How Community-Based Education Informs Conceptualizations of Sustainability: A Critical Literature Review

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How community-based education informs conceptualizations of sustainability:

A critical literature review

Qualifying Paper

Submitted by

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May, 2017

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And finally to my parents, whose perspectives compel me to question my assumptions and learning, who see, feel, and embody the beauty of their homeland, its richness, pain, and resilience—khayr bebeni.

~Drop by drop, a river is made~
Afghan proverb
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<td>Aga Khan Foundation</td>
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<td>BEACON</td>
<td>Basic Education for Afghanistan Consortium</td>
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<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee</td>
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<td>NFE</td>
<td>Nonformal Education</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
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<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>PACE-A</td>
<td>Partnership for Advancing Community Education in Afghanistan</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>Sustainable Development</td>
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<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<td>Teacher Learning Circles</td>
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INTRODUCTION

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the concept of sustainability has become central to policymaking in international and national development. The SDGs, a set of global development goals adopted in 2015 by UN-member nation-states focus on equitable and sustainable advancement in a wide-range of domains, including in education. While equity has been a cornerstone of educational development for decades, the meaning of sustainability in education is unclear. In this literature review, I will closely investigate dimensions of sustainability in education, with a particular focus on nonformal education (NFE) in Afghanistan.

NFE increasingly plays a significant role in the provision of education for marginalized populations in developing country contexts, in particular in conflict-affected contexts, where provision of formal education is challenged by instability. In Afghanistan, a country that has experienced protracted conflict for several decades, 4.2 million children are not in school (UNICEF, 2011). In Afghanistan, as is true globally, the majority of children who lack educational opportunities reside in remote, rural areas and face multiple challenges including distance to school, security, and poverty (UNESCO, 2015a). NFE’s attention to context allows for customization to address local hurdles to education. At the same time, contextualization might be threatened as successful models are scaled up to reach more communities. It is this tension between context and scale that is at the core of defining sustainability in education, and which this paper addresses.

In Afghanistan, one form of NFE that has received growing international support is the community-based education (CBE) model. Community-based schools (CBS) have
been recognized for widening access for girls, in particular by employing female teachers and situating schools within neighborhoods (Kirk and Winthrop, 2006). Students within these schools have also demonstrated academic achievement that matches or exceeds that of students in formal schools (Burde & Linden, 2013). Similar positive trends in nonformal education have been documented globally (Farrell, 2008). Despite these achievements, however, there is an underlying assumption that nonformal schools are a temporary solution (Hoppers, 2006).

In this critical literature review, I will examine the factors that support sustainability in education, informed by the literature on NFE. In particular, I will investigate elements that support and challenge sustainability of nonformal schools, and the interplay between scale and contextualization. I will address this central question: What contributes to and constrains the sustainability of community-based schools? Based on the literature on NFE, I have identified four elements that contribute to sustainability: (1) flexibility, (2) participation, (3) quality, and (4) national policies and partnerships. These four elements form the framework for my analysis of CBE in Afghanistan, complemented by additional literature on NFE in similar contexts. For the purposes of this literature review, I define sustainability as regular and uninterrupted educational programming that is accessible to children. Provision of regular educational services is important because for children to benefit from quality education, as the SDGs prioritize, it must be sustained over time.
BACKGROUND

In September 2015, world leaders adopted a new set of development objectives, the Sustainable Development Goals, to guide national governments, local and international organizations and institutions for the next 15 years. The SDGs constitute a list of 17 integrated and aspirational “Global Goals” with 169 targets ranging from poverty reduction, quality education, gender equality to climate action and peace and justice (United Nations, 2015).

The SDGs are grounded in the vision of sustainability put forth by the Brundtland Report published in the late 1980s. Following the Brundtland conceptualization of sustainability, the SDGs contend that “eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development” (United Nations, 2015) and that the most effective way to eradicate poverty is through education. While the precursor Millennium Development Goals prioritized universal access to primary education, the SDGs propose a more expansive goal: ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs, however, do not provide guidelines on how to sustain this kind of education, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings.

In conflict and transitional settings the challenge of providing regular and uninterrupted educational programming—sustainable programming—is immense. As a result, many nation-states have widened their capacity to provide educational services by incorporating nonformal education into their strategies for education provision. These actions beg an exploration of the connections between nonformal education and sustainability.
In the 1960s, development experts noticed an imbalanced focus on urban modernization and industrialization that neglected widening economic and social disparities between urban and rural populations, including in education (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). This shift to considering the contextual challenges of rural societies prompted interest in nonformal education by policymakers. The term ‘nonformal education’ was first defined by Coombs and Ahmed in 1974, in a research report prepared for the World Bank. The authors frame NFE as a critical element in addressing rural poverty in developing countries “to increase skills and productivity of farmers, artisans, craftsmen, and small entrepreneurs” (xv). The emphasis on the interaction between education and poverty alleviation remains a prominent paradigm in international policy discourse.

Coombs and Ahmed further offered definitions of nonformal, formal, and informal education. There is considerable overlap and interaction between these types of education, and their definitions continue to be influential in framing the discourse on NFE.

- **Informal education**: the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment—at home, at work, at play; from the example and attitudes of family and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books; or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television. Generally, informal education is unorganized and often unsystematic; yet it accounts for the great bulk of any person’s total lifetime learning—including that of even a highly “schooled” person.

- **Formal education**: the highly institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured “education system” spanning lower primary school and the upper reaches of the university.

- **Nonformal education**: any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974, p. 8).
In their conceptualization, NFE differs from informal education in that it is systematic and organized. However, unlike formal education, which is rigid and uniform, NFE is characterized by flexibility in terms of instruction timing, duration of learning, the background of learners, as well as the content and methodology of instruction (Kedranyate, 1997). It is notable that NFE is framed in relation to formal education and more specifically, in its earliest years, to the shortcomings of formal education in rural areas.

Attention to NFE grew against the backdrop of anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia as well as an intensifying Cold War. Rogers (2005) explains that, “A sense of crisis is the key to the emergence of NFE” (p. 68). However, rather than reforming or replacing the formal education system, NFE was, at this time, conceptualized to be a form of education that could serve the needs of rural areas (Rogers, citing Paulston, 1972; LaBelle & Ward, 1994).

In more recent policy documents and academic literature, NFE is referred to by many names and describes quite distinct programming (See Appendix 1), including complementary education systems (DeStefano et al., 2007), alternative programs (Mfum-Mensah & Farrell, 2002), accelerated learning programs (Ministry of Education-Afghanistan, 2012), home-based education (Kirk & Winthrop, 2006, 2008), community-based education (Burde, 2014; Ministry of Education-Afghanistan, 2012), village-based schools (Burde & Linden, 2013), parallel systems (Mendenhall, 2014). This conceptual lack of clarity has lead to questions about the utility of such a broad-ranging term. Is this “catch-all title” (Evans & Smith, 1972, p. 12) useful?
I argue that the conceptual lack of clarity is problematic, and suggest four central characteristics of NFE that can provide a productive framework: (1) flexibility, (2) participation, (3) quality, and (4) national policies and partnerships. These four elements form the framework for my analysis. In addition to these elements, primarily focused on contextualization, I will consider the issue of scale. Before proceeding to an examination of community-based education in Afghanistan, I provide a brief overview of the country’s educational history with a focus on the implications of top-down policies.

