift and 400 male students in the afternoon. Very few boys may also travel to a neighbouring town for schooling to grade nine.

Map 1: Location of research fieldsites



3. Methodology

As noted above, this research is qualitative in nature, and thus it does not seek to ascertain the prevalence of child labour in Afghanistan, nor does it claim that the findings are representative. Rather, it provides a rich context that allows in-depth analysis of the patterns of behaviour underlying decision-making processes, and of the subtleties in motivation associated with household reliance on child labour. Comparisons between the households will help to better understand why some poor households do and others do not employ child labour.

From June 2007 to April 2008 fieldwork was sequentially conducted in three regions throughout the country by a core AREU team comprised of two female and two male field researchers along with two international staff members.

3.1 Selecting the research sites or communities

In order to obtain both rural and urban perspectives concerning decision-making processes related to child labour in different regions of the country, distinctly diverse research sites were chosen which include: 1) a village in Badakhshan; 2) Kabul City and the peri-urban settlement of Paghman; and 3) Herat City and the Islam Qala border region.²³ Initially meetings with representatives of the respective provincial or municipal governments were held in order to introduce the study, obtain official permission to conduct the research and glean information about potential research sites or communities. In all sites, various international and local NGOs involved in child protection activities were also contacted and provided additional recommendations about promising communities to choose.²⁴

²³ Unfortunately, the security situation in the southern and southeastern regions of the country due to military activities and civil unrest precluded their inclusion in this study.

²⁴ Suggestions for field sites in Badakhshan were obtained from

For the purposes of this research, each community chosen—whether rural village or urban neighbourhood—had to meet certain tenets. The major selection criteria included the following:

- the presence of poor households
- the presence of households utilising child labour, either within or outside the community
- the existence of or access to diverse livelihood activities in which children may be involved and
- access to an educational facility.

Wherever possible, attempts were also made to choose settings where a variety of different ethnic groups were present.

3.2 Case selection of households

In this qualitative study, small samples of households were carefully chosen in each research site for particular reasons, rather than utilising a large random sample as is the case in quantitative research. The total purposive sample consists of 33 households:

- Badakhshan (10 households)
- Kabul (12 households)
- Herat (11 households)²⁵

The selection of these units was based on their socio-economic status, livelihood strategy, degree of reliance on child labour and focal child's age and gender. Low socio-economic status was a key criterion in selecting all case households, and local definitions of poverty were ascertained from community members in order to locate these poor

Afghanistan Independent Human Rights commission (AIHRC); Children Fund Afghanistan (CFA); and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

²⁵ See Table 2.

units.²⁶ In addition, the selected cases represent a range of livelihood strategies. In order to explore how trade-offs between work and education are considered, the sample includes households with children that 1.) only work; 2.) combine work and schooling; and 3.) do not work and attend school.²⁷

To ensure that the respondents comply with the definition of child labour used by the International Labour Organisation (ILO),²⁸ the age of each focal CL child was between nine and 14 years, or up to (but not including) 18 years of age if the work was particularly hazardous. In choosing the specific households, an array of different types of child labour was also desired, along with gender representation of both males and females; more boys were selected since they tend to work more frequently than girls do in the Afghan context.

Case households in Badakhshan and Herat were identified through initial referrals from local leadership, community elders, *mullahs*, teachers and local health workers, along with informal discussion with residents of the communities through snowballing sampling techniques, in which the identification of one case household would lead to another. In Kabul, various organisations working in education or livelihoods assisted in identifying the majority of cases.²⁹

3.3 Field techniques

Rather than employ a survey interview form with

26 For example, in the Badakhshan village site of Panj Ko a poor household was locally defined as one with: two *jeribs* of land or less, one cow or donkey, two to three sheep and some poultry. In Herat City, poor households in Koche Nasaji were locally described as those that rely on irregular work activities; have no adult male income earner; include disabled members; cannot afford medical treatment; or cannot afford dinner every night.

27 See Table 5.

28 This definition is outlined in the International Labour Organisation, "Minimum Age Convention," *ILO Convention* (no. 138), 1973 and the International Labour Organisation, "Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour" *ILO Convention* (no. 182), 1999.

29 Organisations providing assistance in case selection in Kabul include Afghanistan Demain, Agha Khan Trust for Culture, Children in Crisis, CCA, EMDH, and Ora International.

coded responses, this qualitative research has included open-ended questioning, with the detailed answers later analysed for common themes or qualities. The main field techniques used were participant-observation, focus-group discussions³⁰ and in-depth conversations. In addition to numerous casual (but purposive) walks through the respective research sites, key informant interviews were conducted with focal members of the communities, including local leaders, elders, *mullahs* and teachers. These conversations dealt generally with the local economy, prevalent livelihoods, community facilities, education and health-related issues, and how local children spend their time.

Prior to research, a number of detailed, semi-structured interview guides for the discussions were developed, which specifically explored the decision-making processes in households in relation to the utilisation of child labour. Discussions aimed at uncovering the context in which decisions about using or not using child labour are made including what was happening in those households at the time they began to use child labour. A field research team comprised of two men and two women visited each participating household's male and female members. The household's livelihood history, assets held, major events experienced in recent years, attitudes towards formal education and their plans for the future were discussed at length. Usually (but not always) these detailed discussions were primarily with fathers and mothers. This could not be accomplished in all discussions, however, because either one parent was deceased or a father was unavailable due to long work hours. In these instances, other influential male household members, such as uncles or older brothers, were interviewed. This general framework was applied to all households participating in the study, both those using and those not using child labour.

The research team revisited households in which child labour was utilised, with parental discussions

30 Especially in rural Badakhshan, focus group discussions held separately with men and women proved to be very successful. However, in the more heterogeneous urban communities with less social cohesion this technique was not so effective and, with the urbanites' diverse daily schedules and differing rules of female seclusion, it was difficult to assemble neighbourhood members in a central location.

focusing upon the household's coping mechanisms, roles and responsibilities of the focal child labourer in the context of the household, and the child's specific contributions to its livelihood strategies. Subsequently, an in-depth conversation was held with the focal child himself or herself, which aimed to understand the child's perspective on his or her roles in the household, and to obtain a description of working conditions.³¹

The research team was sensitive to the ethical challenges involved in interviewing children and families about child labour, particularly with regard to power relations within the household and issues concerning hazards and risks of work. Attempts were made to interview child respondents alone in a private and comfortable setting, although this was not always possible due to the presence of parents or other family members,³² or the work schedule of the child. Prior to conducting the interview, the research team also discussed an informed consent statement with all respondents—both adults and children—and ensured that they understood that their anonymity would be protected,³³ and that they had the right to withdraw consent at any time during the interview process without any repercussions.³⁴

31 Interviews with women and children were conducted primarily in their homes; those with men often took place in more public places such as the neighbourhood mosque, a community guestroom, or their places of work.

32 Ideally, all discussions would have been conducted in private but often, especially in the case of both women and children, other family members or neighbours were frequently present.

33 Pseudonyms have been used for all respondents in this study.

34 In spite of detailed introductions by the field team about the information-gathering purpose of this research about child labour, at times agreement to participate or rapport was difficult to achieve, with adult individuals often citing their lack of time to speak with the team. In addition, a general fear and suspicion of strangers was present in all three sites. In rural Badakhshan villagers were suspicious that the research team was somehow linked with the Poppy Elimination Programme team, which had recently arrived in the district. In Kabul, due to many other organisations requesting their time for interviews in the past, "research fatigue" was common among potential respondents who also often perceived no material benefit from their participation; in addition, parents often feared kidnapping of their children by strangers. Many individuals in Herat City felt similarly insecure, with distrust of the team especially acute in Islam Qala due to the presence of illicit activities such as drug trafficking and illegal migration to Iran. In all sites, building and maintaining positive relations with local

A single interview session lasted one to two hours, which was a considerable amount of time for a busy individual to provide to our field teams. While one fieldworker asked open-ended questions and kept the conversation flowing, his or her team member took extensive field notes. This enabled the collection of necessarily detailed qualitative information. Following each conversation, lengthy field reports were prepared, containing information about complex household social dynamics and decision-making processes pertaining to child labour and schooling. In summary, these methods enabled the assembly of qualitative data from both rural and urban Afghan livelihoods, with focus on the specific decisions involved in whether to utilise child labour or not.

3.4 The sample

Included here is some basic information about the total sample of 33 poor households and their focal children from all of the three research sites of Badakhshan, Kabul, and Herat. Important topics introduced here will be addressed in more detail in later sections of this synthesis. Table 2 illustrates the proportion of CL and NCL households from each research site, along with the gender of the focal children. In total, the sample of 23 working children is comprised of 15 males and eight females. Central to this synthesis is the detailed comparison of these children's 23 CL households with the ten NCL units in which no children work.

As shown in Table 3, which details the ethnicity of the respondents, the majority of the sample is Tajik, which is to be expected since the chosen research sites of both Badakhshan and Herat are primarily comprised of this ethnic group. In the more diverse ethnic settings of urban Kabul, Hazara and Pashtun households are also included, along with Turkman family units in Herat City.³⁵

leadership was crucial in order to obtain continued cooperation and goodwill towards the study, and an initial referral or introduction by a local NGO helped considerably.

35 Any variations in child labour based upon ethnicity are detailed in later sections of the report.

Table 2: Total study sample from three research sites

Research Site	Child Labour (CL)	Non-Child Labour (NCL)	Total Number Of Children
<i>Badakhshan</i>	Male/Female 4/3	Male/Female 2/1	Male/Female 6/4
	7	3	10
<i>Kabul</i>	Male/Female 5/3	Male/Female 2/2	Male/Female 7/5
	8	4	12
<i>Herat</i>	Male/Female 6/2	Male/Female 2/1	Male/Female 8/3
	8	3	11
<i>Total</i>	Male/Female 15/8	Male/Female 6/4	Male/Female 21/12
	23	10	33

Table 3: Ethnicity of the total study sample

Ethnicity	Badakhshan	Kabul	Herat	Total
<i>Tajik</i>	10	6	9	25
<i>Hazara</i>		4		4
<i>Pashtun</i>		1		1
<i>Tajik/Pashtun</i>		1		1
<i>Turkman</i>			2	2
<i>Total</i>	10	12	11	33

The average size of these poor households is large, and is strikingly similar across all research sites, both rural and urban:

- Badakhshan: 7.4 members
- Kabul: 7.0 members
- Herat: 7.3 members

These figures are considerably larger than quantitative results obtained by the CSO and UNFPA for the three respective provinces embraced by this study, although similar to the results for Afghanistan as a whole.³⁶

Concerning household structure, the majority of these family units are composed of only two generations, and all include a large number of children under the age of 18. The average number of children per household in the Badakhshan sample is 5.0, in Kabul 4.8, and Herat 4.5.³⁷ Most of the 33 family units are nuclear in structure, made up of only parents and their children; just three are generationally extended (containing three generations) while a few also include other relatives. Seven of the households are headed by widowed females, with a few cases of polygyny (multiple wives) and the presence of orphans. In these basic demographic aspects, there are no outstanding differences between CL and NCL households.

36 Quantitative survey results indicate that the average household size by province is as follows: Badakhshan 5.8; Kabul 6.2; and Herat 5.8, while for the whole country the figure is 7.1 (CSO and UNFPA, "Afghanistan: A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile," 20.)

37 Figures such as these are indicative of the country as a whole, which exhibits a classic broad-based population pyramid *with high dependency rates* (World Bank, "Development and the Next Generation," *World Development Report, 2007*,) (Washington DC: World Bank, 2007), 4.

4. Key Concepts and Literature Review

Before discussing the detailed findings of this research, a brief summary is presented of some key concepts on which this study is based. Also included is reference to a number of relevant reports pertaining to child labour drawn from a variety of international sources.

4.1 Growing concerns about child labour

In recent years, governments, international organisations and NGOs have paid increasing global attention to the subject of children. The World Development Report 2007 stresses the importance of investment in the younger generation in order to accelerate growth and reduce poverty,³⁸ and notes that many children throughout the world are forced to begin to work too early in life. Indeed, ILO estimates that there are presently some 218 million child labourers throughout the world.³⁹ With the increased interest in human rights, including child rights, and the proliferation of quantitative surveys internationally, enabling statistical research on the subject, literature pertaining to the widespread and complex phenomenon of child labour is considerable.⁴⁰ ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank established the Inter-Agency Research Cooperation Project in 2000, *Understanding Children's Work* (UCW),⁴¹ which has resulted in a

38 Major investments in human capital formation cited include: education and skills training; health care provision; welfare and family services; and infrastructure. (World Bank, "Development and the Next Generation").

39 Within this total, 8.4 million are believed to be involved in "unconditional worst" forms such as trafficking, prostitution and other extremely hazardous work (World Bank, "Development and the Next Generation," 115). The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) cites farming as the largest employer of child labour, with 70 percent of all working children (which it estimates to be 246 million) involved in this undertaking (Overseas Development Institute, "Rural Employment and Migration: In Search of Decent Work" Briefing Paper, (London: ODI, 2007), 2.)

40 E. V. Edmonds, *Child Labour*, Discussion paper No. 2006, (Bonn, Germany: Institute for the Study of Labour (IZA), 2007). In this comprehensive review article, the bibliography contains more than 200 selections.

41 www.ucw-project.org

number of valuable empirical studies. The majority of research conducted on child labour to date is quantitative in nature, in contrast to the qualitative research presented in this synthesis.

Global attention to the problem of child labour and the related subject of child rights is not, however, new. The ILO and others have convened a number of international conventions during the past decades in an attempt to gain the support of individual nations "to improve the instruments available for combating child labour and afford better protection for children, and to bring the measures into line with national legislation."⁴² The most important of these conventions on child labour and child rights, all of which also call attention to the interrelated topic of children's education, are briefly summarized in Box 1.

Afghanistan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1994. However, the nation presently lacks the institutional means by which to implement this. As in many other countries, the gap between the rule of law and the experiences of children is enormous.⁴³

4.2 Definitional debates and methodological problems

The precise definition of what specifically constitutes "child labour" is the subject of ongoing debate among international development organisations and others,⁴⁴ which often complicates the research process and subsequent comparison of findings.

42 For more details on these conventions and others, see: A. Bhukuth, "Defining Child Labour: A Controversial Debate," *Development in Practice*, 18 no. 3 (2008): 385-394. (quotation from page 387).

43 D. Rosen, "Children's Rights and the International Community," *Anthropology News* 49, no. 4: 5-6.

44 Bhukuth, "Defining Child Labour: A Controversial Debate"; Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF, *Best Estimates of Social Indicators for Children in Afghanistan 1990-2005* (Kabul, 2006); Rosen, "Children's Rights and the International Community."

Box 1: International conventions pertaining to child labour

ILO Convention No. 138: Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (1973) States which have ratified this convention agree to implement a national policy seeking to abolish child labour and to steadily raise the minimum employment age (as determined by the individual state). Differentiation is made between light work and hazardous work, with the legal minimum age for working in hazardous activities fixed at 18 years; for light work *“it shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than 15 years.”*¹

ILO Convention C182: Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999): States which ratify this convention agree to combat the worst forms of child labour, which include: 1.) slavery, sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage, serfdom, forced labour, and recruitment of children for armed conflict; 2.) prostitution and pornography; 3.) illicit activities (e.g. the production and trafficking of drugs); and 4.) any other work that may harm the health, safety, or moral welfare of children. Included in the Preamble is the following general statement: *“Recognizing that child labour is to a great extent caused by poverty and that the long-term solution lies in sustained economic growth leading to social progress, in particular poverty alleviation and universal education...”*²

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1990): Defining a child as a person under the age of 18, this convention states that ratifying nations must protect their children from abuse, exploitation, and the worst forms of child labour, along with ensuring their rights to both education and leisure. *“States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.”*³ It also regards the child as an individual in his or her own right, who has the freedom to express opinions in matters affecting him/her.

