Survey of Afghan Libraries

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Introduction

Libraries in Afghanistan, like many socio-cultural institutions in this war-torn country, have been neglected for many years. Little is known about them, such as the quality of collections and services - or even how many there actually are, given that nearly no statistics are kept on them. The purpose of this research project was to begin to lay the groundwork for identifying libraries and their current state, in order to eventually design and deploy assistance to effectively develop them.

The impetus for this research comes from discussions held by the lead researcher, an experienced librarian living in Afghanistan, with individuals working and interested in the state of Afghan libraries over the last four years. Although it was immediately evident to the lead researcher that Afghan libraries are in a very seriously sorry shape, it became clear over time that little can be done to significantly develop them without a clear picture of the landscape. What little publicly available data are tracked on Afghan libraries consist of simply the tally of school, university, and public libraries collected by the Central Statistics Office. No research has been done to learn more about the quality of the current state of these government-recognized libraries, let alone about the number or quality of the plethora of libraries installed and run by NGOs or private organizations. Without a baseline of the current state of all different types of libraries, a comprehensive picture of their needs and challenges is lacking, and a comprehensive plan of addressing the effective development of Afghan libraries is impossible.

One may ask, so what? Why is a comprehensive plan for developing Afghan libraries even needed? There are many pressing issues in Afghanistan that demand immediate attention, such as security, public health, corruption, government reform, and economic development. However, without a solid basis of an informed and educated populace, these immediate needs cannot be fully addressed by Afghans themselves. Education is the key to unlocking the potential of the entire Afghan populace to address these issues themselves and libraries are a foundation to an educated populace, offering access to information otherwise inaccessible. Access to high quality information, from both local and international sources, and the guidance to find useful information to answer information needs, is the foundation of an educated civil society.

Therefore, the research presented here was conducted, funded by a grant from the United States Embassy in Afghanistan. Through a survey conducted with a methodology designed to identify and reach as many libraries as possible within a set timeframe, the research captured what is believed to be the first widespread data collection on Afghan libraries. Their current state of collections, staff capacities, and use by visitors is presented, as well as the challenges they face are clearly defined. Based on these data, a clear picture of the current state of Afghan libraries and their challenges is presented here, with the purpose of guiding future plans to develop them to their full potential and better serve the needs of the Afghan populace as they take up the work of developing their nation.

The report is presented in five parts. A literature review sketches the previous research and known publications about Afghan libraries, and the methodology section presents the methods and survey used. Then the results are summarized to lead into the discussion of the findings. The conclusion highlights the possible solutions to the challenges faced by Afghan libraries.

Literature Review

Afghan libraries have not been a considered focus of research or even really interest, and the literature on Afghan libraries is sparse. A thorough search in a selection of online journal databases (in English) was complemented by searching on Google Scholar and other search engines in English, Dari and Pashto. Two research assistants searched for literature in search engines in Dari and Pashto, after being trained by the lead researcher on how to effectively conduct an online search. The research assistants completed a template in English for each article found, to summarize the bibliographic information and the content of the article, for the lead researcher. Not surprisingly, the scholarly articles were only in English, but even these were few. Of the literature found in Dari and Pashto, these were all news articles or websites with short informative pieces about libraries (such as university library webpage).

Historical and Current Problems

Libraries in Afghanistan have always had significant deficiencies and faced major challenges, it would appear. The earliest literature found was UNESCO reports on the state of libraries dating from the 1970s. These few reports sketch a picture of libraries as very much in a fledgling state.

Reid-Smith (1974) described the work of UNESCO with libraries in Afghanistan in the 1960s and early 1970s. Procurement of books relied on donations from the Asia Foundation, United States Information Services, British Council, and several Iranian organizations. According to Reid-Smith, there were only three librarians with Master's degrees in librarianship in Afghanistan in the early 1970s, and a professional association had just been started. He identified areas of development needed as the need for a national policy backed by law, formal education of staff, and a change in attitude towards books and use of libraries to encourage reading. Cisar (1974) described the challenges in setting up a bilingual library in Kunduz as a Peace Corps volunteer in the early 1970s. He faced problems with getting approval to start the library (cultural hierarchy practices), getting people to do their jobs, getting buy in from authorities, obtaining resources, and securing a qualified person as a librarian. This case study offered an interesting snapshot of the effort needed to establish a library in the 1970s, but these issues are still faced today.