*Education in Afghanistan.*

Despite local organization and decision-making structures taking precedence over social and economic life, the modern Afghan state represents a highly centralized governing body with an equally centralized education system. Political leaders have attempted to leverage this structure to impose change on the country (Barfield, 2010). Two critical periods of reform that demonstrate the implications of imposing top-down policies on rural societies include the reign of King Amanullah Khan, who envisioned a modern society akin to Ataturk’s Turkey during the 1920s, and five decades later the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, that gained a stronghold in Kabul during the rise of communism in the region. These two periods reflect both internal and external efforts to shape Afghanistan into a modern state (Faizi, 2012), and offer lessons on the repercussions of undercutting local authority and norms.

After gaining independence from the British in 1919 (Barfield, 2010), Amanullah, as he is popularly known, became the new king of the sovereign nation-state. His trips abroad, particularly to Turkey, motivated widespread modernization plans with a focus on increasing access to formal education to historically excluded groups outside of
Kabul’s elite. Though mosques and other traditional learning arrangements were available in the provinces, access to formal schooling was limited, especially for girls (Spink, 2005). Amanullah made education compulsory for the children of government officials, made primary and higher education free, and invested in technical training of young professionals (Burde, 2014). Concurrently, he promoted girls’ education, coeducation, and secular schools, which were met with resistance in traditional parts of the country (Khan Burki, 2011). These radical education ambitions along with widespread economic (e.g., taxation) and social (e.g., marriage customs) reforms that infringed on the everyday lives of individuals and families created resentment toward state institutions, and emboldened religious and local authorities to organize a revolt against the central government. Khan Burki argues, “the Amanullah-led government sought societal changes that would ultimately fail because they were forced upon the populace without consultation or regard for the tenor of the times” (p. 48). Though Amanullah’s reform laid the foundation for a fledgling formal education system, a decade later, in 1929, Amanullah abdicated and fled to India, and the country plunged into civil war.

For the next several decades, rural-urban tensions simmered, including over education practices (Burde, 2014). When in 1978, the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan established a communist government after a bloody coup, long-held fears of secularization resurfaced. The government viewed education as an important instrument in transforming Afghan society and fostering communist ideology. The Fundamental Principles of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, adopted in 1980, detailed an extensive plan to increase literacy programs, expand basic education, and develop
vocational training as well as higher education (Samady, 2001). However, the emphasis on communist ideals, denunciation of religion, and forced school enrollment in rural areas accompanied with broader policies pertaining to land reform and greater ties with the Soviet Union led to a backlash against the state. Spink (2005) explains, “In some communities the reaction was extreme, the schools were burnt and teachers were chased out, and education became seen by many communities as threatening the very existence of Afghan values and culture” (p. 197). At the height of the Cold War, Afghanistan became a focal point for regional and global nations to assert their power. A decade of war generated wider social rifts and inflicted havoc on the education system. Protracted internal conflict followed the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, resulting in the gradual erosion of what remained of the education system.

Since 2001, the international community, as well as the Afghan government, have invested in rehabilitating the education system. Although there is limited reliable data and the scope of progress in the country is contested, UNESCO (2015b) estimated enrollment has increased from one million pupils in 2001, almost all boys, to eight million in 2015, of whom girls constituted 39 percent. While there has been considerable achievement in expansion of access for boys and girls, corruption, quality of education, security, and rural-urban disparities continue to challenge achievements that have been made and stifle further advancement. Moreover, the education system remains a highly centralized structure despite historical deterrents. Yet, the new Ministry of Education has paid special attention to developing a more inclusive curriculum that recognizes and integrates local customs and values as well as international norms. Moreover, to increase educational opportunities for marginalized communities, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has
addressed capacity limitations by incorporating alternative methods into national education policy and collaborating with local and international NGOs.

One of the most extensive alternative education models in Afghanistan is the community-based schools that cater to the country’s geographically isolated areas. Sometimes known as village schools, these alternative structures were first documented in 1949 in the form of “feeder” schools, which provided primary grades 1-3 in areas where the nearest school was five or more kilometers away (Samady, 2001). Though they began as community-led initiatives, communities sought greater ties with district education offices to better support teachers and schools. This partnership led to the creation of three textbooks, one for each grade, consisting of religion, language, and arithmetic, as well as supplementary learning materials. In most areas, the local mullah took responsibility of teaching, and mosques, as well as rooms within the local maliks’ (leaders) homes, served as temporary classroom spaces. Schools with high enrollment were upgraded to basic primary schools in the same locality and, in communities where schools were not upgraded, children could enter a primary school if available (Samady, 2001).

Decades later, this model of community involvement serves as the foundation for the way NGOs and the Ministry of Education structure CBE. While the Afghan diaspora and local organizations have established and continue to support CBE, the USAID-funded Partnership for Advancing Community Education in Afghanistan (PACE-A) was one of the largest and most extensive consortia for CBE programming in the country. By 2008, the MoE reported that an estimated 20,000 community-based classrooms operated throughout Afghanistan. In 2011, when PACE-A’s program came to an end, community
demand for continuing local CBE led to the formation of the Basic Education for
Afghanistan Consortium (BEACON), a coalition of NGOs with decades of experience
working in Afghanistan, including CARE, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Aga
Khan Foundation (AKF), and Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

A year later, in 2012, the MoE established policy guidelines on CBE to improve
coordination between the Ministry, communities, and a plethora of local and international
organizations. In this more formalized model, international NGOs play a significant role
in teacher training, community mobilization, and fostering community-government
linkages. Moreover, schools are clustered whereby a group of community-based schools
are established as feeders to nearby government schools, with a central public or “hub”
school linking a cluster of nearby communities. Within this system, the community is
expected to provide a safe physical space for the school, maintain the school, and supply
material resources; support education and allow girls to attend school; support teachers
and collaborate with government school staff when necessary; and actively participate in
the school shura (council) (MoE, 2012, p. 11-12). Meanwhile, students are directly
registered with their respective hub school in order to enable a seamless transition to the
public school after year three. While the MoE encourages transition of all students to
public schools and handover of community-based schools, according to the official policy
guidelines schools can also be upgraded to a primary school where enrollment reaches 25
or above, and where barriers to access continue to challenge transition to public school
CBSs operate as outreach classes of the hub school.