1 ILO Convention, No. 138, Article 2, 1973.

2 ILO Convention, No. 182, Introduction, 1999.

3 United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 32, 1990.

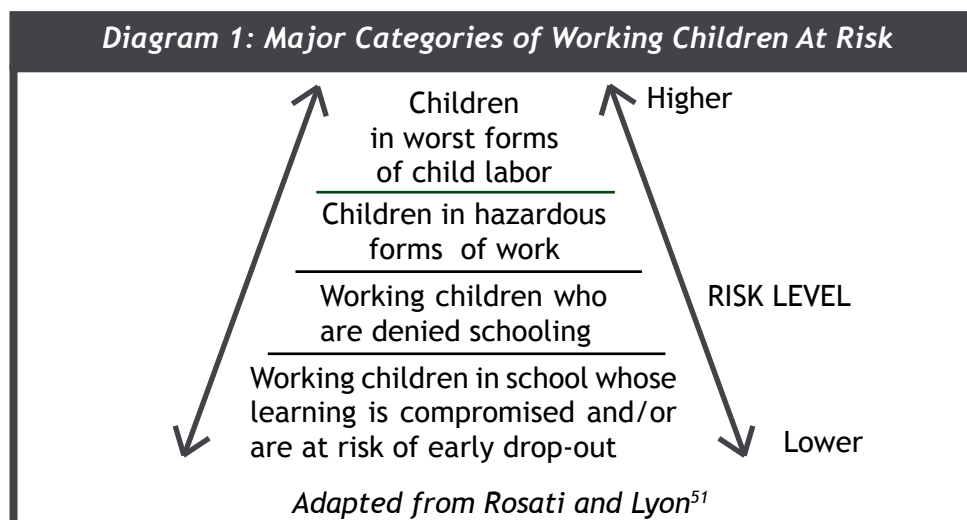
Concerning the definition of *child labour*, there is frequently a lack of consensus as to what age categories constitute childhood; what is hazardous as opposed to light work; whether to include paid or unpaid work; whether to include work undertaken outside or within the household etc. In addition, child labour is primarily found in the informal sector and is often intermittent in nature, which presents methodological problems and further complicates its accurate measurement.⁴⁵ In this context, statistical data may best be considered estimates of the prevalence of child labour within a population. In *Best Estimates of Social Indicators for Children*

in Afghanistan 1990-2005, after noting that, “there is a constant debate among the UN agencies plus World Bank about the child labour definition,” it is estimated that in Afghanistan 25.1 percent of girls (aged seven to 14 years) work, as compared to 23.5 percent of boys in the same age category. It is also estimated that there are 50,000 child labourers in Kabul, with 37,000 of them working or begging in the streets.⁴⁶

Detailed longitudinal study of urban livelihoods of the poor has revealed additional information about the prevalence of children’s work in Kabul, Herat,

45 World Bank, “Development and the Next Generation.”

46 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNICEF, *Best Estimates of Social Indicators for Children in Afghanistan*, 71.



and Jalalabad. Beall and Schutte⁴⁷ found that many children (under 18 years of age) actively take part in the urban labour market, with the rates of participation varying from one city to another and with boys more active than girls. In Kabul 48 percent of boys and ten percent of girls in the study households worked, while in Herat the figures were 56 percent of boys and 35 percent of girls, and in Jalalabad 44 percent of boys and only 2 percent of girls.

4.3 Child labour: diversity in Afghanistan

Lieten has compared children's work in India to a *kichree*,⁴⁸ an analogy that is also applicable to Afghanistan. As demonstrated by the research presented here and in other studies,⁴⁹ child labour in Afghan settings is extremely heterogeneous in nature, taking many forms in both the private

47 A total of 120 poor urban households were included in the sample, with 40 in each city. J. Beall and S. Schutte, *Urban Livelihoods in Afghanistan*, (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006).

48 In both India and Afghanistan the dish of *kichree* is a mixture of rice, lentils, and onions. G.K. Lieten, "Child Labour in India: Disentangling Essence and Solutions" *Economic and Political Weekly*, (28 December, 2008).

49 Terre des homes, Aschiana, and CSO, "Needs Assessment of Children Working in the Streets of Kabul"; Terre des homes, "Street and Working Children Situation in Torkham, Afghanistan"; AIHRC, "An Overview on Situation of Child Labour in Afghanistan."

sphere of the home and the public sphere of the bazaar.

The diverse work activities undertaken by the 23 children (15 boys and eight girls) in this study all occur within the informal sector⁵⁰ and entail varying levels of hazard and risk according to the type of work and also the specific context in which it is carried out. In an UCW discussion of child labour as a global policy challenge, Rosati and Lyon⁵¹ provide graphic illustration of some major categories of working children at risk (Diagram 1). With some overlap, higher levels of risk are associated with the upper quartiles of the pyramid, which entail serious physical and psychosocial risks, while the lower quartiles pertain to the serious risk of being denied education. This diagram is helpful for later discussion and analysis because children from our sample are found in all three lower quartiles of the pyramid: working children in school whose learning is compromised or are at risk of early drop-out; working children who are denied schooling; and children in hazardous forms of work. Specific cases, along with the respective risks involved and how

50 Although the manufacturing infrastructure often associated with child labour in other South Asian countries is lacking in Afghanistan, many opportunities exist within the informal sector (Alexandra Reihing, "Child Labour in Afghanistan," [Carnegie Council, June 20, 2007], www.policyinnovations.org).

51 F. Rosati and S. Lyon, "Tackling Child Labour: Policy Options for Achieving Sustainable Reductions in Children at Work," *Understanding Children's Work* (September, 2006). www.ucw-project.org

they may be mitigated, will be discussed in detail in later sections of this synthesis.

4.4 Childhood and the socio-cultural context

Involved in this inquiry into household decision-making and child labour is an in-depth examination of “the dynamics of childhood as both a state of being and a transition to adulthood.”⁵² International conventions notwithstanding, childhood is experienced and perceived differently throughout the world and must be understood, along with the subject of child labour, within a specific socio-cultural context.⁵³ In the disruptive context of war, poverty and insecurity that characterises Afghan life today, what are poor children’s experiences at work, at school, and at leisure? How are their households preparing them for adulthood, what skills do they think boys and girls should acquire, and what are the parental and child’s aspirations for their future? These are just some of the questions addressed in this report.

In an extensive review of literature pertaining to child labour, Edmonds notes that the role attitudes and norms play in parental decisions about whether children work or not has been poorly understood to date.⁵⁴ Complementing survey research that does not provide holistic socio-cultural data on this subject, this qualitative study provides an opportunity to ascertain both rural and urban Afghans’ perceptions and opinions about the interrelated subjects of childhood, child labour and education and how, in turn, these perceptions influence their decision-making. Indeed, as Woodhead asserts, attitudes about the well-being of children, how they should

socialise, what is in their best interests and what puts them at risk are all influenced by the local socio-cultural context. This also relates to how work affects the child: “The psychosocial impact of child work is embedded in social relationships and practices, and it is mediated by cultural beliefs and values of parents, employers and children themselves.”⁵⁵

The attitudes and norms of not only the household but also the larger community towards its children are especially important to ascertain. In Afghan communities, which usually entail high degrees of gender segregation, local socio-cultural norms are especially influential in determining the type of child labour acceptable for boys and for girls. Through both negative and positive social sanctions, a household is influenced by “what people say” about the activities and behaviour of their members—especially females—and this applies to both adults and children. A community’s social networks may vary in density, degree of cohesion, and the influence they exert upon an individual household. Concerning the socialisation process and decisions pertaining to children, Bhukuth⁵⁶ perceives a general shift throughout the world from collective community involvement to more private processes accomplished by the nuclear family. In both rural and urban Afghanistan, however, social networks of relatives and friends are often an important asset for the poor and form the framework of community-based self-help and reciprocity.⁵⁷ Do these wider social networks influence decisions as to whether a child will work or not? Do communities participate in these decisions and, if so, how?

52 J. Bock, S. Gaskins, and D. Lancy, “A Four-Field Anthropology of Childhood,” *Anthropology News* 49, no. 4 (2008): 4-5.

53 Bhukuth, “Defining Child Labour: A Controversial Debate”; Edmonds, *Child Labour*; Rosen, “Children’s Rights and the International Community”; M. Woodhead, “Psychosocial Impacts of Child Work: A Framework for Research, Monitoring and Intervention,” *Understanding Children’s Work*, (February, 2004). www.ucw-project.org

54 “Ultimately the interest in parental norms is most acute for its implications for the design of policy... (and in) efforts to change attitudes towards work” (Edmonds, “Child Labour”, 46).

55 Woodhead, “Psychosocial Impacts of Child Work: A Framework for Research, Monitoring and Intervention,” 9

56 Bhukuth, “Defining Child Labour: A Controversial Debate.”

57 Beall and Schutte, *Urban Livelihoods in Afghanistan*; Floortje Klijn and Adam Pain, *Finding the Money: Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006).

4.5 Decision-making and child time allocation

The process by which a household decides whether a child should work or not is complex and economic reasons are involved. A poor household is continually confronted with a variety of uncertainties or risks, such as the possibility of illness or even the death of a family member, rising food prices, drought and crop failure, or civil strife. Its risk management strategy, or how it deals with these uncertainties, is a reflection of numerous decisions, including how its children spend their time each day: at work, in school, at play. Often child labour decisions are ongoing responses to serious shocks to the household. In rural Tanzania Beegle, et al.⁵⁸ found that children begin work when a poor harvest occurs and stop work with a good harvest. In urban Brazil Duryea, et al.⁵⁹ note that children transition in and out of work depending on whether adults in their households are unemployed or not. Thus, child labour can serve as a valuable buffer in times of crisis, and can minimize the impact of such shocks upon the family unit.

However, in answering the crucial question as to why children work, other factors, in addition to economic ones, may also play a role. “Research and policy design should be reoriented to focus more attention on other household-level determinants of child labour besides income,” suggest Deb and Rosati,⁶⁰ who find in quantitative research that in both Ghana and India “unobservable” factors, such as parental aspirations and other social issues, appear to be involved in addition to those of an economic nature.

Indeed, while child labour may be part of some

58 K.R. Beegle, R. Dehejia, and R. Gatti, “Child Labour and Agricultural Shocks,” *Journal of Development Economics* 81 (2006): 80-96.

59 S. D. Duryea, D. Lam, and D. Levison, “Effects of Economic Shocks on Children’s Employment and Schooling in Brazil” *Journal of Development Economics* 84 no. 1 (2007):188-214.

60 P. Deb and F.C. Rosati, “Determinants of Child Labour and School Attendance: The Role of Household Unobservables,” *Understanding Children’s Work*, (December, 2002), www.ucw-project.org

poor households’ coping strategies in Afghanistan, not all poor households choose to send their children to work, and this dichotomy between CL and NCL units is the central focus of this research. In addition, a household usually contains a number of children, boys and girls, of differing ages. Among those CL households, which children work and why? Do other siblings go to school and, if so, why? To answer these questions it is necessary to examine not only household composition such as birth order, child spacing and gender but also the dynamics of relationships within the household and its specific division of labour. As a brief example, Fafchamps and Wahba⁶¹ find that in Nepal first born children are “sacrificed” in that they are more likely to work (boys in the market and girls at home), and are less likely to receive education than their siblings; Emerson and Sousa relate similar findings from Brazil.⁶²

In his extensive review of the literature concerning child labour, Edmonds concludes that “perhaps the most important issue is the least researched: who makes the child labour decisions...?”⁶³ This is often referred to as *agency*, or the ability of an individual to define specific goals and act upon them.⁶⁴ Involved in this are the nuances of power relations between individuals, which are often based upon gender or age. There are often multiple decision-makers about child labour: mother, father, other relatives within the household, extended family members, possibly the child himself or herself, and others. Relations between household members include much “negotiation, bargaining, and conflicting behaviour.”⁶⁵ Regarding parental agency concerning child labour decisions, there is question as to if mothers and fathers adequately

61 M. Fafchamps and J. Wahba, “Child Labour, Urban Proximity, and Household Composition,” Discussion Paper # 1966, (IZA) (Bonn, Germany: Institute for the Study of Labour, 2006).

62 P. Emerson and A. Sousa, “Birth Order, Child Labour, and School Attendance in Brazil,” Working Paper #212, (Vanderbilt University, 2002)

63 Edmonds, “Child Labour,” 70

64 World Bank, “Development and the Next Generation,” 16.

65 Beall and Schutte, Urban Livelihoods in Afghanistan, 44.



Photo 1: In urban areas boys frequently find work or apprenticeships in mechanic shops

consider the trade-offs or costs and benefits of sending their children to work or school. Children's agency,⁶⁶ or their own involvement in decisions about how their time is allocated (i.e. in work, school or leisure), must also be ascertained, and this requires attention to "issues of voice and representation and a thorough understanding of the power relations among children and between children and adults...and community members."⁶⁷

4.6 Education: A crucial part of the time allocation equation

Decisions pertaining to whether a child works are closely linked to whether he or she is able to obtain an education because with a limited number of hours in a day, time spent at work often precludes time at school. All of the international conventions included in Box 1 cite education as playing a crucial role in the life of a child and, as stated in the Constitution of Afghanistan, school enrolment is compulsory to grade nine. However, the stark reality of life in Afghanistan is strikingly different: some children attempt to combine work and school, others may drop out in order to work, while many may never attend school at all (Diagram 1).

The direct costs involved with schooling may inhibit children's enrolment,⁶⁸ but other non-economic issues, such as negative evaluations of school quality by household members, may also be involved in the decision-making process. In the South Asian context, Kabeer⁶⁹ finds that the exact relationship between poverty, child labour and educational outcomes is ambiguous, and cites failures within the educational

system itself (e.g. poor teaching quality, high pupil-teacher ratio, poor management, lack of facilities etc.) as reasons for children leaving school and working. In support of this finding, improvements in school quality in Egypt have resulted in a decrease in the dropout rate and a corresponding decrease in child labour,⁷⁰ as was also found to be the case in Yemen and Cambodia.⁷¹ Involved here is also the relevancy of education to the decision-makers; often there is much uncertainty on their part about the value of investing much time and effort in education if chances of subsequently obtaining a suitable job are scarce.

In summary, detailed qualitative examination of a variety of poor households' risk management strategies is necessary to fully answer questions about why some children work and why some do not. A household may implement strategies that provide it with immediate returns, such as sending children to work, which "may come at the expense of children's education, thus limiting the opportunities to build competitive skills for better jobs in the future."⁷² Another household may take a more forward-looking long-term perspective, and strategically invest in its children's education in the hope that the future may be better. The major factors involved in the specific strategies undertaken by poor households in both rural and urban Afghanistan are presented in the following paragraphs.

66 Kabeer, "Deprivation, Discrimination and Delivery: Competing Explanations for Child Labour and Educational Failure in South Asia"; Bock, et al., "A Four-Field Anthropology of Childhood"; Woodhead, "Psychosocial Impacts of Child Work: A Framework for Research, Monitoring and Intervention."

67 M. Ensor, "Children, Climate Change and Disasters: Challenges and Opportunities for Disaster Anthropology," *Anthropology News* 49, no. 4 (2008): 13-14.

68 G. Hazarika and A. Bedi, "Schooling Costs and Child Work in Rural Pakistan" *Journal of Development Studies* 39: 29-64.

69 Kabeer, "Deprivation, Discrimination and Delivery: Competing Explanations for Child Labour and Educational Failure in South Asia."

70 C. Lloyd, et al., "The Impact of Educational Quality on School Exit in Egypt," *Comparative Education Review* 47 (2003): 444-46.

71 L. Gwarcello and F.C. Rosati, "Does School Quality Matter for Working Children?", (Bonn, Germany: Institute for the Study of Labour (IZA), 2007)

72 S. Schutte and B. Bauer, Provide Social Protection Systems to Ease Heavy Reliance on Social Networks and Reduce Vulnerability, (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007), 3

5. Some Characteristics of the Study Households

5.1 The household economy: chronic insecurity

All of the 33 households in this study, regardless of location and whether or not they include working children, are poor. In both rural and urban contexts, there are limited economic opportunities for adults, with work often intermittent or seasonal, and remuneration is low. There are few salaried positions, the vast majority of work is in the informal sector and livelihoods are characterised by chronic economic insecurity. Urban household budgets in Kabul and Herat include high rents, fuel costs, and rising prices of basic food commodities and electricity. Rural residents in Panj Ko may own their own homes and gather fuel in nearby mountains, but with flagging subsistence farming, no household is self-sufficient and all must also seek non-farm employment to survive. In the western community of Dashte Khushk families face rising food and fuel prices, and employment options at the Islam Qala border—both legal and illicit⁷³ are extremely limited and often dangerous; thus, men often undertake labour migration to Iran. Indeed, migration in search of employment to other countries, most commonly to Iran or Pakistan, is common throughout the research sites.