Sinai (1977) examined the feasibility of creating and implementing a national technical information service, but found that the capacity was not present. He noted issues with a low-functioning publishing industry; lack of quality libraries and especially a lack of professional personnel; and a lack of technical and scientific information in general. Combined, these factors make a national technical information service a significant challenge.

In a detailed report, Eyre (1977) described a very weak state of Afghan libraries in the 1970s. Similar to Reid-Smith's (1974) report, Eyre found that libraries suffered from an overall lack of support, resulting in poor book stocks, unqualified "librarians," deficient facilities, and general lack of usage. He also addressed the professional association mentioned in Reid-Smith's article, stating that there had been no other meetings after the initial one. Besides recommendations for improvement in specific areas for the public, university, and teachers' college libraries, Eyre highlighted the need for the formation of formal professional education programs, and a national library adviser to the government.

According to Dupree's (1999) historical overview of libraries in Afghanistan prior to the Soviet coup and subsequent civil war, libraries were active and used throughout the country. Following the coup and civil war, the libraries' stocks were depleted, whether through theft or burning for fuel, resulting in the deplorable state she described of most libraries: collections

haphazardly shelved and covered in dust, a lack of catalogs, and staff with little training. The ACBAR Resource and Information Center (ARIC), the precursor of today's Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University (ACKU) that functioned in Peshawar, Pakistan, has worked to provide small libraries in rural Afghan communities through its box library program (ARIC Box Library Extension, or ABLE). Although the 1999 article stated only 30 libraries were operating, and an update in 2006 (Dupree, 2006) stated 145 libraries, today there are over 300, according to the ABLE manager at ACKU. Eleven public libraries, the library of the Academy of Sciences, and Kabul University Library were evaluated after the fall of the Taliban by Shabal (2002) as part of a program for ABLE to provide books to public libraries. In this evaluation, Shabal noted that collections were out of date, basic facilities were missing, staff only came to work for a few hours daily, and library visitors were few. This is not surprising, given that Afghanistan had only just been liberated from the Taliban.

In a Pashto book titled in English "Afghan Culture Losses," Youn (2008) summarized the losses of Afghan cultural artifacts and resources during the Civil War and Taliban periods. Included is a chapter on the losses suffered by libraries, through theft and destruction. For example, the public library system in 1966 had 79 libraries throughout the country with over 208,000 books, but by 1992 there were only 3 libraries and 89,000 books (p. 100). Other libraries mentioned were Kabul University library, the Presidential Palace library, and the rich libraries held by private individuals, all of which suffered great material losses and significantly set back the importance of libraries post-war.

Unfortunately, little has been done in a systemic and applied manner to improve libraries and access to information, particularly by donors, since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Suroush (2015) presented the current state of the Kabul public library, noting that it suffers from poor facilities, outdated books, lack of a catalog, and untrained staff. An article titled in English "We suffer from a lack of professional librarians" the newspaper "Shafaqna" interviewed Mr. Ghulam Nazari, principal of Afghan Book House (2015). The interview highlighted the dire need for training of qualified librarians in order to support the reading culture development. Another complicating factor facing libraries still is the lack of local materials, which was highlighted in an interview with Mr. Dawa Khan Menapal, Director of Public Libraries in 2015/16 (Sakhi, October 27, 2015). Mr. Menapal emphasized the need to develop public library collections through good relations with local publishers, but they also need support from the Ministry of Information and Culture.

Wiles (2012) in a discussion of information management in the development sector, used the term "trophy library" to describe those libraries in agencies that "look like a library but in fact are usually only a meeting room containing books" (p. 149). These types of libraries highlight the concern for status attributed to having a library and the subsequent establishment of small, usually useless libraries in every government agency department or university faculty. The lack of coordination between departments to combine library resources hinders their ability to provide effective collections and services to users. Wiles called on donors to put pressure on Afghan government agencies to ensure transparent access to information.

In many ways, the findings and conclusions of the Eyre (1977) report are still applicable in 2016. Librarianship was a fledgling profession in 1970s Afghanistan, but was decimated by over three decades of war and instability. Even so, as Wiles (2012) pointed out, donors have not done their part in enforcing the creation of a library profession, and local capacity remains weak.

Current Development

Although Afghan libraries have not been a focus point for much of any donor attention since 2001, some Afghan governmental agencies, international donors, and individual Afghans are trying to support them.

The Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC) has begun rebuilding public libraries by opening several in the last few years, including most recently in Logar, Baghlan and Kabul provinces (Takal, January 6, 2016). The newest is a public library in Nangarhar, which was begun in July 2016 and scheduled to open in 2 years, at a cost of 18 million Afghanis funded by the MoIC ("Nangarhar public library's foundation stone laid," July 16, 2016). A public library in Khan Abad district of Kunduz was also opened in September 2015, with 5,000 books and its 4.5 million Afghani cost funded by the German government, but its status is unknown after the Talian takeover and subsequent fall in August 2016 ("New public library…, September 1, 2015). Also, a public library housing 1,000 books in Balkh was constructed in 2014, again with funding from the German government for the 7.3 million Afghani ("New district public library…, November 6, 2014). These libraries are initiatives started by the local governments in recognition of the need to provide access to books to support a reading culture.

The MoIC has also committed to spending 2.5 million Afghanis to purchase locally published books for distribution to public libraries; an investment that will also boost local book publishing industry ("MoIC to purchase…, April 24, 2016). Efforts to modernize the public libraries also include installing an online catalog, improving the physical building of the main library, and obtaining deposits of newly published books from local publishers ("Public library to be digitalized…," February 1, 2016).

In 2014, a mobile library on a bus was inaugurated by the Kabul Public Library, with the intent to take over 9,000 books to towns in Nangarhar province (Zaman, February 19, 2014). The bus's collection was primarily children's books with the intent to promote reading. However, it seems that at some point the bus stopped making the trips, and does not appear to be currently operating.

Wiles (2015) asserted that Afghanistan does not have a national library: "*Afghanistan still does not have a national institution resourced to cumulate and provide access to information on Afghanistan,* [emphasis in original] nor are there any external university departments or agencies that have taken this function upon themselves" (p. 5). However, dreams of a national library are underway, with the Ministry of Information and Culture developing plans for a state-of-the art building that will hold over 4 million volumes, a conference center, and a librarianship training center ("Engineering sketch of national library… [July 29, 2015]; Malikzada [August 9, 2015]). Although a cornerstone has been laid, no further progress has occurred due to lack of budget and lack of interest from donors.

Help for Afghan libraries has come from a variety of sources. An article titled in English "Introduction of the Afghan Libraries" by the National Library of Iran (2010) summarized a visit from representatives of the National Library to Afghanistan to assess Afghan libraries in 1381 (2002). The assessment found need for materials and training, resulting in the National Library conducting a short-term training for 55 Afghan librarians held by 3 Iranian librarians at Kabul University, 15 days of training for 24 selected Afghan librarians in Iran, donation of 37,000 books, and donation of 10 computers (although the recipient library of the donations is not stated). Also in 2010, the Kuwait Embassy donated 4,000 books to university libraries through the Ministry of Higher Education ("Ministry of Higher Education gives 4,000 books," 2010). In 2015, a wealthy Afghan businessman living in the United Arab Emirates donated 3,000 books ("3,000 books donated," January 31, 2015).

The Digital Libraries Alliance was part of the Afghan eQuality Alliances: 21st Century Universities for Afghanistan, a program funded by USAID and Washington State University in 2005to improve higher education (Han & Rawan, 2013). The goal was to build capacity for Afghan libraries to work with open source digital platforms, including an open source online catalog software

implemented by four Kabul universities in conjunction with the University of Arizona Library. Although an online catalog was installed and supported for a year, turnover at the Ministry of Higher Education's IT department, which housed the online catalog server, resulted in the system becoming defunct and not currently used.

To assist with the low availability of children's books in Dari and Pashto, Hoopoe Books is a non-profit organization located in California that has since 2007 distributed over 4.3 million copies of their children's books (http://booksforafghanistan.org/our-progress-this-year). Hoopoe books produces 10 titles based on traditional Afghan stories by Idries Shah and available in Dari and Pashto, with accompanying teacher guides and audio recordings available for free on the website.

Some donors have looked to technology to support the rebuilding of Afghan collections. Digitized collections are an attempt to enable access to publications about Afghanistan for researchers throughout the world. The Afghanistan Digital Library at New York University (http://afghanistandl.nyu.edu) was founded in 2005 and provides access to publications from 1871 to 1950 (McCann, Southworth and Buchman, 2010). The project was funded by the United States' National Endowment for the Humanities and other donors, and included a partnership with the MoIC to digitize holdings in the National Archives. It currently offers access to over 400 publications. The Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University (ACKU) has an extensive digitizing program (http://www.afghandata.org), set up and supported through a partnership with University of Arizona Libraries (Everett-Haynes, February 5, 2013). The partnership started in 2007, and was funded until 2012 by the United States' National Endowment for the Humanities. Over 15,000 titles (1.2 million pages) are available, including the Anis and Kabul Times newspapers and the Afghanistan Kalany (Almanac). Finally, the Darakht-e Danesh digital library is an online library of open educational resources for Afghan educators, sponsored by Canadian Women for Women of Afghanistan (http://www.darakhtdanesh.org). The digital library is designed to serve as a repository of lesson plans and materials for a wide variety of subjects, with each entry available for free in Dari, Pashto and English.