Envisioned as a temporary measure to close access gaps in rural communities,
Afghanistan’s CBE model is designed to increase access and provide secure educational
opportunities to out-of-school children and adolescent girls close to home. Positioning communities as service providers allows the MoE to build its own capacity to eventually absorb students into government schools. From its inception, the aim of CBE was not to construct a parallel or shadow system, but one that complements and “strengthen[s] the government system as opposed to competing against it” (Kirk & Winthrop, 2006, p. 2). This “end goal” (Kirk & Winthrop, 2006, p. 2) suggests that the Afghan government recognizes the need for CBE to address current challenges but has not anticipated, or defined, communities’ role—or interest—in long-term educational planning and provision.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

My analytic strategy incorporates empirical and theoretical literature to form a theory of sustainability for nonformal education, with community-based education in Afghanistan as the central case study under examination. First, I begin with a discussion on the origins of the conceptualization of sustainability, found in sustainable development literature and the Brundtland Report. Calling for intergenerational equity and a balance between economic growth and conservation, Brundtland’s ecological conceptualization of sustainability stands as the dominant paradigm guiding international frameworks as well as academic research. I identify the key components of sustainability, paying particular attention to the Report’s mentions of citizen participation. Then, I examine the Brundtland Report for how education is considered within this dominant conceptualization. The lack of clarity on the relationship between sustainability and education led me to consider literature in educational policy and empirical sources on NFE, with a particular focus on CBE in Afghanistan.
Discussions on educational sustainability are further intimated in literature on **scale**. While scalability has traditionally been understood as expansion of the organization, scholars have shifted the discussion to a more complex conceptualization that includes attention to local needs and demands, long-term sustainability, and community ownership (Healey & DeStefano, 2000; Coburn, 2003; Uvin & Jain, 2000). An extensive literature review of scalability is beyond the scope of this piece, rather, I focus on a few seminal pieces that shed light on the relationship between expansion of educational programming and sustainability.

From the literature on sustainability, scale, and NFE, I identify four elements of sustainability in education: community participation, flexibility, quality, and national policies and partnerships. In framing the theory on sustainability of NFE, I begin with how theory informs each of the defined components, and then complement each with an empirical case drawn from community-based schools in Afghanistan. This method enables a rich analysis of one context where NFE has undergone a transformation of increased support from national and international actors toward transition to formal public schools. This transformation calls for attention to how community-based education has changed over time and its implications for understanding sustainability.

**METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of data collection was to find theoretical and empirical studies, including qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, literature reviews and policy documents. I focused on two primary categories—sustainability and NFE—and a secondary category—scale (See Appendix 2 for search terms) to construct a theory on
sustainability of NFE. The databases for literature included Academic Search Premier, Education Abstracts, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest, and EBSCO HOST. After a preliminary analysis of the foundational literature on sustainability, I identified formative literature on sustainability, scale, nonformal education, and community-based education. In the sustainability literature, the Brundtland Report emerged as a seminal policy framework that has influenced both policy and research since its publication in 1987, and I therefore decided to limit the literature on sustainability to 1987 to the present. References to scale in the educational sustainability literature required attention to another body of literature on scale, with a focus on the relationship between scale and sustainability.

The literature on NFE begins with Coomb’s seminal work on the need to address rural-urban educational disparities and lack of state capacity to close existing gaps. I supplemented this policy framework with empirical research to further examine the intricacies of NFE, its various names, how it operates across settings, and its transformation since these early publications. I conducted further searches after identifying new terms for NFE in the literature (e.g., alternative education, complementary education, parallel system, etc.). In order to conduct a deeper and richer literature review I focus on the Afghanistan context.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this literature review. Firstly, while I identify contributing factors to sustainability, there is still much debate on the quality and attributes of NFE. I utilize my first-hand knowledge of CBE in the Afghanistan context as well as research on CBE to assess extant literature and whether the elements that scholars suggest contribute to sustainability exist in this case study.
Secondly, while there is a core group of scholars and policymakers writing about the CBE model, there is still a need for more research on some of the issues raised in this literature review. Moreover, there is likely to be variation between contexts and services provided by various organizations. Finally, the lack of historical literature on the early development of CBE also makes examination of the changes that CBE has undergone difficult. When useful, I incorporate insights I have gained from research as well as personal communication with individuals in Afghanistan to deepen my analysis.

CONCEPTUALIZING SUSTAINABILITY OF NFE

Conceptions of Sustainability

Scholars across disciplinary lines suggest that attention to sustainability at the global level emerged in the early 1970s after heightened awareness of the disastrous consequences of unlimited growth. The Brundtland Report, also known as *Our Common Future*, published in 1987, marked a milestone in thinking on environment, development, and governance (Sneddon, Howarth, & Norgaard, 2006; Dovers & Hussey, 2013). Led by Gro Harlem Brundtland, the former Norwegian Prime Minister, the UN-sponsored World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987 defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (p. 43). This wide-ranging conceptualization of sustainability continues to influence discourse on sustainability in international policy (e.g., Sustainable Development Goals) as well as economic, community, and environmental sustainability.
Some scholars suggest the vagueness of the definition enables a common understanding of sustainability. Daly and Cobb (1989), in their seminal book, *For the Common Good*, a title that intentionally refers to *Our Common Future*, assert that Brundtland made a politically wise decision that placed “a concept whose unstated implications were too radical for consensus at that time” high on the international agenda (p. 75-6). What made this conceptualization radical? Sustainable development (SD) suggests that development must have limits by focusing on present needs as well as intergenerational equity. The report demanded an integrated, global approach to development that required both developing and industrialized nations to unite in a common vision for humanity and consider economic as well as ecological factors. Repetto (1986) explains that “poverty underlies the deterioration of resources and the population growth in much of the world and affects everyone” (p. 17). It is this “pragmatic self-interest” that reinforces the normative stance that consigning a large portion of the globe’s population to deprivation is unfair (Repetto, p. 17).

In addition to a definition of SD, the Brundtland Report expounds on the operational objectives of SD with seven critical objectives for environment and development policies. These objectives include: 1) reviving growth; 2) changing the quality of growth; 3) meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water, and sanitation; 4) ensuring a sustainable level of population; 5) conserving and enhancing the resource base; 6) reorienting technology and managing risk; and 7) merging environment and economics in decision making. Lele (1991) argues that most organizations and agencies advocating for SD subscribe to some or all of these critical objectives with an additional goal: making development more participatory. Though not listed as a critical objective,
pleas for public participation are integrated throughout the Report, suggesting that achieving the other objectives is contingent on it.