In these circumstances, the cost of basic needs for a family often exceeds household income and, as other research in Afghanistan has shown,⁷⁴ a frequent coping strategy is to go into debt. Regardless of location, all of the households (both CL and NCL) in the sample owe cash or kind to a variety of credit providers, most of whom are members of their

73 Illicit activities at the border primarily include smuggling and drug trafficking. Concerning the highly sensitive topic of opium, not much reference was made by any respondents to this pressing problem vis-a-vis either supply or demand; in Badakhshan, where the substance is used extensively for medicinal purposes, some households noted that they had raised opium poppies in the past, and in Herat one male head of household is a recovering addict.

74 Klijn and Pain, *Finding the Money: Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan*; Beall and Schutte, *Urban Livelihoods in Afghanistan*.

extensive informal social networks. These include shopkeepers, relatives, neighbours and friends; microcredit programmes provide only a small minority with financial assistance in Kabul. Reasons for these debts include daily consumption, medical bills, rent, funeral costs, house construction and, very infrequently, small business investment.⁷⁵ Unforeseen idiosyncratic shocks to a household such as illness or death, or more general crisis events, like drought or floods, that affect the whole community can quickly result in sudden changes in the well-being of these poor households, and result in the need for immediate credit in order to survive. In the absence of formal social protection programmes, access to these largely informal safety nets is vital.

The absence of an adult male worker due to death, illness or migration characterises a number of both CL and NCL households in Badakhshan, Kabul and Herat.⁷⁶ In these especially vulnerable cases, women and children are often compelled to work.⁷⁷ As discussed below, however, there are many context-specific gender norms which limit female mobility and, correspondingly, employment options for women. Many adult females in the sample engage primarily in the daily management of their households.

5.2 Child labour: What are they doing?

Table 4 contains a listing of all of the different work activities undertaken by the total sample

75 Debt levels range from 200-200,000 Afghanis with the amounts larger in the cities. In rural Badakhshan, where barter is also common, wheat may also be the currency of exchange.

76 Out of the total sample of 33 poor households, both CL and NCL, approximately 1/3 (N=11) have no access to able-bodied adult male labour.

77 Adult women in 14 households out of the total of 33 are engaged in income-generating activities, mostly within their own households. This includes ten out of the 23 CL units, and four out of the ten NCL units.

Table 4: Child labor—types of work presently undertaken

Type of Work	Badakhshan (N=7)		Kabul (N=8)		Herat (N=8)		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Outside Household (Public Sphere)								
<i>Farm labour (planting, harvesting)</i>	2						2	
<i>Shepherd for others</i>	1						1	
<i>Grazes household flocks</i>	2	1					2	1
<i>Gathers firewood/sells in town</i>	3						3	
<i>Gathers firewood/dung for household</i>	1	1					1	1
<i>Village Sanitation Project labour</i>	2						2	
<i>Apprentice (shops of mechanic, water pump repair, bakery)</i>			3		2		5	
<i>Wage labour with mason</i>	1						1	
<i>Helps father (masonry, carpentry)</i>	2						2	
<i>Scavenges for paper</i>			1	1			1	1
<i>Street vending (snacks, plastic bags, water, juice, vegetables, mobile cards)</i>			2		2		4	
<i>Sells fuel (at border)</i>					2		2	
<i>Loads/unloads trucks (at border)</i>					2		2	
Inside Household (Private Sphere)								
<i>Household chores for others</i>		1						1
<i>Household chores</i>		2	1	2			1	4
<i>Embroidery for others</i>		1						1
<i>Shop keeping (home-based)</i>		1		1				2
<i>Carpet weaving</i>				1		1		2
<i>Pistachio shelling, wool cleaning,</i>						1		1
Total							29	14

of 23 child labourers (15 boys and 8 girls) in all sites: Badakhshan, Kabul and Herat. Most of these individuals range in ages from 13-15, and are in the stage of early adolescence. Gender norms are evident in relation to location and types of work. The majority of boys work in the public sphere, in the bazaars and mountains, and the girls work in the private sphere of the household.

All of these undertakings are within the informal sector, with many of the boys and some of the girls

involved in more than one work activity. There is considerable variation in specific types of work according to location. Especially in the rural sites, work is seasonal and temporary, although in both the city and village these are largely intermittent pursuits with little remuneration security. Indeed, permanent jobs are rare for both children and adults throughout Afghanistan. Although relations with employers may be exploitative in nature, none of these are cases of debt-bonded labour

or “unconditionally worst” forms of child labour.⁷⁸ Included in this sample are rather more everyday types of work undertaken by Afghan children.

The remuneration received by these children for their labour comprises a significant contribution to their household budgets and, in some cases, is crucial for their survival. The child usually gives payment, which is largely in the form of cash in urban areas, and in wheat, bread and other foodstuffs in the villages, to a mother or father. Some children are also allowed to keep small amounts of cash, which they use for their public bath fees, clothing, or perhaps school supplies. Earnings are primarily utilised for household consumption (food supplies, soap, lamp oil, etc.), rent, debt repayment and, in some cases, school supplies for the focal child and his or her siblings. Collection of paper in the urban sites and brush or dung in the rural settings serves to heat the homes and provide means for cooking.

5.3 Education for some

As noted in Table 1, in all three study sites—Badakhshan, Kabul, and Herat—households have access to both boys’ and girls’ government schools. In addition, in the urban areas educational options

78 Cases of bonded child labour, such as in the brick kilns of Jalalabad, occur throughout Afghanistan. See IOM, “Trafficking in Persons” for more information on the “unconditionally worst” forms of child labour in the Afghan context.

also include NGO-sponsored schools, centres and courses. With respect to work and school, there are three general categories of children in the study sample:

1. boys and girls who only work and do not attend school (N=14)
2. boys and girls who combine both work and school (N=9)
3. boys and girls who do not work at all and only attend school (N=10).⁷⁹

In the first category of children who only work (N=14), almost all of them (N=11) have previously attended government schools⁸⁰ or private facilities, but have subsequently dropped out. In the second category, nine children presently struggle to combine both work and school. These two groups should be compared to the lower quartiles of the pyramid presented earlier in Diagram 1 in Section 4. It is clearly the case that many individuals in our sample are denied schooling, while others presently in school are at risk of dropping out.

79 Groups one and two comprise the CL households; group three is made up of the NCL households. None of the focal children’s siblings in the NCL households work. In the CL households, however, siblings of the focal child may also work or, in some cases, attend courses or government school.

80 For these children drop-out occurred from grades one to six.

Table 5: Work and education—three major categories of children

	Badakhshan	Kabul	Herat	Total
<i>Only Work</i>	Male Female 4 0	Male Female 2 1	Male Female 5 2	Male Female 12 3
	4	3	7	14
<i>Both Work And School</i>	Male Female 0 3	Male Female 3 2	Male Female 1 0	Male Female 4 5
	3	5	1	9
<i>Only School</i>	Male Female 2 1	Male Female 2 2	Male Female 2 1	Male Female 6 4
	3	4	3	10
<i>Total</i>	Male Female 6 4	Male Female 7 5	Male Female 8 3	Male Female 21 12
	10	12	11	33



Photo 2: In Kabul children scavenge for paper, which is used by their households for fuel

6. The Decision To Work

In this economically insecure situation, some poor households decide to send their children to work—both boys and girls—in an attempt to diversify their livelihood activities and minimize their risks.⁸¹ As seen above, in many but not all cases working precludes any possibility of school attendance for these individuals. All of the economic issues associated with poverty that have been reviewed here—irregularity of work, low earnings, high expenditures, debt, or lack of an adult male earner—may contribute to a household resorting to child labour. However, none of these are sufficient to explain why this occurs, for these are characteristics of both CL and NCL households in the sample. Enquiry must therefore go beyond poverty explanations to find additional reasons as to why some poor children are work.

In addition to the economic context, Diagram 2 illustrates the major variables involved in the decision-making process as to whether a child will work or not. These fall into four major categories:

1. variables within the *household*;
2. those found in the larger *community context*;
3. variables pertaining to *work*; and
4. those pertaining to *school*.

Work or school decisions are based upon a careful analysis of both social and economic factors, with each household responding somewhat differently. Options for the poor households in the whole sample are limited, and all face dilemmas as to how an individual child can best participate in their respective risk management strategies; this complex process is often difficult and stressful. Parents are usually the major decision-makers about whether their sons and daughters work or attend

⁸¹ Another strategy which many of the poor families in our sample have utilised in recent years is the marriage of their eldest daughters, who are usually in their mid- to late-teens, but in some cases are even younger. This enables the household to receive a substantial bride price of perhaps hundreds of thousands of *afghanis* (along with livestock and wheat in rural areas) from the groom's family.

school, but, as evident in later discussion, other people may be involved too.⁸² Within the context of insecurity and uncertainty that pervades life in Afghanistan today, parents and others are often in a dilemma as to how to proceed.

“In my mind, there’s no one poorer than me. If I can send my children to school though I have economic problems, then why can’t others? Everyone can do anything they want... no one can say I was so hopeless that I kept my children from school.”

– Father of four children in a NCL household in Kabul. All school-aged children are studying, and none are working.

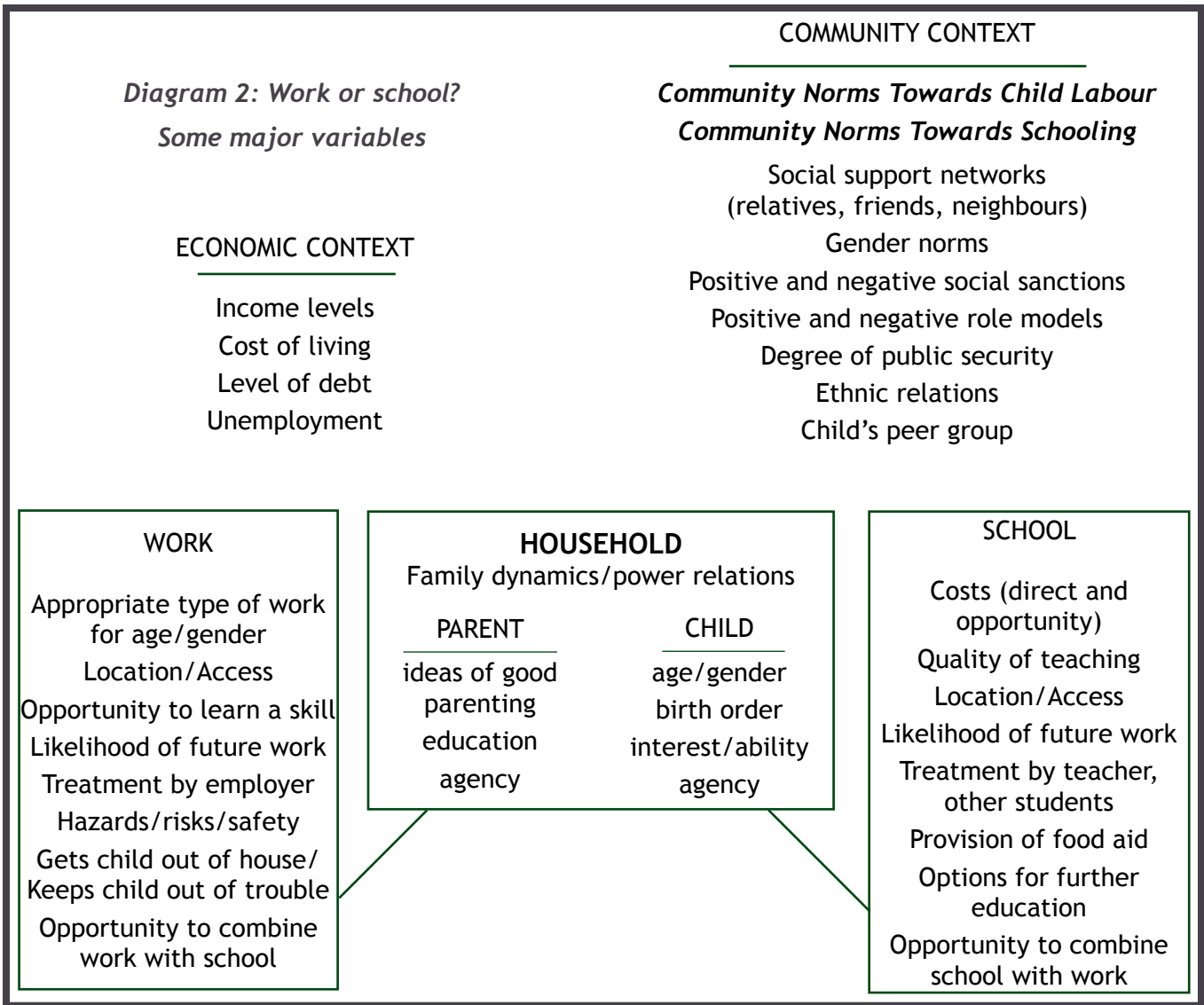
6.1 Household variables

Household dynamics

Although relations between household members vary considerably between families, some generalisations can be made. In most of the sample households both parents are present and both participate jointly in decisions about how children take part in its respective risk management strategy, i.e. whether the child works or attends school. In those cases where an adult male is not present, a widowed mother may make the decision herself, or with her brother or another male relative who lives nearby. Although Afghan men do traditionally possess more decision-making power in general, women may also wield considerable power within their households. Individual personalities and negotiation skills play a role in determining one's degree of agency within the family, and differences in opinion or outright conflicts are not uncommon. Indeed, household decision-making concerning

⁸² In addition to the household, in some situations, the community may make the decision if a child works or goes to school: see Section 6.2 below.

*Diagram 2: Work or school?
Some major variables*



whether a child works or studies is an ongoing process, and opinions of family members and their respective power relations may change over time through discussion, negotiation or argument.

For example, in rural Panj Ko in a household with no elder sons a woman continues to argue with her husband, believing that their 13-year-old daughter is now “too old” to graze their sheep in the nearby mountainsides. She feels this may tarnish their honour and reputation and hopes that he may someday sell the sheep and the girl will then be able to concentrate fully on her schooling. In urban Kabul a widow, who was forbidden to attend school as a girl, now insists that her son continue to attend

a course while he also works as an apprentice in a water pump repair shop, in spite of her brother’s on-going demands that his nephew should only work and cease his studies.

Children’s agency in these decisions, or their voice in the process of determining if they work, study, or combine both, similarly varies according to the specific power relations within their respective households.⁸³ The child’s personality and his or her ability to negotiate within the family are also

83 “They (children) are social actors, trying to cope with their situation, negotiating with parents and peers, employers and customers, and making the best of oppressive, exploitative, and difficult circumstances.” Woodhead, “Psychosocial Impacts of Child Work: A Framework for Research, Monitoring and Intervention,” 6

involved.⁸⁴ Considering the total sample of CL and NCL households in all locations, it appears that children in rural settings, where traditional norms concerning family relations and respect for elders are more prevalent, generally have less agency than their urban counterparts.

Regardless of location, however, there are also some significant differences in children's agency between CL and NCL households. In both groups, children's opinions and desires regarding work or school are included in household discussions, and usually parents are acutely aware of their feelings, both positive and negative, towards how they spend their time. However, in NCL households, there is often a heightened consideration of their offspring's opinions and desires regarding their working or studying, and respective decisions reflect the children's wishes more than in CL households. NCL children generally appear to have more voice in deciding how they spend their time, and their choice is usually, but not always, to go to school. However, in some NCL households where eldest sons express a desire to work, which is perceived by them to be a sign of adulthood, parents often forbid them to cease their schooling.⁸⁵

NCL parents provide more monitoring and supervision of their children's daily activities (i.e. school, home-based pursuits, and leisure). They especially want to protect their sons from exposure to anti-social behaviour and bad morals (e.g. smoking, gambling, stealing, etc.), which they believe child labourers frequently encounter through their unsupervised work in the public sphere. NCL parents perceive childhood as a period of preparation for adulthood in which a child's role—both son and daughter—is to obtain an education rather than to work.

84 For example, in Kabul a 12-year-old boy who is an apprentice in a bakery states that he was previously bored at home and, along with the encouragement of his family, he found the job. The mother of a 13-year-old boy who sells plastic bags, juice, and water on the streets of the capital relates that he began to work because he desired new clothes, which the household was unable to provide him. In another CL household, the parents of an 11-year-old boy want him to stop his apprenticeship in a mechanic shop because of repeated injuries; however, the determined child has convinced them to allow him to continue his work.

85 See the following section on Household Composition and Gender Norms.

Many consider that it is their child's right to go to school.

While in many cases, economic considerations compel CL children to work, not all boys and girls want to do so, but they comply with their parents' wishes.⁸⁶ They are aware of the serious economic needs confronting their households and feel responsible for the well-being of other family members. In addition, many parents and children make the best of a bad situation, with a degree of rationalisation and acceptance of their fate also evident. Indeed, as discussed in more detail below, respondents find a number of positive aspects about child labour too.

There is a high degree of agency⁸⁷ among NCL parents, both mothers and fathers, and this "can-do" orientation often enables them to deal successfully with their many difficulties. They are frequently self-starters who attempt to acquire new skills themselves, and they take special actions to not only to send their children to school but also to see that they remain there, which often includes sacrifice and planning ahead to provide necessary expenses for school. In contrast to many CL parents and other family members who are fatalistic concerning the future of their households and their children, members of the NCL households are generally more optimistic. Hoping for a better future, they continue to believe that this can be achieved through education.

Closely related to agency is how individuals in these households (in this case, primarily parents) respond to various risks and uncertainties they encounter in their lives. All of these poor households, both CL and NCL, must cope with the many day-to-day problems that confront a family, but there are considerable trade-offs to be considered between risks and opportunities of the present and those

86 See Section 7.3. for more detailed discussion of CL children's opinions about their work and some corresponding psychosocial effects.

87 Agency refers generally to one's ability to define specific goals and act upon them (World Bank, "Development and the Next Generation," 16).

of the future and this is where some important variation also emerges.

The responses of two mothers of 13-year-old sons in Dashte Khushk, one from a poor CL household and another from a poor NCL household, to enquiries about their households' future are included in Box 2. These responses succinctly illustrate differences concerning their general time perspective and priorities.

Box 2: Two mothers' ideas about the future—CL and NCL

"I just want to have food for us to eat tonight, and I don't care about tomorrow!"

– Mother in CL household in Dashte Khushk of 13-year old boy who loads/unloads trucks at Islama Qala border; husband is a gardener at the border; none of their five children are in school.

"Next year the village school may teach higher levels. If not, the boys will go to school in Islam Qala. If that school does not accept them, then we are obliged to send them to Herat.... my maternal uncle lives in Herat, and he told us that if the children come there for school, they can stay in his house and come back here once a week."

– Mother in NCL household in Dashte Khushk of 13-year-old boy in seventh grade in local school; husband is a wage labourer; all of her four sons who are of school age are enrolled.

The CL mother's priorities are immediate and concern the household's survival, and the daily labour of her son is crucial in this regard. In comparison, rather than short-term priorities, the NCL mother focuses upon long-term investment in her sons' education, with anticipated assistance of her social networks. Although the CL mother does not engage in income generation, the NCL mother supplements the provision of her household's material needs through her quilt making.

Household Composition and Gender Norms

In both rural and urban Afghan households, many traditional socio-cultural norms exist that serve to regulate the behaviour of old and young, male and female, including their access to various labour markets. An examination of intra-household structure and dynamics provides initial clues as to why some children work.

Concerning birth order, as in other regions of South Asia,⁸⁸ it is a long-standing tradition in Afghanistan that the eldest son should ideally work to help to support the household. It is considered his responsibility, and he must often sacrifice his personal desires for the good of the household and his younger siblings.⁸⁹ In Badakhshan, along with Kabul and Herat, the oldest boy often works so that his siblings may study. Indeed, diversification, in which one or more children in a household work while others attend school, is a common strategy employed by many households. Eldest sons in some units may feel pressured to work by their parents, while others are pleased to assume the responsibility, which may be seen by the boy to indicate his adult status. In fact, all of the eldest sons in the NCL households in Kabul express an interest in working although their parents do not allow them to do so and insist that they continue their education.

In families that have no sons, or that have small boys too young to work, a daughter may assume the mantle of a breadwinner to help her parents and undertake labour suitable for a girl of her age, which is usually but not always within the private sphere of the household. Some daughters resent having to undertake these tasks, while others gladly comply.

88 E. Edmonds, "Understanding Sibling Differences in Child Labour," *Journal of Population Economics* 19: 795-821.

89 It could also be argued that an eldest daughter traditionally must also make sacrifices for her other siblings through her early marriage, which yields substantial bride-price for her natal household. Early arranged marriage has occurred for many teen-aged girls in our sample households.

“I understand that we’re poor. When I look into my parents’ faces, I can see their sadness. My parents only have us girls, so I went out to work...”

– Girl of 13 in Panj Ko who does chores in other village households after school for payment in foodstuffs and soap; her parents have four daughters and two infant sons.

Gender norms exert constant restrictions on household choices as to how to allocate labour between members, especially when they apply to adult women who must comply with varying degrees of seclusion and corresponding lack of mobility according to the context. In spite of these limitations, however, in both CL and NCL households and in both rural and urban research sites, mothers in many of these poor families attempt to supplement their meagre household budgets by undertaking a variety of income-generating tasks.⁹⁰ These informal sector activities are highly irregular, remuneration is low and occur frequently within the private sphere of the home (e.g. bread-baking, selling eggs, shelling pistachios, and wool-spinning). Carpet-weaving is one of the most profitable jobs for females, with Turkman women in Herat taking much pride in their skills.

Mothers from units lacking an adult male labourer are most likely to undertake such work. Options for these non-literate women are severely limited, however, and in many cases children must work because their mothers lack individual agency or are not allowed to do so. Husbands and other male relatives often fear negative social sanctions from the community –“what people will say”–if an adult woman works, especially in the public sphere. Issues of honour and shame are involved here, and a household’s reputation must be preserved. However, there are also cases in which gender norms, although powerful, are not insurmountable barriers to women’s work even in the public sphere. For example, a mother in

90 As previously noted, mothers of focal children in 14 out of the total sample of 33 households are engaged in income generating activities, with remuneration in either cash or kind (ten out of 23 CL households; four out of ten NCL households).

Herat holds a salaried position in a carpet factory. Other females venture out of their homes to wash clothes in neighbouring households or to gather fuel. Family dynamics and power relations between spouses vary greatly between households. Of special importance to the subject of this research, in some cases mothers’ income-generating sacrifices,⁹¹ in both home and community, enable their children to not work and attend school.

In many NCL households there is concerted effort and sacrifice on the part of parents to enable the children of the unit to attend or remain in school. This pertains to both fathers and mothers, but in many cases it is mothers who undertake a variety of income generation activities in both the private and public spheres so that their offspring can study. In all research sites, NCL mothers also express anxiety that their sons and daughters will criticise and perhaps reject them as adults if they do not facilitate their education during their childhood. Staunch religious belief is also often involved in trying to provide the best for their offspring, which includes schooling.

6.2 The community context

In attempting to not only understand, but also to subsequently respond successfully to the complex issue of child labour through targeted interventions, careful analysis of the specific socio-cultural context is of primary necessity. Diagram 1 includes a variety of community-level variables that influence a household and, more specifically, its decision-making pertaining to whether a child works or goes to school. Drawing examples from the different rural and urban research contexts of this study, a number of important socio-cultural issues form the framework for this discussion.

Community norms

In both rural village and urban neighbourhoods, prevailing community norms⁹² pertaining to child

91 Similarly, there are many cases of fathers who make sacrifices to enable their children to attend school.

92 Standards of conduct that should be followed

labour influence both the beliefs and behaviour of adults and children within the respective setting. Correspondingly, other community norms exist towards education. A combination of these standards is usually present in all locations. In some settings, however, the norms pertaining to child labour clearly predominate while in others education-related norms prevail (Box 3). To illustrate, Table 6 compares various features of two very different communities included in this study: Panj Ko in Badakhshan and Dashte Khushk in Herat. In Panj Ko the dominant community norms support education for its children while, in contrast, in Dashte Khushk the dominant community norms are in favour of child labour. This does not mean, however, that every household follows these standards, but that the majority of them choose to do so.

Box 3:

Differing community norms: work or school

“A person does what the majority does...”

- The CL father of a 13-year-old boy in Dashte Khushk when asked why his son works at the border loading trucks and selling fuel.

“Everyone sends their daughters and sons to school in this village...”

- The NCL mother of four daughters and one son, all of whom attend the local school in Panj Ko.

In the border settlement of Dashte Khushk a striking lack of community cohesion, along with a general atmosphere of resignation and powerlessness, feeds into a sense of inevitability about children working, even if it may also be perceived to be potentially harmful for them.⁹³ The local school is perceived by both parents and children to be of very poor quality, with unprofessional and corrupt teachers and high rates of drop-out. In an environment, which includes drug trafficking and smuggling, very

limited employment options exist for either adults or children. Many boys find work at the border selling fuel, loading trucks, or vending phone cards. Indeed, in this community, the norm that children work instead of pursue an education appears to go largely unchallenged, except for a few family units. Households compete with one another for material gain, both legal and illicit.

In contrast, in the isolated mountain village of Panj Ko local social networks are strong and supportive, with much cooperation and self-help among community members. The local school is championed by the village leaders and is extremely successful, with almost all children—both boys and girls—enrolled to grade nine. A women’s literacy course is also very popular. Employment options for villagers, both on-farm and non-farm work, are very sporadic and seasonal in nature. Children in some poor households work to generate income through farm labour and household chores, or selling brush and wage labour in the nearby provincial capital of Faizabad. Parents nonetheless consider education a primary means by which their offspring will find valuable future employment and related economic security either in Panj Ko or Faizabad. Although opium poppies were grown extensively in the past, the community is presently cooperating with the provincial government and has decreased its production.

6.3 Social support and sanctions

For poor households the existence of strong social support networks comprised of relatives, friends and neighbours is often crucial for their survival, especially in times of crisis such as death of a breadwinner or illness within the family. These informal safety nets provide funds and foodstuffs that enable the unit to maintain its livelihood, along with providing welcome moral and emotional support. In addition, as previously discussed concerning the household economy, these networks often are a source of much-needed credit for everyday daily consumption needs. Information and referral concerning possible job opportunities for both adults and children may also be obtained through these valuable social

⁹³ See Section 7.1. on “Work Conditions, Hazards, and Risks” for more details.

PANJ KO, BADA KHSHAN	<i>Table 6: Community norms—a comparison of two rural communities</i>	DASHTE KHUSHK, HERAT
Dominant Community Norms Support EDUCATION (majority of children in school)	Community Orientation Towards Work/School for Their Children	Dominant Community Norms Support CHILD LABOUR (majority of children work)
Homogenous ethnicity, stable population	Ethnic composition, population	Mixed ethnicities (4), on-going arrival of new migrants, refugees
Strong respected <i>komandan</i>	Leadership	2 <i>arbabs</i> (by ethnicity)
United	Community dynamics	Divided, factions
Local school to 9 th grade for boys and girls	Educational facilities	2 schools (by ethnicity) for boys and girls (one to Gr.7)
Good; residents pleased	School/Teaching quality	Poor; high drop-out rates
Farm labour; household chores; sell brush or wage labour in Faizabad for boys	Child labour opportunities	Casual labour at Islam Qala border for boys; farm labour; household chores
Poppies grown in past; opium used medicinally	Drug-related	Drug trafficking/smuggling
Guarded optimism; political links with leaders in Faizabad	Community Atmosphere	Pessimism; hopelessness and helplessness

relations. Reciprocity of such assistance is common between households.

The strength and effectiveness of these networks varies greatly between communities. For example, they are very weak or nonexistent in rural Dashte Khushk, while in rural Panj Ko these relationships are extensive. Although not as immediately apparent in this study's urban sites of Kabul and Herat, where neighbourhoods may be composed of a variety of ethnic groups, many new arrivals, and strangers, social support networks are also called into action in times of need. Indeed, this is not only a rural phenomenon but also an urban one, as previously ascertained by AREU's research on livelihoods in Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad. Of special interest for this report, this research found that for some

urban households "...having strong social assets has been decisive in enabling children to go to school, as it has freed them from relying on child workers to contribute to the household income."⁹⁴

On a slightly more formal level, in both Koche Nasaji in urban Herat and the rural locality of Panj Ko in Badakhshan, the local *shura*⁹⁵ have petitioned their respective governments to establish schools in their localities.⁹⁶ Although not successful to date, efforts are ongoing.

94 Schutte and Bauer, *Provide Social Protection Systems*, 2.

95 Neighbourhood or village committee usually comprised of local leaders and elders.

96 In the urban neighbourhood of Koche Nasaji a local primary school is desired, while in Panj Ko the request is for a lycee.



Photo 3: The daily fetching of water for household use often occupies the time of both boys and girls in village and city

At times community-level collective action is also involved in the decision-making process concerning whether children work or go to school. Although in most instances members of an individual household are the primary decision-makers, here the wider community may play a major role, as illustrated in Box 4. This often occurs in settlements where strong social networks exist, households know one another well, and many members of the populace are related to one another by blood or through marriage. In this specific case, it is in the rural community of Panj Ko where social safety nets are frequently called into play to help extremely vulnerable households in emergencies. Even these safety nets have their limitations, however, and finally children in the respective families must leave school to work.

Influence of a child's social support network or peer group also affects both boys and girls, especially as they approach early adolescence and begin to socialise with individuals other than those in their own household. This may serve as encouragement for them to attend school or, on the other hand,

to work.⁹⁷ For example, in the Turkman community located in Koche Nasaji in Herat, a young girl who stopped school at grade four to weave carpets at home relates that she found little motivation to remain in school when all of her female cousins of the same age had dropped out of school to do the same. Involved here is the influence of her peer group, combined with gender norms, community norms, and issues of basic ethnic identity.

Additional examples of peer influence upon young males comes from the border community of Dashte Khushk, where one boy in the sample dropped out of school at grade five because all of his neighbours of similar age had left school to begin work loading trucks at the border. Another mother relates that her son dropped out of school at grade five and began selling phone cards at the border because his friends had urged him to join them in this endeavour.

Social sanctions may be negative or positive. In either case, the concerns a household has about what others in their community think about the

⁹⁷ See Section 7.3., *Psychosocial Effects of Work*, for more discussion on this topic.

Box 4: The community decides—withdrawn from school to work

In the village of Panj Ko in Badakhshan, the larger community has been the major decision-maker in the withdrawal from school of two boys, along with their subsequent commencement of work, with only secondary participation of the youngsters' household members. Both households are extremely vulnerable and, after experiencing crises with the deaths of the boys' fathers, have been assisted by the substantial village social support system in which they receive food, clothing, and moral support from others.

With strong community norms supporting education, usually the teaching staff of the local school strongly discourages the withdrawal of students and works with households on an individual basis to retain both boys and girls in the institution. However, in the case of these two boys, both of whom had been good students in Grade five and Grade six, the situation was different. While Nabi's staunchly religious older brother fulfils his traditional ritual obligations following the father's death, the boy now must work as a wage labourer. Abdul must now assume the contracted task of village shepherd that his deceased father had held.

The local *shura*, including the village leaders, elders, and the local school teachers, met publicly in two separate sessions to discuss each of these cases separately. Each time the collective decision was made to withdraw the youngster at least for a year so that he could work. Household members agreed, as did the boys with reluctance.