The Brundtland Report positions public participation as central to pursuing SD because it empowers communities to articulate and enforce their common interest and compensates for lack of state capacity. The underlying assumption is that individuals and communities will act on collective interests once there is greater awareness of the ramifications of environmental degradation and recognition of collective, rather than individual, responsibility. Yet, in practice this progression of steps might be unrealistic. Dovers and Hussey (2013) articulate a more logical theoretical position on the importance of community participation in environmental and sustainability policy. First, they argue there is a rising general interest in participatory forms of governance and democracy. Second, local communities and organizations are demanding and anticipating a say in decisions and actions that affect the environments they inhabit. Third, there is greater realization on the part of governments, firms, and large NGOs that the success of policy programs depends on local understanding, support, and involvement (p. 61). Education, thus, is integrally related to citizen participation in that it enables citizens to share local knowledge and expand their understanding to make use of limited resources more responsibly.

Education, within the Brundtland Report, is conceptualized as a mechanism through which sustainability is achieved. The primary purpose of education is to develop knowledge and skills to help individuals “improve their economic performance” (section 3.2) thus meeting basic human needs. Additionally, education is envisioned as a means to inculcate values and attitudes towards the environment and development. This includes
fostering tolerance and empathy to improving health and lowering fertility. Though the Report makes references to expanding informal and vocational opportunities, teacher training, and improving quality and relevance to local conditions, there is a lack of attention to sustaining educational opportunities. Meanwhile, the emphasis between education and economic prosperity remains a dominant frame of reference in sustainability discourse, which I explore below.

**Educational Sustainability**

In education, the prevailing conception of sustainability centers on economic viability and technical capacity (Zehetmeier, 2015). Little attention has been given to the mechanisms in place for sustaining educational programming after external funding either decreases or ceases all together. Nkansa and Chapman (2006) ask, “what remains [of community participation] after the money ends?” These authors present four frameworks through which sustainability is traditionally conceived in international development work: 1) economic models seeking to sustain economic benefits after external inputs have ceased; 2) socio-political models that aim to transfer foundational interpretations, structures, and capacities to facilitate ongoing citizen participation; 3) ecological models that stress the preservation of resources and the effect of human behavior on resources; and 4) the innovation-diffusion model that emphasizes community ownership of new projects (p. 511-12). Nkansa and Chapman propose a synthesis model of sustainability that draws on components of each of these four perspectives, focusing on both management (e.g., planning, transparency, resources, leadership, and participation) and socio-cultural (e.g., social cohesion, community skills, and valuing of education) dimensions of sustainability. However, Mendenhall (2014) argues that the model’s
perspective is limited in that it only considers management and socio-cultural factors taking place at the community level. Further, its origins in a politically stable country in Africa limits its applicability to fragile and post-conflict contexts. This is an important and relevant point of caution for contexts such as Afghanistan, where international organizations play a significant role in the provision and management of education, particularly outside of the formal system.

Razzaq (2016) offers a perhaps more relevant process framework for ensuring the sustainability of community-supported education models based on the Pakistan context. Particularly, she is interested in how successful models can be replicated and scaled. Her analysis rests on two levels of replicability: 1) the product, in this case, complementary, community-based education models; and 2) the process of developing these systems. She argues the process of creating “a service delivery system should determine its features” (p. 20). The emphasis on process ensures that community-supported education systems are adaptable to local conditions. The process framework includes five steps: 1) attention to local values and conditions; 2) building strategic coalitions; 3) expanding network of support; 4) ensuring quality of service, which lead to 5) the formation of community-supported education service. This framework is supported by literature across developing contexts, however, the model suggests that community-supported programs should remain small-scale as they are replicated, which begs the question as to how these critical components are compromised when programs are scaled up.

*Conceptions of Scalability*

The concept of sustainability in educational programming is intimated in discussions on “scaling up” educational reforms (Mendenhall, 2014). Scaling up has
predominately been defined in terms of expansion in the number of schools reached by a given reform (Coburn, 2003). Stringfield and Datnow (1998) define scaling up as “the deliberate expansion to many settings of an externally developed school restructuring design that previously has been used successfully in one or a small number of school settings” (p. 271). However, Coburn (2003), writing on educational reform in the US, problematizes this unidimensional conceptualization that solely focuses on the spread of reform. She argues that simplified definitions of scaling up “[say] nothing about the nature of the change envisioned or enacted or the degree to which it is sustained, or the degree to which schools and teachers have the knowledge and authority to continue to grow the reform over time” (p. 4). Instead, Coburn offers a new framework for scaling up that considers four dimensions: 1) depth, that is understanding the nature of change, involving underlying beliefs, norms, and social interactions in addition to surface level considerations such as structures or procedures; 2) sustainability of reform in original and subsequent schools; 3) the spread of structures, materials and classroom organization, as well as underlying beliefs, norms and principles to additional classrooms and schools; and 4) a shift in ownership such that reform becomes self-generative (p. 4-7). This nuanced understanding of scale emphasizes attention to social and structural elements as programs are replicated.

Scholars focusing on international development have also deepened their understanding of scale. In addition to ownership of reforms, Healey and DeStefano (1997) argue that reforms are successful when they address a well-understood local need, there is local demand for the reform, and the reform is locally driven (p. 11). Educational reform in international, particularly fragile, contexts involves multiple actors, both
national and more distant international stakeholders, and this necessitates particular attention to local needs and demands. These authors assert that significant parent and public engagement is essential to engender a sense of ownership of the reform. While Coburn focuses on the foundational elements necessary for replication, this international framework focuses on shifting the perspectives of educational providers to ensure attention to local dynamics. Healey and DeStefano include an additional factor that is not considered in Coburn’s framework: adequate financing to keep the reform sustained. Because external actors often initiate reforms, funding dwindles as these actors exit, limiting possibilities for financial sustainability.

*Theory of Sustainability for NFE*

Hence far I have shown how the sustainability literature sheds light on broad conceptual cornerstones that pertain to ecologically conscious development and the critical role of education within this project. The focus on education is built on the assertion that there is a positive relationship between greater educational opportunities, poverty alleviation, and economic and social prosperity. Perhaps more importantly, the role of education is to enable communities to protect Earth’s vital natural resources in the quest for greater economic possibilities. In transitional societies, fledgling state capacity and vast physical, social, and political barriers to education necessitate the incorporation of innovative measures to reach marginalized communities with education. And once educational access widens, it is critical to sustain these efforts to realize the promises of education. Yet, remarkably little attention has been dedicated toward identifying mechanisms that sustain educational programming beyond economic inputs.
In this section, I will supplement the theoretical literature on sustainability and scale by exploring an empirical case—CBE in Afghanistan—with the purpose of uncovering the elements that contribute to or constrain sustainability in education. While CBE is a specific example, developing societies have depended on nonformal educational programming and are increasingly relying on NFE as access gaps have become more transparent and educational aspirations rise among citizens. In order to consider other dimensions of sustainability, I argue that it is useful to utilize a more holistic framework that takes into account contextual factors at the school, community, and national levels.