In both of the cases of Nabi and Abdul, there is a complex mix of economic and social factors involved in the decision-making processes to withdraw these boys from school and send them to work. In order to help their exceptionally poor households to survive, the community does provide social support, but there appears to be a limit to such support, after which the household itself must take part (e.g. through child labour), in spite of the community's emphasis upon the importance of schooling for its youth. In Nabi's situation, the household is in debt to other villagers and the teachers themselves. In Abdul's case, the villagers' flocks must be taken to the mountain pastures daily. The leaders of the community have had to sacrifice the education of these two boys, at least temporarily, in order to not only promote the survival of their individual households but also to preserve village harmony.

behaviour of its members, both male and female, is crucial in both village and city. Gossip is common, and the fear of its power to make or break a family's reputation is pervasive. Indeed, "*what people think*" influences how parents evaluate their children's various work undertakings outside of the household. Parents, especially mothers, are often worried as to how their offspring's activities will reflect upon themselves, and how others will judge them as parents. Box 5 contains two brief but strikingly different examples of mothers' responses taken from field notes, one from urban Kabul and the other from rural Panj Ko.

In addition, in both rural and urban Afghanistan

community gender norms exert a powerful influence upon decisions relating to both work and school, especially for females. Numerous gender-based rules and regulations exist, which are usually closely followed by females (and males) in order to preserve the household's honour and reputation within the wider community. In general, the female domain is within the private sphere of the household compound, while the male sphere is in the public spaces of the neighbourhood and bazaar. In this dichotomous situation, female mobility may be severely curtailed within the public domain, especially in urban centres where the populace is comprised of many unfamiliar persons; in contrast, women and girls in villages where "everyone

knows everyone else” may have more freedom of movement.

Gender norms affect all households in their decisions as to who works, in what activity, and where. Home-based income generation is common for secluded women, who may clean pistachios, weave carpets, sew, etc., and often their daughters assist in these activities.⁹⁸ When girls are under the age of 13, they may also have permission from their parents to work outside the home collecting papers and fuel, grazing sheep in the rural areas, or in other tasks. However, upon reaching puberty many social sanctions come into play that limit their work activities and encourage their seclusion. Although safety concerns are also involved, primary apprehensions of both mothers and fathers relate to the honour of their respective household, and the fear that their maturing daughter may tarnish its reputation through her contact with males.⁹⁹

Similarly, in the area of education socio-cultural issues of a gendered nature limit female access to schooling in all research settings, especially in the upper grades. Some households may find little value in investing in education for their daughters, who will subsequently marry and become part of other units, as opposed to their sons who will stay to support the family. There are also fears that their daughters’ travel to and from school, contact with male students, and their exposure to new ideas may destroy the household’s reputation and standing in the community.

In this conservative atmosphere, travel in the public sphere to work or school entails chronic risks for Afghan females and, if not accompanied by a male relative, they prefer to travel in groups rather than alone. A household’s fear of sexual abuse, along with potentially “bad morals” on the part of both males and females, hold serious negative repercussions. There is always the chance that a girl may lose her virginity (or at least “people will talk behind our backs” which is similarly devastating), and this would preclude future marriage propositions.

98 Refer to Table 4 for illustration of gender-based types of work for the study sample: boys in the public arena and girls within the household.

99 See Section 7.1.

Box 5: What other people think

“I’m worried about what the neighbours are thinking when my children stay out late at night when they are working. Do they think that we send them for robbery or for prostitution? Sometimes I worry about these things to myself...”

– CL mother in Kabul of young working boy

“Now the neighbours say, ‘Oh, those poor boys are so ba-khairot (responsible). They took their father’s job, and are doing their duty. They’re taking care of their family!’

... if the boys didn’t work, then the neighbours would say that this is the fault of their mother....”

– CL mother in Panj Ko whose two sons work as village shepherds following the death of their father

In the present atmosphere of civil unrest, suicide bombings, the presence of both local and foreign troops in Afghanistan, etc., many parents worry when their children leave their homes for either work or school. This applies to both sons and daughters, with somewhat more concern exhibited for girls, and may affect their mobility. Additionally, fears of kidnapping of both male and females also abound in all locations, with many rumours of children never returning home. In some cases, children have been withdrawn from school due to these various fears on the part of parents or, in other instances, parents limit children’s work activities to those that can be conducted in their nearby neighbourhoods.

Positive and negative role models

The presence of either positive or negative role models is particularly powerful as parents and children consider the future of their household and its members. These individuals, who are usually relatives or members of respondents’ social networks, influence decisions about work and education. In

general, residents of the cities of Kabul and Herat have had more exposure to a greater variety of positive role models who have succeeded through education and subsequent employment than their rural counterparts. However, rural individuals with exposure to nearby provincial centres also refer to persons—both men and women—whom they perceive to have succeeded through schooling: teachers, doctors, engineers—anyone with a stable salaried job. Men who have returned from living in Iran or Pakistan pay particular attention to positive role models encountered during their experiences abroad.

Household decision-making about the education of its members is not only driven by calculations of expected future material returns from employment. Another major factor that encourages investment in schooling is the enhanced status and reputation of educated sons and daughters and their parents—who can take credit for these achievements. In general, NCL parents make more reference to educated and successful role models—relatives, teachers and other professionals, and political figures—than their CL counterparts, and they hope that their sons and daughters will follow in their footsteps.

On the other hand, respondents in all locations, especially in the CL households, also draw attention to individuals who have graduated from grade 12 or even higher and are nonetheless unemployed. Based on these negative role models, they subsequently wonder if it is worth taking the risk to educate their offspring. In the border community of Dashte Khushk, there appear to be no positive role models in support of education in the social networks of the respondents in the study sample, but instead role models exist for border work and labour migration.

6.3 School-related variables

Benefits of education

In all sites—Badakhshan, Kabul, and Herat—parents in both CL and NCL households value education highly in spite of the fact that few have been able to

study themselves.¹⁰⁰ Many of these individuals were deprived of education in their youth due to a number of the same obstacles faced by their children today: gender-based seclusion norms, the loss of a male head of household and poverty. In addition, years of war, civil strife, and migration made it impossible for many of these adults to study when they were younger.¹⁰¹ Fathers and mothers primarily equate education with literacy and numeracy, along with “being able to talk with people.” Moral learning is another expected outcome from education. Parents want their children to be able to distinguish right from wrong, to be able to read the Holy Quran, and to become good Muslims. On a national level, others believe that Afghanistan is in dire need of an educated populace to find peace and prosper, and they want their children to take an active part in its future development. In addition, and in many cases most importantly, fathers and mothers believe that education will enable their children “to become somebody,” and to find productive employment in the future that will not only bring benefit to themselves but also to their parents and households.

Only a minority of parents do not perceive benefits from formal education. For example, a CL father in Kabul who has studied to the university level and cannot find work now sends his son to learn a skill in a mechanic shop, for little cash income but with the hope that his son’s career will be better than his own. A CL mother in Dashte Khushk believes that schooling is a waste of time and is “only for the rich,” not a part of her world. Among some minority groups, ethnic discrimination, either perceived or real, is another socio-cultural factor that may inhibit various choices pertaining to both work and school. For example, in the ethnically mixed Herat community of Koche Nasaji

100 In the total sample of 33 households, no mother has any formal education and, except for some being able to read the Quran, all are non-literate. In rural Panj Ko and Dashte Khushk, along with urban Koche Nasaji, the males are also non-literate except for a few NCL fathers have attended school (ranging from grades two to 12). In Kabul mothers are all non-literate, and half of the fathers (CL and NCL) have attended school (from grades three to military university)

101 Deb and Rosati, “Tackling Child Labour” also discuss the staunch commitment to education on the part of parents who have been deprived of it in their own lives.

respondents in the Turkman households included in the sample are ambivalent towards education and its potential. Parents note that even those male relatives who have graduated have not been able to find suitable employment (i.e. as teachers or doctors) due to what they believe to be ethnic discrimination on the part of the government. “... So what’s the point of going to school?” asked a mother of a 13-year-old boy who works in a mechanic shop.

In all research sites, pervasive and long-standing traditional gender norms result in differential access to formal schooling for boys and girls, along with determining their length of study and subsequent type of work. Fewer educational options for girls exist in both rural and urban settings and traditionally girls are seen to not need to be educated as much as boys are. If they do attend school, they may be withdrawn at puberty. However, when considering the benefits of education, many fathers and mothers in the sample voiced belief in the importance of formal schooling for both sons and daughters in present-day Afghanistan, and want to provide equal opportunities for them. This is, unfortunately, not always possible, and education is not even an option for many children, regardless of gender.

Costs, quality, and related considerations

In deciding whether a child will attend school or not, one of the primary considerations for a poor family are the direct costs involved, which typically include investment in uniforms, book bags, school supplies, etc., in the case of government schools. In both rural and urban settings these school-related costs are a considerable burden on a poor household’s budget and often play a large role in decisions about education. Parents in NCL households choose to make the necessary investment to enable their offspring to attend in hopes of future returns in the form of secure employment and related social status, while CL households may not be willing to take the risk. In both Kabul and Herat, the option also exists for a child to attend NGO-run courses, which often provide the necessary supplies and,

in some cases, uniforms. Although not without potential negative effects,¹⁰² these incentives are appreciated by both parents and students. In the case of the village of Panj Ko, however, where most families send their children—boys and girls—to the local government school, each household not only willingly purchases basic school supplies but also contributes a small amount of cash monthly to support the non-local teachers who must reside at the school.¹⁰³

Expectations and experiences of school vary from site to site, with differences between CL and NCL households. School location is a crucial consideration and, as part of the research design for this research, all communities have access to government educational facilities for both boys and girls. A major constraint to enrolment, attendance and retention, however, is the poor quality of public education as perceived by both parents and children especially in CL households. Indeed, in our sample of 23 working children (15 boys and eight girls), a total of 11 (nine boys and two girls) have previously been enrolled in government schools and have subsequently dropped out, largely because of dissatisfaction with the school system for one reason or another.¹⁰⁴

The elements included in the definition of school quality for parents and children are numerous. First and foremost is educational outcome: whether the child learns to read and write after a few years of study. In addition, the quality of the learning environment is seen to be very important, which includes not only teacher motivation and skills, class size, cleanliness of the school, availability of books, etc., but also the treatment of the students

102 For example, the decision to send a child to school may be motivated by the material assistance received, rather than the value of education itself.

103 Strong social sanctions of a political nature encourage community enthusiasm and support of the local school in Panj Ko, which is generally perceived as providing quality education. The local *komandan* is a champion of education and has valuable links to leadership in the provincial capital of Faizabad, which has resulted in a fully staffed cadre of teachers at the well-organized and administered school.

104 In addition, in Panj Ko two boys dropped out of the local government school due to the deaths of their fathers and one boy, an orphan, had never been enrolled at all.

by the teachers. Children and parents from CL households frequently relate that teachers beat the students, especially boys, and also exploit them by demanding their manual labour. Complaints of teachers taking bribes for good grades are also common. Ethnic minorities in Kabul and Herat have felt discriminated against in the classroom by teachers and also by fellow students on the way to and from school.¹⁰⁵ In contrast, parents in NCL households do not dwell upon these negative aspects of schooling, but are rather concerned about their children's educational successes and subsequent promotion and graduation.

The general awareness and understanding of teachers towards their students who must also work is critical for a child's attendance and retention. Nine children (four boys and five girls) in the sample attempt to combine both work and school (both government and NGO-sponsored). In rural Panj Ko where teachers know their students' individual livelihood situations well, they provide special leave applications and make-up assignments for working children who have been absent and they are generally understanding of possible conflicts that may arise between work and school. In contrast, in Dashte Khushk two working boys dropped out partially because they could not complete their homework and the corresponding insensitivity of their teachers.

Similar to the incentives provided at NGO-sponsored schools in urban areas, a selling point for school enrolment, attendance and retention especially in rural sites is the World Food Programme Food for Education Programme (FFE), which distributes valuable foodstuffs to all students.¹⁰⁶ The programme is designed for vulnerable and food-insecure areas. When it ceased in one of the study

¹⁰⁵ In contrast, NGO-sponsored classes and courses in the urban centres are highly appreciated by both parents and children because they are often free or have low fees; the quality of the learning environment and outcome is good, with teachers giving attention to children; and there is less potential for harassment or ill treatment on the part of teachers or fellow students.

¹⁰⁶ In this programme, a 50kg bag of wheat is given to each enrolled child twice a year, and all children get nutritional biscuits (100 grams) every day. In addition, every girl student receives 5 liters of cooking oil twice a year.

sites it was a major factor in the withdrawal from school of a few students, who then began to work, along with affecting the attendance of a number of other children.

Another variable that influences the decision towards schooling is the presence of options for further education for both boys and girls. It is reassuring for parents to know that following their children's completion of elementary school they will have access to secondary and also higher educational opportunities.

Given their limited resources and the uncertainty of future returns, diversification, in which a child or children in a household work while others attend school, is also a common strategy employed by some poor households. Parents carefully weigh up the costs and benefits of work and school, along with a consideration of a child's individual characteristics, interests, and abilities. For example, parents may consider one son in a family to be especially intelligent and thus he is sent to school, while his physically stronger brother works.

In addition to the respondents' degree of satisfaction with the school system, of utmost importance is their perception of the likelihood of future employment for their educated offspring, the corresponding degree of job security and the chance to obtain a secure salary. These are major considerations for NCL parents as they consider the future payoffs to be obtained from their investment in their youngsters' education. On the other hand, CL units often find that that investment is too risky a proposition, not only because of the poor quality of schools, but also because of their uncertainty about future returns. In addition, CL parents take into consideration the costs of their son or daughter not being able to take part in income generation through child labour if they sent them to school.

More frequently than their CL counterparts, NCL fathers may have studied beyond elementary school themselves, and they realise the importance of education for their sons and daughters. Both fathers and mothers frequently ask their children about their schoolwork; when possible, they also help them with their homework and meet with their teachers.

Non-literate mothers may even attempt to learn to read along with their offspring. This commitment is often accompanied by disappointment and regret on the part of parents that they were deprived of education during their childhood due to war, poverty, gender-based seclusion norms, etc.

In an ongoing process, both CL and NCL households try to make strategic choices by maximising their returns from a limited array of options, and calculate trade-offs between work and school. In short, the ways in which these two groups perceive risk is strikingly different. CL families focus upon immediate and short-term returns, which are available through their children working, while their NCL counterparts focus upon the long-term future returns from education.

6.4 Work-Related Variables

The opportunity to learn

Learning is a strong motivation involved in the decisions of many CL households to send their children to work, and careful consideration may be taken concerning what type of work they assume. In many but not all cases of child labour included in this sample, skills are obtained, which will prove valuable in their adult life. For example, this includes activities such as farm labour, carpentry, or mechanic apprenticeships for boys and carpet-weaving, embroidery, shop-keeping, and even household chores for girls.¹⁰⁷ Both parents and children in CL households clearly acknowledge the learning opportunities their respective work provides them (Box 6). In Dashte Khushk, however, respondents unfortunately find that their hazardous work at the border does not impart any skills to their sons that could be used in the future to secure a more stable and improved livelihood.

Well aware of the unpredictable returns from educational investment, some families want their children to learn a vocational skill, in the hope that this may provide them a more reliable livelihood in the future. Apprenticeships for boys are valued in

Box 6: Working and learning

“I’m happy because I want to learn everything—and do everything well! For example, the first time I washed clothes for others I couldn’t do it very well and I was ashamed—the women in the house laughed at me. But now I know that task very well. And I’m also happy because I’m bring something home (payment in soap, cooking oil, etc.)...”

– 13-year-old girl who does household chores for others in Panj Ko

“I’m happy with carpet weaving. It’s our work. We’re Turkman, and we should learn carpet weaving...I never get tired of it. Carpet-weaving is my passion.”

– 14-year-old girl who weaves carpets in her home in Koche Nasaji, Herat

“From selling firewood in the town I’ve learned a little counting. Now I can count from 1 to 500. I’ve also learned how to sell the wood, and how to deal with customers.”