1. Community participation

Several disciplines shed light on the position of community engagement in sustainable development. From a socio-political perspective, citizen engagement is central to sustainability in order to transfer “guiding interpretations, structures, and capacities of a society from generation to generation” (Dahl, 1995 as cited in Nkansa & Chapman, 2006, p. 512). The innovation-diffusion approach echoes the socio-political model by suggesting that sustainability is most likely when the values and norms of the community are reflected in projects (Rogers, 1995). Literature on community-driven development describes the promises and challenges of community-led initiatives. The quality of participation, how the boundaries of the community are conceptualized, and the positionality of facilitators impact the success of development projects (King, 2013). While a full discussion around authentic community participation is beyond the scope of this paper, community engagement is a comprehensive concept that involves participation of individuals throughout the development process and inclusion of community norms, values, and experiences.
Community participation, facilitated by local and international NGOs, is at the center of community-based schools in Afghanistan. According to the 2012 MoE policy on CBE, the criteria for establishing a community-based school begins with community requests for provision of education and promise of ongoing administrative support through the formation of *shuras* (community councils) composed of parents and local leaders. Moreover, communities take a role in selecting teachers, individuals who are usually from these very communities, and are responsible for providing a safe space for a classroom. In 2006, communities benefiting from CBSs under PACE-A, one of the largest community-based schooling programs supported by USAID, were responsible for supporting and compensating teachers (Kirk & Winthrop, 2006). While communities continue to support teachers with in-kind compensation such as food, the 2012 CBE policy seems to indicate a shift in this role. The policy stipulates that either the MoE or an NGO implementing partner will be responsible for compensating teachers, with no mention of the responsibility lying on the part of communities. Given the lack of community resources, the financial institutionalization of CBE might contribute to its sustainability.

While there is a lack of evidence on the extent to which community norms, values, and experiences are incorporated in CBE, the role of local teachers might be a significant factor in promoting community support for CBE. Local teachers contribute their understanding of local dynamics as well as pre-existing relationships. As part of its community mobilization efforts, PACE-A established community education committees to nominate “trusted” local teachers (Kirk & Winthrop, 2006). Kirk and Winthrop (2006) explain, “locally appointed teachers can provide appropriate instruction and an acceptable
learning environment” (p. 20). Moreover, there was an emphasis on recruiting women “as they are often able to attract girls from more conservative families” (p. 20). They also acknowledged that families allow their daughters to attend a classroom with a male teacher if he is known and trusted. The official CBE policy enables participation of local teachers as teacher certification requirements are lifted; however, another factor in this decision is teacher shortages and the hesitation of teachers from urban areas in relocating to rural communities. The section on quality further examines how local teachers incorporate local practices, norms, and values in their classrooms.

2. **Flexibility**

Examination of NFE brings to the fore the importance of flexibility in expanding access to marginalized communities. Often, in under-resourced countries, the limited number of schools mean that children living in the margins have to walk long distances. And in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts, the risk may be too great to take because of security concerns (UNESCO, 2010). Nonformal schools have been successful in reaching marginalized communities by reimagining the traditional school structure in which multi-grade classrooms can be created within already existing community spaces, including homes and mosques. According to Yasunaga (2014), NFE’s ability to adapt innovative, flexible, and multiple delivery modes to learner’s convenience, while considering time and location constraints, ensures equitable access to educational opportunities. However Rose (2009) questions how flexible NFE is in practice. She argues that NGO-supported NFE is “often offered in the form of a standard package” and hence is not as flexible as the literature suggests (p. 233). An assessment of NGO education programs funded by USAID across four country contexts in sub-Saharan
Africa showed that the approaches to nonformal schooling were similar (Miller-Grandvaux, Welmond, & Wolf, 2002). Rogers’ insight about scale and its effect on flexibility may account for why this is the case, in that as contextualized best practices expand, flexibility decreases.

In Afghanistan, CBSs offer flexible class schedules, which Kavazanjian (2010) emphasizes is important for girls as it “reduces the opportunity costs associated with schooling and increases demand for education by enabling girls to attend classes without neglecting their responsibilities at work or at home” (p. 45). The official CBE policy allows for flexibility in hours and duration of CBSs depending on community needs “as long as the total grade hours are achieved by the end of the academic year” (15). This ensures some level of community customization to local needs as well as basic standards for quality. It is important to note, however, that these special accommodations are discussed in relation to Kuchis, a nomadic group. It is likely that most CBSs in villages have standard school hours.

CBSs receive textbooks from the MoE as well as other learning materials (MoE, 2012) which supports some level of standardization across schools. By law children are entitled to that which is provided to public school students. This policy is set in place to enable students to transition smoothly into the public education system and succeed on national exams, which is a requirement (Balwanz, 2006). Anastacio and Stannard (2011) explain that the Minister of Education, Hanif Atmar, at the time PACE-A began implementing a large-scale CBE program, was “fearful that CBE was becoming a parallel structure to the formal education system, and he was keen to unify the community-based students and teachers within the formal structure” (p. 120). Thus, expansion of programs
may be aligned with greater standardization and government oversight. It is also worth noting that with the involvement of foreign NGOs and donor agencies, it is expected that states become more cautious about what is taught in schools. Even prior to the participation of NGOs in education service in the late 1940s, communities requested textbooks from the MoE; therefore, the use of national curricula is not an entirely new development due to expansion of services in Afghanistan. Relatedly, although it may seem that the MoE is strict about utilizing the national curricula, Kirk and Winthrop’s (2008) work on CBE teachers’ experiences (detailed below) shows that teachers incorporate local knowledge and traditions that nurture the socio-emotional growth of children into their classrooms despite their lack of professional training.

3. **Quality**

While community participation has been recognized as a method of promoting local buy-in and support for education, less has been written about quality of NFE. The lack of empirical studies on student achievement as well as teacher qualification impedes any conclusive understanding on whether NFE delivers quality educational experiences that prepare children for success beyond early primary school. In some cases, NFE has been found to be of poor quality and unsuccessful in inculcating basic skills and competencies in students (Rugh, 2000). While teacher training is provided in almost all NFE projects, teacher quality continues to be a challenge as individuals without prior pedagogical experience are recruited to compensate for teacher shortages. Moreover, there are concerns about growing inequality between children who attend NFE versus mainstream education (Rose, 2009; Kavazanjian, 2010), in part because state schooling continues to be seen as the best option (Rose, 2009). However, there is some evidence
that NGOs may be a mechanism through which NFE can promise quality by providing pedagogical training for teachers and facilitating community support.