– 14-year-old boy from Panj Ko who sells firewood in Faizabad

all sites, but in our sample it is only those individuals in the urban locales of Kabul and Herat who are working in these positions (N=5). Firstly, due to a lack of vocational diversification, apprenticeship options do not exist at the village level in Panj Ko. In addition, apprentices in some contexts do not earn salaries per se, and thus many parents in both rural and urban sites said that they cannot allow their sons to take up any work that provides no remuneration. Finally, in the community of Dashte Khushk and other settings it is believed that only those who have *wasita*¹⁰⁸ can obtain apprenticeships for their sons, and none of the boys in the sample have been able to obtain them.¹⁰⁹

108 Relations with powerful and influential people.

109 In addition, in both rural and urban sites it is believed that skilled craftsmen do not train their apprentices well on purpose because they fear future competition and a decrease in the demand for their services.

107 Refer to Table 4, *Child Labour: Types of Work Presently Undertaken*

Most popular in the urban sample of both Kabul and Herat are apprenticeships for boys in mechanic shops; others work in a water pump shop and a bakery. In general, children's experiences are not very encouraging, however, not only because of the dangerous working conditions, but also due to the frequently harsh treatment by the employers.¹¹⁰ Working as an apprentice with relatives appears to provide better conditions. In short, however, parents and children agree that there is a striking lack of opportunity for skills training for both boys and girls in both village and city.

The transition from childhood to adulthood

Many parents and children in CL households consider the work undertaken by children as simply a part of an ongoing process, the natural transition from childhood to adulthood. In NCL households parents also frequently mention that children should help with household tasks and “learn how to work” in order to prepare them for their adult lives. Also involved is a perception of the moral benefits of work. In addition, in both CL and NCL households mothers are especially concerned that their daughters learn how to perform household tasks such as cooking and tailoring because, if they are not competent in these skills, it will reflect badly upon their household and themselves when the girls later marry.

Indeed, the learning of essential life skills is an important non-economic motivation for some households to send their children to work. Most of the children in the sample are in the stage of early adolescence and are slowly assuming more responsibility and increased status within their family units. Often they are acutely aware of the dire economic condition of their families and worry about how they can best contribute to improve their livelihoods. Some working children develop their numeracy skills, begin to save, and take more interest in their household budgets and expenditures. Self-esteem can also grow through successful work and related remuneration, and the

¹¹⁰ See additional discussion in Section 7.1. on “Work Conditions, Hazards, and Risks.”

adolescents may even begin to think about and plan for their forthcoming marriages.

Many CL children do not have the opportunity of a school setting where they can establish peer relations with others, build their social networks and learn positive social and communications skills. However, some of these child labourers, especially boys working in the public sphere, find that their work context enables them to form friendships with others of their own age and learn how to communicate with adults and strangers. As these early adolescents mature, many begin to accompany their parents to various social and political functions, and proudly take more active roles in their respective communities.

Although not the primary focus of this research, it is possible to make some brief comments about the period of childhood in Afghanistan. Childhood, especially for the poor, is very fleeting for many boys and girls, and individuals in our sample in both rural and urban locations often have had to begin working at a very early age.¹¹¹ In spite of early participation by children in productive activities for their households, however, adult respondents note that, in general, children 15 years of age and under have not fully developed reasoning abilities (*bey-aqel*) and need much ongoing guidance from their elders.

When child labour precludes participation in school and leisure CL youngsters in the study sample who must work are clearly missing out on a childhood as characterised in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other international documents. However, not all Afghan households define the period of childhood in the same way. In contrast to the above discussion about CL families, the response of a mother from an NCL household is especially interesting (Box 7).

¹¹¹ In the urban context, here are a few examples of various types of work and the ages at which they were started by our sample of CL children: vending eight years old; mechanic apprentice ten years old; carpet weaving seven years old; cleaning pistachios five years old. And a few more are from the rural sites: gathering brush or dung four to seven years old; grazing flocks nine to ten years old.

Box 7: An NCL mother's views on childhood

“Childhood is not the time to work. It is a time for schooling...the only duty children have is to learn and to study. They should learn how to socialise with others in school. Working is not their duty.”

– Mother of four sons (all who are school-aged are studying), NCL household, Dashte Khushk, Herat.

Keeping children occupied and out of trouble

Another positive aspect of child labour perceived by many CL mothers and fathers, especially in the cities of Kabul and Herat, is the fact that work keeps their children, boys more than girls, occupied and out of trouble. In Kabul, where large families and cramped living quarters are common, stressed-out mothers also mention that they send their children out to work to have some degree of peace in the household during the day.

Many urban parents possess a deep distrust of leisure time for their children. Free time is often considered a waste, along with providing the opportunity for them to get into trouble; improper behaviour in public by both boys and girls has the potential of damaging the household reputation. In the atmosphere of insecurity and crime that is often present in Afghanistan, parental concern in this regard may be justified but, on the other hand, the importance of free time, leisure, and play for children's healthy development cannot be forgotten.¹¹²

Especially for city boys, who have more access to the public sphere, bad morals or behaviour generally associated with excessive free time include: roaming the streets and associating with bad people, smoking, gambling, taking drugs, chasing girls and stealing.

¹¹² For example, leisure and play is mandated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and is internationally recognised to be crucial for children's physical and psychosocial development. This is an example of how universal values must be balanced with culturally specific attitudes, particularly in the Afghan context of conflict and insecurity.

Children in Kabul and Herat may relax by watching television in the evenings if their households have the appliance, and they are usually free on Fridays to play football (boys) or visit friends (girls). In the isolated village context of Panj Ko a more secure atmosphere generally prevails, and children in the sample engage in kite-flying and football (boys) or picnics and visiting (girls) when they are free with generally less negative sanctions by their parents than their urban counterparts. The situation is quite different in the border community of Dashte Khushk, however, where little mention is made of leisure time and parents are well aware that their sons' work at Islam Qala clearly exposes them to a variety of abuses and criminal behaviour.

Box 8 summarises this discussion with a listing of some of the positive features relating to child labour as perceived by both parents and children.

Box 8: Child labour—some positive features

- Furnishes opportunity for learning (technical and moral)
- Provides child a sense of responsibility
- Increases child's influence within the household and community
- Develops child's confidence in interacting with people and builds self-esteem
- Helps to develop numeracy/arithmetic skills
- Furnishes an opportunity to socialise with peers
- Keeps child occupied and out of trouble

7. Experiences and Impact of Child Labour

7.1 Work conditions, hazards, and risks

In spite of the positive factors associated with children's work, the majority of child labourers included in this study do not work under conditions that meet the requirements of the UNCRC, to which Afghanistan is a signatory, or those of the English translation of the 2007 draft version of the Afghanistan Labour Code. The international UNCRC¹¹³ generally protects children from economic exploitation, hazardous work, and work that might interfere with schooling or be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. The Afghan Labour Code specifically defines the working age as 18, although light non-hazardous work is permitted for children age 15-18. The recruitment of children under age 18 for hazardous work is prohibited. The work week for child labourers aged 15-18 is less than that for adults, and is set at 35 hours rather than 40 hours.

Out of the total sample of 23 working children, including 15 males and eight females, the vast majority (N=19) are below the minimum working age of 15 years as outlined in the Labour Code. Those few who are older are certainly not engaged in light non-hazardous work as mandated, but rather in difficult physical labour. They also put in extremely long hours, with some labouring as much as twice the legally mandated work week for children. Specifically, totals range from more than 80 hours per week (an 11-year-old mechanic's apprentice in Kabul) to 24 hours per week (a 13-year-old girl who assists her father in his shop, along with attending grade 6), with an average of approximately 45 hours per week—clearly above the amount specified by the Afghanistan Labour Code. Boys generally work more hours than girls, but this is not always the case.

There are also numerous hazards associated with

the different types of work undertaken by these children. Table 7 presents a general summary of the many hazards identified by both parents and children in the sample households that are associated with various types of child labour. A few of those included at the top of the table pertain only to rural undertakings, and are those that occur in the uninhabited mountains and fields surrounding the village or on the way to and from the provincial centre of Faizabad. Other hazards concern work that only occurs in the urban sample sites: at home, in workshops, on the busy streets of Kabul and Herat or at the crowded border town of Islam Qala. Other hazards at the base of the table are common to both rural and urban sample sites.

Depending on the specific types of child labour, some of the dangers affect only males or only females. Examples of those only affecting boys in our sample include many of the hazards encountered in the public sphere such as police harassment and abuse or use of dangerous tools or machinery in a workshop. Examples of those that affect only girls are those associated with carpet-weaving (inhaling wool fibres and dirt; forced adoption of poor posture); and the widespread danger of sexual harassment, gossip or negative social sanctions that are possible whenever a female enters the public sphere. To a lesser extent, the danger of sexual abuse also pertains to boys.

These many hazards put working children at risk of injury, ill health, dangerous social repercussions, or even death. In general, they may be categorised as those that occur when travelling to and from work, those relating to the physical environment of the workplace and others, which are inherent to the specific type of work activity. They are all reflections of the unregulated nature of child labour in Afghanistan, all of which occur in the large informal sector where there are few mechanisms to protect the interests of both child and adult workers. Along with the lack of protective clothing or equipment in the work place and other safety measures, children also face job insecurity, unpredictable incomes,

113 Refer to a summary of this and other conventions in Box 1.

Table 7: Perceived hazards involved with various types of child labour activities in all research sites

Location	SPECIFIC HAZARDS (Encountered by Males/M and Females/F)
<i>Rural Sites Only</i>	Attacks by wild animals in mountains/fields (M/F) Falling in mountains (M) Perceived attacks by <i>jinn</i> (spirits) outside village (M/F)
<i>Urban Sites Only</i>	Police harassment and abuse (M) Harassment and abuse by older children (M) Use of dangerous tools/machinery in workshop (M) Carrying/lifting heavy loads (M/F) Inhaling bakery fire smoke (M) Inhaling noxious fumes (M) Skin exposure to fuel (M) Inhaling pollution in busy traffic (M/F) Exposure to germs, etc., in trash (M/F) Inhaling wool fibres and dirt (F) Forced adoption of poor posture (F)
<i>Both Rural And Urban Sites</i>	Beating/physical punishment by employer (M) Road accidents (M/F) Robbery (M) Kidnapping (M/F) Inclement weather (heat/cold/rain/snow) (M/F) Sexual harassment/abuse (F/M) Gossip, negative social sanctions (F)

lack of sick leave and the absence of any kind of legal protection.

It is evident that the quality and conditions of work for working children are often far from ideal, and both parents and children are well aware of this. In addition to making the difficult initial decision that their child must work, many CL parents subsequently debate as to what type of work he or she should undertake. In this process, they carefully weigh the pros and cons of specific jobs, taking into account the related work conditions, hazards and risks. This consideration of work type occurs more frequently in urban settings where more options exist than in rural contexts. For example, in both Kabul and Herat parents have removed their sons from abusive apprenticeships in favour of street vending, a task that also involves its own dangers, such as road accidents.

In spite of parental concerns and their children's own apprehensions, children continue their labours for the general good, if not the survival, of their households. Weighing the risks against the benefits of their children's labours, most mothers and fathers are unable to do much more than worry and perhaps check on their offspring now and then during the day due to their own responsibilities.¹¹⁴

In comparing and contrasting the various research sites included in this synthesis, the child labourers from Dashte Khushk who work at the Islam Qala border undertake the most hazardous forms of work in the sample, and thus they deserve special discussion. Included in Box 9 is a description of some examples of the dangers these boys must face daily while loading and unloading

114 See Section 7.5. below which contains some specific examples of how parents and children attempt to reduce their risks.

Box 9: Working at the border

The boys from the village of Dashte Khushk in Herat province who work at the bustling border town of Islam Qala face numerous dangers each day. Sibghatullah and Sultan, both 13 years of age, have been performing heavy manual labour there since they were ten, along with the illicit transporting of fuel through customs for truck drivers. The loading and unloading of trucks involves lifting and moving heavy loads, often from one truck to another, and there is always the fear of falling. Sibghatullah's mother recalls the case of her neighbour's son who had died from a serious fall recently when doing similar labour.

In addition, parents report the high risk of being hit by a vehicle, given the busy traffic at the border. Children engaged in illicit activities, such as stealing fuel from trucks, are at particular risk of being involved in accidents as they hide and run from the truck drivers or the police. Fuel-related work also has detrimental physical effects, and Sibghatullah has developed a painful skin condition as a result of prolonged exposure to the substance. His mother relates the following about her son's condition:

“My son's skin is covered in oil and he smells of it... his whole leg has blisters and sores. He washes his leg everyday with a sponge and soap, but the skin is sensitive and it's damaged by the fuel. ...But he has to work!”

The illicit nature of these fuel-related activities also exposes children to the risk of harassment, beating, and arrest by the police, particularly if the boys have not complied with the common practice of bribing them so that they will ignore their activities. In addition, in this competitive environment, bullying and physical abuse by older or more powerful boys occurs. This risk is heightened by the lack of adult supervision at the border, as well as the uncaring attitudes of the police.

While adult workers often face the same problems, children are particularly vulnerable due to their lower status and lesser physical strength. Indeed, children are often threatened by adults who resent their competition for scarce employment opportunities, as Sibghatullah describes:

“Some of the wage labourers are good, and they help me out with my loading. The rest of them don't help me. They tell me to leave and find myself other work (at another truck), but I don't listen to them...”

trucks and selling fuel in a general work environment where crime, exploitation and abuse are widespread. This combination of extremely hazardous and high-risk labour with few protective measures leaves the children extremely vulnerable to severe and long-term physical and psychosocial harm.

It should be remembered, however, that risks associated with child labour not only relate to children's physical illness or injury, but also to the likelihood that they will be deprived of valuable educational opportunities. With reference to Diagram 1, the second quadrant from the top,

children in hazardous forms of work, includes the boys in this study who work at the Islam Qala border, along with others from our sample.¹¹⁵ In addition, the third quartile is that of *working children who are denied schooling*, which embraces many boys and girls in the study sample who have never been in school or have dropped out in recent years and face the risk of growing up with little or no education. Lastly, the fourth category, *working children in school whose learning is compromised and/or at*

¹¹⁵ For example, boys who work as apprentices in mechanic shops and others.

risk of early drop-out, is also characteristic of a number of children in the sample (four boys and five girls) who are presently attempting to combine work and school, often with considerable difficulty. Specific risks associated with the various trade-offs between work and education will be reviewed in subsequent discussion.

7.2 Relationships with employers

In the unregulated atmosphere of the informal sector, shop owners, tradesmen, and others who employ child labour or take in apprentices often exert considerable power and authority over the children, and exploitation of the relationship is common. This applies largely to males in the sample who, in the rural setting, herd other villagers' sheep or work as wage labourers for skilled tradesmen in town, and, in the urban sites, are apprentices for mechanics, bakers, and others.¹¹⁶

In almost all cases, boys receive physical punishment and are beaten if they are late for work or do not complete their work as expected. Parents are especially concerned about this treatment and they recognize the harm that physical violence can do to children.¹¹⁷ For example, in the village of Panj Ko, owners of animals beat the young shepherds if the animals are injured in the mountains when under their care. Masters slap or beat their apprentices in Kabul and Herat if errors are made or if tools go missing when working in a mechanic shop or bakery. Another boss in Herat was angry because his apprentice had attempted to combine work and school, which made him late, and thus the boy's mother withdrew him from grade 3: "if my son only went to the shop in the late afternoon and evening, he would never learn his skill." In all of these cases,

116 Only one girl in the total sample can be considered to be employed by others (doing household chores for families in the village of Panj Ko), and she has established good working relations with the other village women.

117 D. Smith, *Love, Fear, and Discipline: Everyday Violence towards Children in Afghan Families*, (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008.) Indeed, although physical punishment within the household is a common form of discipline in Afghanistan, it appears that this is less accepted by parents when such punishment is carried out by individuals outside of the household such as employers or teachers.

CL parents who rely upon their children's labours feel helpless as to how to deal with the situation.

Only one individual, a 14-year-old boy who works as an apprentice in a mechanic shop in Herat, appears to have a good relationship with his employer, and this is because the master is his maternal uncle. The uncle says, "we're from his own family so we work hard with him and watch over him..." The mechanic ensures that his nephew is able to combine work and school ("...education is the priority"), teaches him valuable technical skills, pays for his medical treatments and gives him a day off now and then. In this case, in deciding to send their son to learn a skill, this boy's household has thus successfully reduced the risks involved by choosing an employer they know and trust.

7.3 Psychosocial effects of work

Focal children in the sample express varying opinions about their work, ranging from pride in their accomplishments to utter dislike and despair. Granted, compared to the physical hazards and risks involved, the psychosocial hazards and risks of child labour, along with the subsequent effects upon these youngsters, are not easy to assess. Much depends on the specific context in which the work is conducted, family dynamics, and the personality of the individual child. For many youngsters, early adolescence is also a period filled with some tension and uncertainty, and this must also be taken into consideration.

In a discussion of the many psychosocial impacts of work upon children, Woodhead rightly notes the "positive functions that moderate levels of work can play in children's lives," and some of these have been discussed in earlier sections: the provision of learning opportunities, growth in self-esteem and responsibility, the development of social skills, etc. However, this is not always the case with the sample children, many of whom undertake more than moderate work levels, and a number of negative effects are also apparent.

For example, concerning the development of self-esteem, social and communication skills and the

formation of social networks, working children have very different experiences—both positive and negative—related to the specific context and an individual’s personality. A village boy in Panj Ko enjoys the trip by donkey to and from Faizabad to sell brush with his friends, and is proud that he has learned how to speak with adults by selling brush in the large urban bazaar. In contrast, a mother in the city of Herat worries that her son, who works in a mechanic shop, does not have time to socialise with peers and is becoming increasingly shy as his apprenticeship continues.

As mentioned above, some children enjoy their work, take pride in their accomplishments, and are pleased to be responsible contributors to their household economies. Others, however, express anger towards their parents that they must work, and arguments within the household are a daily occurrence. A few boys relate that they feel ‘like a servant’ and threaten to run away from home, with mothers at a loss as to what to do. Girls in early adolescence may also object to labour they feel is unfitting for their age and refuse to work until their parents demand that they must do so.¹¹⁸

Some of the most striking negative indicators of psychosocial effects of work are the anger, depression, and humiliation exhibited by some, but not all, young boys who have been withdrawn from school to assume employment. This most often occurs if the individual had studied for five to six years, had enjoyed school, and had been a good student. This is especially the case where the community norm is one that stresses education and school attendance.¹¹⁹

118 Some children relate that their parents beat them, and parents correspondingly relate that they may discipline their offspring (especially sons but also daughters) with a slap or beating now and then. In general, physical punishment in the childrearing process is an accepted occurrence in Afghanistan. Although not the focus for this research, this is an important topic. See Smith, *Love, Fear, and Discipline*, for more information about violence towards children within Afghan families.

119 With reference again to Diagram 1, these boys had been in the lower fourth quartile but, following drop-out, have now moved into the third quartile, *working children who are denied schooling*, or perhaps the second quartile, *children in hazardous forms of work*, depending upon the activity.

Generalized mental stress and anxiety is also common among both boys and girls, along with feelings of inadequacy and a belief they are unfit for the specific type of work they must undertake. Some young boys, in both rural and urban environments, experience nightmares and bed-wetting. Other children face conflict within the household concerning their labour and suffer from insomnia, as illustrated in Box 10. They spend sleepless nights wonder about the precarious future of their extremely vulnerable households.

7.4 Work and school: Those who try to do both

Although not easy to accomplish, a portion of the households in the sample do try to provide opportunities for their children—both boys and girls—to combine work and schooling. This indicates the value parents place in both their labour and their education, along with the desire to diversify their children’s skill sets in light of an uncertain future. As previously indicated in Table 5, nine children (four boys and five girls) are presently working and studying at the same time.¹²⁰ These cases will be reviewed here in order to examine to what extent it is feasible to combine work and education. A number of interesting variations between the various school settings and their degree of support for working children are clearly apparent.

Work and school are often ongoing competing priorities, especially in the case of attendance at government schools, where the time children must spend at work often has a negative impact upon school performance. Many children in all sites have at one time attempted to combine work and school, but have found it to be impossible. Some have failed repeatedly and have finally dropped out. For example, boys in Dashte Khushk have left school because they had insufficient time to complete their homework due to work, and their teachers subsequently beat them. In short, school-going children who must also work long hours often exhibit

120 Referring again to Diagram 1, these children are in the lower quadrant of the triangle, *working children in school whose learning is compromised and/or are at risk of early drop-out*.

Box 10: Worrying about the future

Twelve-year-old Homa lives in Karte Naw in Kabul. She has seven siblings, with an eighth on the way, but the first five are girls. The lack of sons in the household has caused tension between her parents, and their unhappiness has affected her deeply—to the point that she took on the mantle of the household's eldest son, dressed as a boy when younger, and worked frequently in the public sphere collecting paper for fuel.

At present, she continues to work outside of the home collecting paper, even at the age of 12 when issues of family honour and female respectability mean that many young girls her age are removed from outdoor work and must stay at home. Her unemployed father was not told of her mobility and, when he found out, he beat Homa as her statement testifies:

“...He beat me and he would say, ‘You dishonour me with your work.’ So if my father was at home I would throw my sack on the roof of the house and collect it later. ...He always asks where I go. When he saw that there were some papers around the tandoor oven he understoodso he came and beat me hard.”

In her father's view, she is becoming too old for such work, even though it is his inability to work due to illness that drives her to take on this responsibility. The poor economic condition of her household causes her great worry—worry beyond that which is desirable for such a young girl.

“When the lights go off at night, the others fall asleep but I can't. I am always thinking a lot and worrying about my family's condition. I always sit like this (she sat with her knees close to her chest and her head down with eyes closed), and I think about where I can find more papers for the next day...”

chronic absenteeism, inability to concentrate or stay awake in school and poor performance. Harassment on the part of both teachers and peers is a frequently mentioned concern for both boys and girls in the sample who are enrolled in government schools.

Some parents of CL children continue to be strongly committed to education, however, and seek out alternatives to the government schools that enable their children to both work and study. In Kabul and Herat, NGO schools exist that specifically target working children and provide accelerated courses, which are held at convenient times. These courses are run by understanding staff who identify working children in the vicinity of the centres.¹²¹ The courses provide the opportunity for not only learning

but also play and socialising. They also seek to reintegrate the children into government schools at a level according to their age and ability. Almost all of the six urban children who both work and go to school in our sample are presently enrolled in these NGO-sponsored courses, and both the children themselves and their parents are pleased with this type of schooling.

Another situation prevails in the village of Panj Ko, where the only educational option is the local government school that holds classes for both males and females. In this rural sample it is only girls who are able to combine work and school. Boys' labour activities entail long hours in the mountains and travel to the provincial centre bazaar, which takes the entire day, and thus they cannot combine work and study. In contrast, girls' work is local, which enables them to attend school in the morning and work in the afternoons. In addition, in Panj Ko, where community norms are very supportive of

¹²¹ Some children may also enroll themselves in the centres, which are usually free and may also provide uniforms and school supplies for the students.

education, the Principal and teaching staff at the local government school know and sympathise with those students who must combine work and school, and they attempt to provide special assistance to them.

7.5 Trying to reduce their risks

Both parents and youngsters are keenly aware of many of the hazards and risks involved in the different types of child labour that are undertaken, and attempts are made to mitigate these risks through a variety of different strategies. In some cases, if options exist parents may make strategic decisions to change the type of work their children undertake. However, often households must deal with whatever work type is available. Some methods of risk reduction prove to be more successful than others and most households do not have any recourse for protection.

Table 8 includes a number of examples of risk reduction strategies taken from all research sites. Children themselves may take protective action by forming groups to protect themselves from a variety of attacks in the desolate mountains on their way to market, or by wearing scarves when carpet-weaving as protection from dust-related illness. In other instances, however, it is the parents who seek to mitigate the dangers related with their children's labour. In the sample, a village father helps his daughter with herding, seeking to deflect dangerous gossip, while another protects his son from police arrest at the border. A village mother whose daughter combines work and school provides her with uninterrupted time to successfully complete homework, while parents in the cities carefully choose their son's employer to avoid exploitation, or decide upon a type of labour that suits the boy's personality.

Table 8: Some risk-reduction strategies

Child, Age, Work Activity	Hazard/Associated Risk	Risk-Reduction Strategy
Panj Ko		
<i>Hussein, 14, gathering/selling brush</i>	Injury from fall in mountains, attacks by wild animals, <i>jinn</i> , kidnapping, robbery	Boys travel in groups to mountain to gather brush and also to city bazaar to sell
<i>Karima, 13, grazing household sheep</i>	Gossip, negative social sanctions; a tarnished household reputation	Father accompanies his daughter to pastures with sheep when free
<i>Mariam, 13, shopkeeper (next to home)</i>	Poor performance at school; dropping out	When the girl does her homework, her mother takes care of the shop
Kabul		
<i>Nazir, 13, sells plastic bags, water, juice</i>	Illness, sunstroke on very hot days	Parents allow son to not work on hot days
<i>Zara, 11, rug-weaver</i>	Illness from inhaling wool fibres/ dust	Girl wears scarf around her mouth and nose when weaving
Herat		
<i>Amin, 14, mechanic's apprentice</i>	Bad treatment, beating from employer, no opportunity to combine work/study	Careful selection by parents of boy's employer (a trusted relative)
<i>Fatah, 13, street vending</i>	Bad treatment, beating from employer, and other risks	Parents choose an appropriate type of work for a shy boy; not apprenticeship but self-employed vending
Dashte Khushk		
<i>Sibghatullah, 13, loading/unloading trucks/selling fuel at border</i>	Harassment, beating, possible arrest by police at border	Father (who also works at the border as a gardener) knows police and intervenes if his son is in trouble

8. Aspirations of Parents and Children

In most research sites included in this synthesis, parents and children in both CL and NCL households generally express high hopes for the future of the younger generation—for both sons and daughters. Parents want their children to have “a bright future” and, although they are not exactly sure what this will entail, they struggle to make the correct decisions that may enable this to occur. Both parents and children themselves hope that they will “become somebody” when they grow up, which often entails a desire for a salaried job. This reflects not only the hope for financial security, but also for the concomitant achievement of respect and status in the community, which accompanies successful employment. Parents perceive the future success of their offspring, especially sons, as an achievement for themselves and their households as a whole. Children frequently say that they want to succeed in order to be able to support their families and to help them out of poverty.

Ideal career choices include the professions of teaching, medicine, and engineering. Parents and children frequently talk about these professions as aspirations for both males and females, especially in the NCL households. Choices of young girls usually include being a teacher or doctor, which are both acceptable and respectable work for females. Any type of salaried employment that demands literacy, such as clerkships in government offices, is also desired. In many cases, these careers involve years of formal education that is not available in the respective localities, and the feasibility of individuals actually achieving these aspirations is often questionable. However, parents in NCL households voice detailed plans to send their children, especially sons, to larger urban centres to obtain the necessary training. Members of NCL households in both rural and urban settings consider themselves very much part of the larger context of province and nation, and they expect positive professional and financial returns for their ongoing investment in their children’s education.

Although they have high aspirations, many NCL

parents also indicate that they will let their children make the final decisions concerning their respective careers. CL parents are generally more resigned to the fact that their offspring may not achieve what they desire, and are quick to acknowledge the difficult realities of their livelihoods.

Many CL children who have dropped out or have been withdrawn from school long to return to their studies. With some rationalisation on their part, they may consider their work to be only temporary and desire careers in teaching, medicine, or engineering. They realise, however, that the decision to resume their education does not rest with them, but is rather in the hands of their parents and depends more generally upon future improvement in their household livelihoods.

However, not all working children have aspirations that entail further formal education. For example, a young Turkman rug weaver has other plans: she will practice hard and become an expert craftswoman, which entails the potential for not only financial gain but also status and respect from the larger community. Boys who now have apprenticeships plan to have their own shops one day, and another wants to be a carpenter. A few youngsters also relate, rather typically for early adolescence, that they just want to make money and have a car.

Marriage for sons and daughters is eagerly anticipated, with mothers hoping to be able to arrange appropriate matches for both sons and daughters. If a son is literate, his family is usually intent on finding an educated mate for him too. Among CL households, however, there is considerably less desire for education for their daughters, especially in rural areas, and early marriages are common.

Aspirations are influenced not only by family dynamics but also by the larger socio-cultural context, and the prevailing degree of optimism varies from one research site to another. For example, in the village of Panj Ko, where community

norms support education and most children go to school, there are widespread expectations for a better future, with hopes that the government will expand the local school up to grade 12 for both boys and girls. In contrast, the general atmosphere in the village of Dashte Khushk is considerably different. In this location, where community norms

support child labour, both parents and children widely express extremely limited aspirations for the future. Perhaps a son will become an illegal migrant in Iran, or another may remain a shepherd. With a narrow scope of limited options, the villagers look to the future with resignation.

9. Conclusions

Although poverty is indeed a critical factor in household decision-making processes about whether a child works or not in Afghanistan, there are also a number of additional factors of a socio-cultural nature that influence or interact with important economic variables. In both rural and urban contexts in Badakhshan, Kabul and Herat, focus for this synthesis of qualitative research has been on only poor households, some who utilise child labour and others who do not, and a number of comparisons between the child labour (CL) households and the non-child labour (NCL) households have been made. Although many findings are context-specific, presented here are some general conclusions pertaining to the major social and economic factors that are involved in the complex and ongoing cost-benefit analysis undertaken by both parents and children as they consider two major alternatives: work or school.

All of these poor households in both village and city are plagued by chronic livelihood and economic insecurity, which includes high unemployment, low productivity and earnings, high costs of living and debt. However, their poor economic situation is not necessarily the singular or most prominent consideration in decisions pertaining to children in the family. Granted, the lack of an able-bodied adult male worker in the household due to death, disability, or migration, or the seclusion of adult females in the family and their subsequent inability to find productive work may result in the utilisation of child labour. In some cases, however, mothers choose to make sacrifices and, by going against prevailing gender norms, undertake income generation that enables their children to avoid work and attend school.

Traditionally it is usually the eldest son who is called upon to work, and he often has to sacrifice his desires for the good of the household and his younger siblings. In families that have no sons, or those that have small boys too young to work, a daughter may assume the role of a breadwinner. Gender norms severely limit income generation

options for girls, especially with the onset of puberty. A common strategy employed by many households entails diversification, in which one or more children may work while their siblings attend school. The monetary cost of education is a limiting factor for many households, and decisions as to who has the opportunity to attend school among siblings is also influenced by the individual child's perceived scholastic ability by other household members.

Parents, both fathers and mothers, are usually the major decision-makers concerning who works and who goes to school. Children themselves also have some agency, depending on specific family dynamics, their ability to negotiate and individual personalities. However, children often feel compelled to work in order to support their households and agree to their parents' wishes. In addition, although fathers and mothers are usually the decision-makers, in some rural communities the decision that a child must withdraw from school and work may be made by the larger community, including the local *shura*, village elders, and teachers. This may occur when local social support systems can no longer provide for extremely vulnerable households lacking an adult male worker. In these cases, child labour decisions may mean the withdrawal of promising students from school.

Although each socio-cultural context varies greatly, in all contexts community norms exert considerable influence upon individual households and their respective decision-making concerning child labour or schooling. In some settlements, norms pertaining to child labour clearly predominate, while in others education-related norms prevail. A household is concerned about what others in their community think about the behaviour of its members, both male and female, and fear of negative gossip is common; parents express anxiety about how their children's behaviour, achievements, or failures are interpreted by the larger society. In both rural and urban settings, local social networks of relatives, friends, and neighbours may be strong and supportive for a poor household, providing material and emotional

support in time of need. However, community dynamics vary greatly, with some settlements exhibiting strong leadership and a united approach in their actions while others are filled with conflict, lack of leadership, and corresponding atmosphere of resignation and powerlessness.

There are a number of positive features related to child labour that influence the decision-making process concerning whether to send children to work. Of most importance, parents and children believe that working furnishes the opportunity to learn a skill, which hopefully will result in successful employment in the future. Apprenticeships for boys are highly desired, although hard to obtain. In addition, work provides an individual with a sense of responsibility, which may also increase his or her influence within the household. A youngster's self-confidence may be also enhanced through work, and communications skills with both peers and adults may be perfected. Children especially appreciate the opportunity to socialise with peers through their labour activities and, with a prevailing distrust of children's leisure time on the part of adults, their parents believe that work keeps children occupied and out of trouble.