In Afghanistan, locally-recruited teachers receive in-service professional development training by NGOs (Kirk and Winthrop, 2006; Burde, 2014). Burde (2014) acknowledges that many CBE teachers do not meet the government’s qualifications of having completed teacher training college, with some having never reached grade 12. According to a 2006 USAID report on CBSs established by the International Rescue Committee, most teachers have at least a tenth grade education, however, “more than half of public school teachers in Afghanistan also fail to meet [the grade 12] requirement” (Kirk & Winthrop, 2006). In many cases, the mullah, community religious leader, serves as the teacher because he may be the most educated person in the community (Kirk & Winthrop, 2006). Though religious leaders may foster trust amongst community members and convince parents to support their children’s education, these individuals may not be fully prepared to teach subjects outside of Islamic sciences. When teachers are trained, the lack of teacher certifications may hinder them from continuing their work once schools are integrated into the public system (Bellino & Faizi, 2015; Kirk & Winthrop, 2006), which means that benefits of years of teacher training are lost. It is also worth noting that the 2012 policy document on CBE outlined plans for a standardized training package for pre- and in-service teacher training for all CBE teachers in the country, an indication that the model is moving more toward standardization. This may provide more viable employment opportunities for teachers once CBSs are handed over.

There are also indications of student academic achievement resulting from attending CBSs. In 2013, Burde and Linden carried out a randomized evaluation of 31
communities and 1,490 children in rural northwest Afghanistan to examine the effect of community-based schools on children’s academic achievement. Their findings show that the CBSs have positive outcomes on girls’ and boys’ enrollment and academic achievement. A school within a village increases the enrollment rate of girls by 52 percentage points and their average test scores by .65 standard deviations. Though boys also benefit from the program, the benefits to girls is particularly remarkable—to such an extent that placing schools in communities nearly eliminates the gender gap in enrollment and significantly decreases differences in test scores (Burde & Linden, 2013). Similar positive trends in educational quality have been demonstrated in Bangladesh, where children attending BRAC nonformal schools outperformed their counterparts in formal schools in reading, writing, and numeracy skills (Nath, Sylva, & Janice, 1999).

Kirk and Winthrop (2008) take a different approach to measuring quality by examining the socio-emotional benefits of having local teachers who understand contextual challenges and cultural understandings. Drawing on qualitative data collected by the IRC, specifically interviews and questionnaires from students and teachers in home-based schools, they find that these teachers have a determined sense of their role in the community, particularly with respect to inculcating cultural and religious values. They argue that CBE teachers are “alternatively qualified” in “valuable qualities and abilities that inexperienced and unqualified teachers in crisis and post-crisis contexts have, especially with regard to child well-being” (p. 877). They identify four components that make these teachers alternatively qualified: 1) the prevalence of female teachers or trusted male teachers from within the community; 2) understanding children and their psychosocial needs; 3) having culturally appropriate strategies to protect and
nurture children; and 4) appreciating their own opportunity to learn, develop, and contribute (p. 882-4). While they emphasize these are important qualities in fragile contexts, they also note teachers often experience feelings of isolation resulting from lack of professional community of support. Recent developments in teacher learning circles further illustrate efforts to institutionalize CBE activities, which I take up in the next section.

4. National policies and partnerships

NFE is conceptualized in comparison to formal schooling, rather than standing on its own as an independently recognized form of schooling. As a result, Rose (2009) argues NFE is overshadowed by the public system and continues to be seen as second-best to formal schooling, even in cases where quality may be better in NFE. These perceptions might be based on associations between government provision and professionally developed and regulated systems that prioritize preparing children for the formal labor market; whereas, NFE involves meager external monitoring, “with learning limited to literacy and numeracy” (Rose, 2009, p. 223). Partnerships, mainly between NGOs and government representatives, emerge in the literature as a possible mechanism by which distance between NFE and public institutions can be reduced.

NGOs provide a crucial link to the state by forging partnerships that support national policies and advocate for further support of NFE. This connection ensures legitimacy of the schools. Many NFE approaches are complementary models (DeStefano et al., 2007), rather than parallel systems (Mendenhall, 2014), as they support the public system by preparing students to transition to public schools by the middle or end of primary school. This is an important element of sustainability of nonformal schools;
governments provide necessary support to nonformal schools in order to boost the public system while ensuring that parallel systems do not develop outside of their purview or even beyond a certain point—this idea of setting boundaries on how much this system can grow or can be sustainable (Rogers, 2005). As such NFE predominantly offers primary education and is supported by state structures to facilitate absorption into the public education system.

CBSs began as a grassroots movement in rural areas of Afghanistan with a lack of public schools in close proximity to communities, however, the local community requested state support in terms of provision of textbooks (Samady, 2001). Hence, there was state involvement in CBE from the beginning to meet community resource scarcity; however it is evident that state and NGO involvement has increased. Today, the MoE policy provides comprehensive guidelines on CBE that ensure student certification and promote transfer to post-primary schooling. Perhaps one of the significant changes indicative of standardization is the clustering approach to facilitate greater monitoring of CBE. Within this approach, the hub school principal’s role is extended to guide and supervise CBSs in the cluster. Moreover, provincial and district level education officers assist with monitoring the schools. This approach ensures that students are accredited, teacher professional development is officially recognized, and resource shortages are directly reported to MoE representatives. However, this move toward standardization may negatively affect community ownership and flexibility. Another impetus toward greater government oversight may have to do with increased international NGO involvement. Rose (2007) explains “as NGO provision expands, it is likely to lead to
concern for alignment of NGO and government provision to ensure graduates from NGO schools can attend government secondary schools” (p. 12).

In some cases, closer ties with the MoE have strengthened support for CBE actors, including teachers. As part of the National Education Quality Improvement Program (2011), the MoE described the development of Teacher Learning Circles (TLCs) to better facilitate teacher professional development and community building. TLCs are “semi-structured discussion groups which offer teachers a venue to share their experiences and brainstorm solutions to challenges of teaching specific subjects, problems in classroom management, or administrative concerns” (MoE, 2011, p. 18). This structure also enables experienced teachers to mentor novice ones. The official MoE document notes TLCs might be particularly helpful to teachers living in remote locations with limited years of formal education and little formal training, indicating an inclusive vision for quality improvement. The BEACON program included TLCs in all of their CBSs to foster teacher professional development. Importantly, given that Kirk and Winthrop (2008) noted the lack of professional community as a serious impediment to teacher well-being, this structure not only provides teachers with greater professional support, but also relieves a sense of isolation resulting from being the sole teacher in remote areas (Bellino, Faizi, 2015). Over time this structure might also facilitate a shared understanding of CBE goals and culture among teachers.

DISCUSSION

In this literature review, I have argued that sustainability of community-based education rests on four components—community participation, flexibility, quality, and
policies and partnerships. Figure 1 illustrates the intricate relationship between these elements. At the center remains the core, persistent characteristics of CBE—community participation and flexibility. The sustainability literature positions citizen participation as a key mechanism for ensuring sustainability. In CBE, community participation ensures that girls and boys attend school and trusted individuals are selected to teach. Community members also partake in the everyday management of schools through school shuras that bridge parents with school as well as to district level education offices, in return compensating for lack of state capacity. The arrow between these two elements indicates that the authenticity of community participation to an extent can be determined by the flexibility a system displays. If local input is valued then local conditions are able to influence some aspects of schooling, for instance, location of schools, teacher recruitment, and curricular content. Communities’ role in deciding the location of schools as well as recruiting local teachers, and in some cases setting school hours, ensures easier access to education, especially in rural areas.

**Figure 1: The Relationship between Four Critical Components of Sustainability**
As Figure 1 shows, these two elements—community participation and flexibility—affect the quality of education children receive. In addition to providing socio-emotional support to children who face ongoing hardships in a conflict-affected region, community teachers contextualize their lessons by integrating their local knowledge of culture and customs, strengthening the relationship between school and home. In this way, community schools reduce the cultural distance between home and school. This is especially important for girls. Sperling and Winthrop (2016) explain, “Small schools close to home not only decrease the physical distance to school; they also help reduce the cultural distance girls must negotiate” (p. 141). In light of Afghanistan’s history of top-down policies and its destabilizing effects, these measures are critical in building trust and sustaining education programming.

National policies and partnerships are positioned at the top of the figure, indicating authority to sway the system. Nonformal education has become more complementary to the public education system through a process of institutionalization. In Afghanistan, while local education offices were involved in the early development of CBE by providing textbooks and facilitating student transition to public schools, the 2012 MoE policy cemented a more standardized process for establishing, managing, and “handing over” community-based schools. The potential benefits of this development include student certification and transition to public schools; high quality teacher training (Bellino, Faizi, & Mehta, 2016); and perhaps most importantly recognition of CBE as an essential element of education policy throughout the country. Moreover, the clustering approach strengthens CBE-public school linkages to facilitate student transition to post-primary education. These standardization measures, however, put community
participation and flexibility at risk thereby jeopardizing key elements of sustainability. In fact, many students, especially girls, drop out when schools are handed over, indicating that national policies continue to eclipse community concerns.

In addition to more state involvement, standardization is driven by the impetus to replicate successful models to increase access to a greater number of marginalized communities. The success of CBE, documented quantitatively and qualitatively, continues to justify its expansion. And yet, while some level of standardization and scaling up of best practices is necessary to reach more children, it might come at the expense of the core elements of CBE, weakening critical levers for sustainability. This also has an effect on the overall quality of education, as teachers lose autonomy to contextualize their lessons within a more standardized model. In a qualitative study of CBE established by the International Rescue Committee, students and parents persistently discussed quality in relation to teacher attentiveness and level of engagement (Bellino, Faizi, & Mehta, 2016). These teacher characteristics are directly related to the teachers’ position within the community and to IRC teacher training that emphasizes student-centered models and student socio-emotional well-being. The question remains, to what extent can implementing partners disseminate these pedagogical methods within a large-scale, more standardized model and, most importantly, if and how local teachers can maintain the flexibility to meet the specific needs of their students? As Afghanistan continues to develop its education system, it is important to take heed of Rogers’ (2005) proposition that as programs become standardized there is less room for contextualization.
A contentious educational history and extensive international involvement makes the cost of decontextualization high, with the potential to undermine hard-earned progress, particularly in rural areas of Afghanistan that continue to experience political, economic, and social instability. Indeed, Afghanistan’s educational history demonstrates the disastrous implications of top-down policies that undercut local realities. During the communist era in Afghanistan, the influence of Soviet policies led to a backlash against state institutions, particularly in rural areas where state aspirations clashed with local identities. Similarly, Amanullah Khan’s reign demonstrated that state ambitions can also seem foreign to the periphery when policies are influenced by developments in other countries and regions rather than responsive to contextual conditions. Because the education landscape in Afghanistan includes more stakeholders today, greater attention should be paid to how policies are produced and implemented. Speaking on a global level, Dryden-Peterson (2016) warns, “the imposition of global policy without processes of adapting it to the needs and realities of local situations can reinforce inequalities and runs the risk of exacerbating conflict conditions” (p. 201). Community participation can mitigate the risk of inappropriate policies or misperceptions about external involvement in education at the local level. Figure 1 represents a stable model where each lever of sustainability complements and binds the others around community input at the center. When government influence increases, however, its greater role weighs down on the factors that have made CBE resilient in the face of decades of insecurity and neglect.

While Figure 1 illustrates an ideal representation of the relationship between the four components of sustainability, where each component is in balance with one another, in practice there is no point of total equilibrium. At the heart of attempts to define and
realize sustainability exists tension between standards and standardization and flexibility and contextualization; between local customs, norms, and community participation and the efforts to align educational structures and policies between national and local levels. This tension is particularly salient in the ways in which “quality” gets demonstrated and measured. The balance may be aspirational, but the tensions are unavoidable and potentially generative for communities, NGOs, and the state.¹

At the community level, positive experiences with school have generated a deeper understanding of the importance of accessibility and quality in education (Bellino, Faizi, & Mehta, 2016). These experiences have increased community demands that the requirement to transition to public schools be paralleled with higher demonstrations of quality education in public schools, particularly responsive and trustworthy teachers. NGO community mobilization efforts might in part account for this stronger sense of agency. There are also indications of important shifts in the role that NGOs might play in addressing these expectations. NGOs, such as the IRC, are widening their reach by influencing national education policy and taking on a greater role in teacher training. Technical expertise from international NGOs will expose teachers across the country to research-based professional development techniques and the importance of community participation.

While there is an underlying assumption that the nonformal sector needs to better align with the formal sector in order to feed seamlessly into a robust formal system, tension between stakeholders and perspectives presents an opportunity to improve the formal education system as well, as policymakers continue to bring these sectors in

¹ I would like to acknowledge Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot for drawing my attention to the tensions present between the various components of my framework and their potential for generativity.
alliance. This raises critical questions both for the formal and community-based education systems. To what extent will national policymakers be open to transforming the formal system, particularly teacher training programs? Should Afghanistan move toward a decentralized education system given the history and diversity of the country? For CBE, there are also questions around how communities might see costs and benefits of both contextualization and standardization, that is giving up power in one domain in favor of some of the benefits that might accrue from standardization.

**CONCLUSION**

Participatory education is not a modern development. Communities were at the center of education prior to the emergence of modern states and centralized education systems (Bray, 2000). Nation-states have claimed ownership of education provision more recently; however, lack of resources, inequitably distributed, and limited state capacity has resulted in national governments and international partners once again leveraging community assets to meet the increasing demand for education (Bray, 2000). Coombs and Ahmed’s seminal 1974 publication on rural-urban educational and economic disparities arguably turned global attention to nonformal education as a mechanism for minimizing this disparity, yet, communities in many parts of the world that were not folded into the public system have long relied on grassroots initiatives to foster children’s development and equip them with the skills to flourish socially and economically in their societies. At present, we are left between a reawakening of the potential of local capacity and expansion of national and global policies and structures. We have yet to find a balance between these levels of influence. States and international bodies are particularly
invested in defining the boundaries of local authority in education because of education’s role in shaping societies that we all belong to and depend on for our livelihoods and security.