However, in spite of the merits of work for their offspring, both CL and NCL households clearly realise the importance of schooling, and the majority of parents desire an education for both sons and daughters. Children themselves also prefer school more than labour activities. Adults who do send their children to study were often deprived of educational opportunities in their youth due to war, poverty, gender norms, etc. They are now determined that their children will become literate and find valuable employment, economic security and concomitant social status in the future for the household.

Boys and girls included in the research have access to local government schools in both rural and urban locales. In the cities, NGO-sponsored classes and courses are also available. Along with the prohibitive cost of the government schools for some households, in most but not all of the communities there is also serious concern, especially on the part of CL parents, about the poor quality of

education provided by these schools. In addition, harassment and beating of children by teachers and peers is another worry. These factors have led to the withdrawal of many children from school, and they now work. In contrast, NGO-sponsored courses receive positive ratings: in addition to the fact that they are free and provide material aid, the teaching is perceived to be better and students receive more individual attention.

Some households attempt to provide opportunity for their children, both boys and girls, to combine work and schooling, which indicates the value parents place upon not only income generation but also education. However, it is very difficult to balance the many competing priorities of these diverse activities, and most individuals who try to undertake both finally drop out of school. Working children are frequently not able to complete their homework, and absenteeism is common, along with subsequent beatings by teachers. In short, there is often a general lack of understanding of the problems confronting a working student on the part of the formal educational system.

Child labourers included in the study sample work in a variety of different activities, all of which are within the informal sector. In general, boys' work is in the public sphere, while girls' labour is conducted within the private sphere of the household. Almost none of these children work under conditions that meet with the requirements of the UNCRC, to which Afghanistan is a signatory, or those of Afghanistan's updated Labour Code, which was approved by Presidential decree in February 2007. The UN convention protects children from economic exploitation, hazardous work and work that might interfere with schooling or be harmful to child's health, etc. Clearly, these children are not sufficiently protected in these areas. Concerning the Labour Code, almost all children in the study are below the prescribed minimum working age of 15 years. The average number of hours worked per week by these young children is 45 hours, which is considerably above the 35 hours that the law sets for child labourers aged 15-18.

In the unregulated informal sector, there are numerous hazards associated with the work that

these children perform that put them at risk of injury, ill health, dangerous social repercussions, or even death. Parents and children relate a variety of hazards, which may be generally categorised as those that occur when travelling to and from work (road accidents, sexual harassment, etc.) and those pertaining to the physical environment of the workplace (use of dangerous tools, inhaling noxious fumes, etc.). Even in the case of coveted apprenticeships, employers may exploit the relationship, demand long hours of work from the child with little compensation and frequently use physical punishment if the work is unsatisfactory.

The psychosocial effects of child labour upon the individual may be positive or negative. Although some children enjoy their work and take pride in their accomplishments, others express anger towards their parents that they must work rather than go to school, and conflict within the household is common. Young boys who have been withdrawn from school to assume employment exhibit feelings of anger, depression, and humiliation, especially if they have been good students. Others—both boys and girls—are under considerable emotional stress due to chronic worry about how they can best help to alleviate the economic problems facing their families.

In summary, CL households and NCL households face many of the same daily challenges and occasional crises, but exhibit different responses to their problems. In general, NCL parents sacrifice more, largely through their own labours, so that their children can go to and remain in school. They are more aware of a child's rights, and consider their sons' and daughters' opinions and desires more than CL parents. With higher expectations of the economic and moral benefits of education, they also have strongly held perceptions of the negative risks (moral, behavioural, and physical) involved with child labour. NCL households refer more to positive role models who are educated and successful by which they can pattern the behaviour of their family members. There is also a greater degree of agency, or a "can-do" spirit, among NCL parents, and they generally are more optimistic about the future.

Of special importance, CL and NCL households undertake different types of risk management strategies, with CL units exhibiting more coping or reactive strategies that deal with present-day risks, and often entail the utilisation of child labour. In contrast, NCL units demonstrate more forward-looking strategies in which they invest in their children's education today, with hope of a better tomorrow.

10. Recommendations

What are the most important implications of the above discussion for policy and programmes? It is evident that child labour is central to the survival of many poor households, and reasons for this complex and widespread phenomenon extend beyond poverty. Not all poor families decide that their youngsters should work, and there are important lessons to be learned from those resourceful households whose risk management strategies enable them to send their sons and daughters to school. In the general context of extremely insecure livelihoods, parents in all of these vulnerable households are struggling with a myriad of decisions about how to provide basic food and shelter for their families and how to best raise their children. Poor households must be provided with appropriate support to deal with the many serious insecurities and risks they must face each day, which will eliminate the need for child labour and subsequently assure a more secure future for their families and communities.

Based on the above research findings, a series of recommendations is presented here for the Government of Afghanistan, along with donors, international and Afghan organisations, and concerned stakeholders. Taking into consideration both socio-cultural and economic factors, these suggestions focus upon how best to reduce the incidence of child labour in Afghanistan, along with how to assist those children who are presently working. As aptly noted by Rosati and Lyon¹²² in a discussion of how sustainable reductions in child labour can be achieved:

Child labour is a complex phenomenon that cuts across policy boundaries—education, health, labour markets, capital markets, social security, economic growth, and income distribution all play an important role.

A multi-sectoral approach is necessary that cuts across policy boundaries and allows for a crucial synergy between economic and social components.

A correct mix of policies is the key, some of which are child-specific and other which are more general in nature. In short, policies and programmes are needed that serve to reduce household dependence on child labour with short, medium, and long-term time perspectives.

Before getting to specifics, some points must be made that apply to the following recommendations in general. Any planned intervention must be context-specific and be carefully targeted to include clearly identified and appropriate households. This is not easy to achieve, because it demands that those involved know the community and the socio-cultural context, which entails significant time investment in fieldwork. Not only are there differences between rural and urban Afghan settings but, as illustrated in this synthesis, prevailing community norms towards child labour and education among rural communities themselves may be strikingly dissimilar, much less than among households within a community. In all instances, however, targeted intervention is called for which focuses upon the most vulnerable households, including not only those which utilise child labour at present but also those which may be in danger of doing so if subjected to shocks for which they are unprepared. These households are often, but not always, units with young children which lack able-bodied adult male workers, those that have recently experienced the death of a breadwinner, and those in which adults are presently unemployed or underemployed.

The Government of Afghanistan, including MoLSAMD and other ministries, along with a number of NGOs with both local and international support, have initiated activities that are presently attempting to decrease the incidence of child labour in Afghanistan. Included here are some recommendations as to how to build upon these ongoing efforts, along with some new proposals. Central to these suggestions is the goal of providing poor households with appropriate support so that they will be better able to cope with insecurities and risks without resorting to child labour.

122 Rosati and Lyon, "Tackling Child Labour: Policy Options for Achieving Sustainable Reductions in Children at Work,"³

On the macro-level: labour markets and legislation

- In order to meet the overarching need for improvement in livelihoods security, the Afghan Government, including MoLSAMD, must continue to work to provide an enabling environment that generates increased and better work opportunities for adults, both men and women, in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. An increase in viable employment for adults will reduce the dependence of households upon child labour.
- In both rural and urban Afghanistan, small-scale entrepreneurship and public works programmes hold promise. Better agricultural and non-farm opportunities in rural areas will help to stem migration to the country's already overcrowded cities. With rising productivity and wages, a sustained reduction in child labour will become easier to achieve.
- Considering the chronic socio-cultural risks associated with gender for females, the Afghan government, along with MoLSAMD, the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and other ministries, needs to increase efforts to create more vocational opportunities specifically for poor women. For example, the National Skills Development Programme (NSDP) has set a target of including 35 percent women in their total of 150,000 new trainees. Opportunities should be developed for females in the public sphere, which also requires fostering a conducive work environment for women; in this respect, they could be involved more in the many donor-funded infrastructure projects that are presently planned. Options for home-based vocations in the private sphere should also be expanded. With more viable income generation for mothers, fewer children in poor households will be required to work. In this regard, a positive step has been taken by NSDP that, along with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and MoWA, has identified a number of new possibilities for mothers of young children.
- The Afghan government is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which protects children from economic

exploitation, hazardous work and work that might interfere with schooling. Parliament has also ratified a new Labour Code in September 2008.¹²³ However, this legislation is not being successfully implemented. The government must put more concerted effort into the implementation of labour regulation, within not only the formal sector, but also the informal sector, where the majority of working children are found. This should include information dissemination, the provision of legal protection and actions in case of breaches of the law.

Participation on the community level:

- To best deal with the issue of child labour, localised child-centred strategies are crucial and community-based child protection networks should be fostered. To achieve this, government support is necessary, in partnership with capable and experienced NGOs. Special programmes or projects should be developed to promote the formation of these child protection networks in both rural and urban Afghanistan. The UNICEF-initiated Child Protection Action Network is a positive development, although its links with local communities—perhaps through Community Development Councils, Parent Teacher Associations or health clinics—require further strengthening.
- This research has shown that in each community there are poor households who do not send their children to work, but rather send them to school. Parents, both fathers and mothers, from these non-child labour (NCL) households should become core members of the child protection networks to be developed through NGO and government partnership. Both NCL mothers and fathers can play valuable roles in the programme or project through targeting at-risk households in their communities. Some examples include:
 - NCL parents can become role models for others; they can advise CL parents about their household risk management strategies,

¹²³ *Afghanistan Parliamentary Assistance Project Legislative Newsletter* Vol 1, No 18. 7 September 2008. There is no copy available of this version of the law in Dari or English. The only available version is the 2007 draft referenced earlier in the paper.

which do not entail child labour, and provide them with practical suggestions.

- NCL parents can identify cases of child labour within the community that are exploitative or are being carried out in hazardous working conditions in both the private and public sphere, along with participating in project activities to alleviate these conditions.
- NCL parents can identify households that presently do not employ child labour, but which may be in danger of doing so in the future. They can ascertain those children who may be on the verge of dropping out, so that preventative action may be taken.
- NCL parents can become valuable communicators of information about child rights and child protection to others in their community; both formal and informal social networks can be utilised in this process.
- Taking into consideration the fact that communities vary as to degree of cohesion, efforts should be made to enhance local governance and accountability in the development of the community-based child protection networks, as mentioned above. Local leaders, elders, teachers and other noteworthy individuals—both men and women—must be involved in the process of enhancing community norms in support of education and decreasing community norms pertaining to child labour. Local-level participation and intervention may prove to be the most effective in interventions to reduce child labour, and can compensate for policy weaknesses at the macro-level.

Children who are now working: improving conditions and providing new opportunities

- Intensive effort is immediately needed to improve the working conditions of children who are presently facing numerous hazards and risks. Many of these are context-specific and relate to the physical environment of the workplace or specific type of work activity. With a local community-based child protection network project in place, and NCL parents' participation, those children who are in exploitative situations or are working in hazardous conditions can be identified and subsequent action taken by the NGO and government partners. Negative psychosocial affects of work that affect some children must also be ascertained by project participants, requiring special sensitivity and training.
- In the short and medium-term, creative ways need to be developed which enable working children to also successfully obtain an education. In this regard, there are a number of excellent ongoing activities being conducted by NGOs that, as indicated by this research, are appreciated by the poor in urban Afghanistan. These projects and others can serve as models for similar undertakings throughout the country. On the other hand, any existing NGO activities that exploit children through their labour should be identified and brought to an end.
- Basic education opportunities should be available for those working children who have never been to school, along with second-chance options and accelerated courses for those children who have had to drop out from formal schooling due to their work. Special classes, courses, and small schools should be established, especially for working children. Coordination with the Ministry of Education (MoE) on the part of sponsoring NGOs is crucial, in order to allow for re-entry into the formal school system at a later date, and to avoid the creation of a parallel system of education. At present, this is part of the MoE strategy, and they are in communication with a network of NGOs. A key to success is careful targeting of those children and households who want to participate in these educational opportunities. More coordination and sharing of innovations should be established between all participants, perhaps with NGOs working more directly within existing government schools themselves.
- Government schools must also become more compatible with the specific needs of working children who are presently enrolled. This research has illustrated how difficult, if not often impossible, it is for many youngsters to combine work and school. School principals, head teachers and teachers need to be especially

aware of the children in their classes who also are engaged in income generation, and actions must be taken with the goal in mind to prevent their dropping out. This requires accommodation on the part of the school system at both the policy level and individual classroom level. A degree of flexibility in the academic calendar, curriculum and school hours or shifts may be required for working children. In this regard, the MoE and MoLSAMD plan to implement evening schools for these individuals. And, on the crucial day-to-day classroom level, teachers must become more understanding if a working child is occasionally absent or late, or if homework is incomplete, and remedial work should be assigned. The participation of individual teachers in community-based child protection networks as described above could foster the above improvements in government schools.

Education

- In order to improve the poor quality of education that is presently available in Afghanistan's government schools, a number of basic reforms are necessary on the part of the MoE on both the policy level and delivery level. Efforts must be made to ensure that, for example, schools have the relevant curricula and the quality of teaching is sufficiently high so that poor households are increasingly motivated to invest in their children's education.
- Especially in targeted areas that are highly food-insecure, school-based feeding schemes such as the WFP Food for Education programme can encourage enrolment of youngsters from poor households and, correspondingly, help to prevent child labour.
- Research presented here has shown that work or school decisions are based on a number of factors. Parents are concerned about school quality, costs (both direct and opportunity) and whether their children will subsequently find viable employment. Successful education sector reform fostering more quality education would lessen the risks that are presently involved in a household's long-term school-related investment for their children's future. Simply on the delivery level, better teacher training is very important, along with assuring that books and school supplies are available to all students.
- As mentioned above, government schools must become more compatible with the specific needs of working children who are also studying. In order for this to be achieved, policymakers must stress the importance of an increase in flexibility, ongoing monitoring and general understanding of the working student on the administrative and classroom level.

Technical education or vocational training:

- This research has clearly shown that parents and children are keenly interested in technical or vocational training in both rural and urban areas, but there is currently little opportunity for this. Both boys and girls are in need of more opportunities to learn practical skills in a variety of professions that will provide them with viable employment in adulthood, and the Afghan government, in coordination with relevant NGOs must take more concerted and widespread action in this regard. Another possibility is that vocational training be incorporated into the government school curriculum beginning at grade seven.
- Traditional apprenticeships exist for boys in urban areas, but these often entail exploitative relations with shop owners. The NSDP programme, implemented through NGOs, should not only include on-the-job training for adolescent boys but also for girls in order to prepare them for their working lives; such programmes need to be carefully monitored to be sure that trainees are adequately protected. Incentives need to be developed to encourage informal sector firms, shopkeepers and technicians to take on apprentices for training. The introduction of new technology, the provision of safety standards, and certification are related topics for inclusion in the project.
- Educational opportunities for children participating in the above project should also be provided, which would entail coordination between the firm and educational institutions (NGO and government schools) located nearby.

- The successful transition to work following training is another area requiring assistance in the form of another related project, which matches individuals with the right skills mix with suitable employment.
- Mass media such as radio, television, and billboards, along with local community events should be included in this information campaign to expose the many risks associated with child labour, decrease its prevalence, and encourage education.

Developing awareness about child labour issues:

- A communications strategy concerning child labour needs to be developed that informs and educates not only parents, employers, and children but also the general public about child rights and child protection issues, with emphasis upon the relevant legislation on the books in Afghanistan today.
- Special information campaigns and classes on child rights and protection need to be developed for the police, which provide practical guidelines on how to deal with various situations in the public sphere concerning child vendors, etc.
- Teachers should also receive specific training on child rights and protection.
- Concerning communications in general, methods for formal and informal sharing of information about child labour-related undertakings and plans between various ministries and NGOs need to be established.

For this multi-sectoral approach to succeed, the right mix of policies and projects is crucial, and that requires coordination and communication between participants. In conclusion, to successfully decrease the incidence of child labour, Afghanistan is in urgent need of not only increased political commitment on the national, provincial and district level, but also better enforcement of legislation pertaining to child rights and protection, capable and effective institutions and a mobilised society.

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