Global goals and agendas, for instance the Sustainable Development Goals, increasingly recognize the critical role of local communities in furthering development aims while safeguarding environmental protection standards. In education, both the potential of nonformal options and the threat of the formation of parallel systems have compelled policymakers to pay greater attention to and make space for NFE in national education policy. In most countries, NGOs have served the role of bridging communities and localized educational programming with the central education system. Bowden (1997, in Bray) describes the growing mutual dependence of NGOs, states, and global organizations: “NGOs rely more on government for their funding than ever before, and for achieving basic NGO aims in many areas of development. In addition, bilateral and multilateral agencies are increasingly incorporating the community-oriented approaches of NGOs in their projects” (p. 4). The creation of more robust alliances between NGOs and national governments strengthens sustainability efforts by increasing commitment to education for excluded populations. These alliances also produce stronger accountability measures for all stakeholders. Beyond access, the coming together of education stakeholders at multiple levels is also promising for educational quality. The Afghanistan case study exemplifies the importance students and parents place on access to quality education. The attention to quality is central to sustainability because “when schools come to communities, access is the draw and quality is the mechanism for sustainability” (Bellino, Faizi, & Mehta, p. 34). Communities have a nuanced understanding of quality
that transcends examination pass scores, and emphasizes the everyday experiences of children within their classrooms. Positive, healthy experiences with teachers and peers is especially vital in post-conflict and conflict-affected contexts where community life is destabilized, children are more vulnerable, and apolitical educational opportunities dwindle. And because these are communities under duress in societies working to establish greater government capacity, regular and uninterrupted educational programming depends even more on meaningful community involvement within a system that is responsive to local conditions.

While literature on sustainable development and education emphasize the importance of community participation, there is remarkably little comprehensive research on what constitutes authentic community participation across varying contexts, who has power, and how participation differs across communities. Of particular relevance involves how community participation takes shape and changes over time both voluntarily and through structures aimed at standardization and scale. In light of Rogers’ insights on the inverse effects of greater standardization on local ownership and flexibility, it is important to consider what dimensions of community participation and contextualization are critical for sustainability and which might be less important and even willingly given up in favor of some of the benefits that might result from standardization (e.g., access to secondary schools, higher education, more highly trained teachers, etc.). I will aim to shed light on these critical issues in my dissertation, which will be a qualitative study of three community-based schools in Kabul, examining how these communities make meaning of participation in education. My study will aim to understand marginalized voices and perspectives that are often overlooked. Qualitative
methodologies are particularly advantageous for this type of endeavor because individual voices are contextualized, enabling a deeper understanding of perspectives and decision-making processes. With this literature review serving as the foundation for my research, I will pay special attention to the role of teachers in enabling or impeding community participation; gender and ethnic dynamics; and to what extent communities shape what happens within and outside schools. Comparing several schools will also illuminate the levels and types of community participation, what accounts for differences, as well as the implications of standardization, whether it has similar effects across contexts and whether it presents the same challenges and opportunities for community participation. This study will enhance our understanding of community interaction with schools, with important implications for policy and practice.
Appendix 1: Definitions of Formal/Nonformal/Informal Education

In this study, I utilize definitions of formal, nonformal, and informal education as outlined by UNESCO (2014). It is important to note that clear boundaries do not exist between these three identified forms of education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Education</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned through public organizations and recognised private bodies and – in their totality – constitutes the formal education system of a country” (UNESCO, 2014, p. 7).</td>
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<tr>
<th>Nonformal Education</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals” (UNESCO, 2014, p. 7).</td>
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<tr>
<th>Other references to nonformal education in the literature</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Alternative education (Mfum-Mensah &amp; Farrell, 2002)</td>
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<td>• Complementary systems (DeStefano et al., 2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Home-based education (Kirk &amp; Winthrop, 2006, 2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Community-based education (Burde &amp; Linden, 2013; Burde, 2014; Ministry of Education-Afghanistan, 2012)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Village-based schools (Burde &amp; Linden, 2013, Burde, 2014), Parallel systems (Mendenhall, 2014)</td>
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<td>• Accelerated learning programs (Ministry of Education-Afghanistan, 2012)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Community-based education/school in Afghanistan</th>
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<tr>
<td>Community-based education is a type of nonformal schooling in many developing countries, including Afghanistan.</td>
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<td>Afghanistan’s Ministry of Education (2012) defines a CBS as “the MoE outreach school/class, and is jointly established by the MoE, communities and facilitating partners, and/or the MoE and the community, in remote, rural and sparsely populated areas (villages) where:</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) A gender appropriate public school for children does not exist;</td>
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<td>b) Children live at a walking distance of more than 3 kms from a public school; and</td>
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<tr>
<td>c) A significant number of children have missed the opportunity of formal education, have crossed the school age, and require accelerated learning opportunities” (p. 11).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal Education</td>
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<td>“Forms of learning that are intentional or deliberate but are not institutionalized”</td>
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### Appendix 2: Methodology and Search Terms

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<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Method of literature selection</th>
<th>Search terms</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainability</strong></td>
<td>The sustainability section is based on a search of the literature from 1987, when the Brundtland report, the seminal work on sustainability was published, through the present. As there is little written on educational sustainability, I identified preeminent conceptions of sustainability in other disciplines, including economics, community development, sociology, and business. The importance of community participation emerged as an underlying theme across several disciplines.</td>
<td>Sustainability + education; sustain + education; sustainability + international education; sustainable + education; ecology + sustainable; sustainability + education + NGO</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scale</strong></td>
<td>The literature on scale, although more focused on education, places specific attention on educational reform. Coburn’s (2003) conception is the most useful as she brings in the concept of sustainability within her framework. Moreover, Rogers’ bases his critique of NFE on the tension between scale and contextualized education.</td>
<td>Scale + education; scaling up +education; scale + education reform; scale + international education; scale + NGO + education</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nonformal education</strong></td>
<td>To provide an overall grounding for the discussion on NFE, this paper is based on Coombs’ seminal work on NFE first in 1968 and later in 1974 with Ahmed. I supplement this with Farrell and Mfum-Mensah, and Rogers’ (2005) updated, comprehensive text on NFE that provides a contemporary overviews and critiques multiple, historical discourses on NFE, including Coombs’. After providing a conceptual understanding of NFE, my search narrowed to examine community-based education.</td>
<td>Nonformal education; alternative education; complementary education systems; community-based education + Afghanistan</td>
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References