Afghans are also taking it on themselves to build libraries. In 2014 two privately initiated libraries in Nangarhar also recently opened; one is a personal library of over 17,000 books now made available to the public and the other is supported by the Egyptian Embassy (Yasini, April 23, 2014). Since 2015, Matiullah Wesa has raised over 26,000 book donations from local population and has opened seven community libraries in Helmand, Kandahar, Khost, Kunar and Wardak provinces (Mashal, March 30, 2016; Salek, August 8, 2015). The libraries are not large, a few hundred or thousand books, and located in individuals' houses, but they are well used. He also distributes Hoopoe books in the communities. Most recently, Saber Hosseini started a bicycle-born library in Bamiyan province in early 2016, cycling around Bamiyan to loan books to children ("The cyclist bringing books...," April 14, 2016). He also distributes copies of children's books from Hoopoe Books, so children can have their own books (http://booksforafghanistan.org/our-progress-this-year/).

Based on a review of the literature, it is evident that Afghan libraries have long been paid little attention by donors, Afghan government agencies, and even researchers. Afghan libraries continue to face many challenges, most notably a lack of new books in local languages, a lack of formally trained staff, and poor building facilities. There is also a significant lack of data on libraries; very few articles found had any statistics included in them, and the Central Statistics Office does not track anything other than the number of public libraries and total number of books in them. The survey conducted and presented here is an attempt to begin to fill in the gaps of data and offer guidance for future development of Afghan libraries.

Methodology

To discover information about the current state of libraries in Afghanistan, a survey was conducted, supplemented by interviews with key informants. Statistics about libraries in Afghanistan are not regularly kept and there is an overall lack of information about the number and location of libraries. Therefore, the snowball sampling method, in which respondents are asked to identify other possible respondents, offered the means to discover other libraries. The key informants were already known to the lead researcher. The research was carried out over a period of 3.5 months, and resulted in 324 surveys and six interviews with key informants.

A definition of "library" was required to provide parameters for the possible participants. For the purposes of this study, "library" was defined as an entity with a dedicated physical space to house a collection (of any size) of print materials (and computer technology if available) for the use of a specified potential audience. In essence, this excluded private libraries that were not open for use to people outside the immediate family or neighborhood.

Survey

Respondents

A list of initial contacts was developed by the lead researcher through her contacts with Afghan ministries, the U.S. Embassy, and known NGOs working in literacy and librarianship. The Ministry of Higher Education provided a recent contact list of public and private universities; however, several of the contact numbers listed for private universities did not work. Multiple requests were made to the Ministry of Information and Culture for a list of public libraries, but none was ever received. The U.S. Embassy provided a list of the Lincoln Learning Centers and Canadian Women for Women of Afghanistan provided a list of their participant schools. Also, Womanity Foundation and the ACKU Box Library Extension contributed by surveying their beneficiaries (after training from the lead researcher) and providing the responses. In addition, the founders of the now defunct Afghan Book House, an NGO that provided training to many libraries over the last several years, supplied contacts of their past training recipients, although several of these numbers were outdated. Finally, the list was also augmented by contacts held by the lead researcher directly.

The snowball sampling approach was used to try to reach as many libraries as possible, given that there is not a comprehensive list of known libraries. A question was included in the survey asking the respondent for the names and contact information of other librarians known by the respondent. These names were then added to the list of contacts. However, not many of the respondents were able to provide the names of other librarians in their geographic areas. This indicates already that librarians need better encouragement and support for connecting with their colleagues.

Instrument

The survey was designed to capture data on a variety of components: building and collection quality; staff education; visitor type and use; technology accessibility; and challenges faced. The questionnaire had 55 questions in total, although some questions were skipped if not relevant to the response received. The questions were grouped into the following categories:

- Basic information about the library (location, age of the library, accessibility to the location, size of the library, condition of the building)
- Book collection (size of collection, condition of collection, means of acquiring materials, topics, collection management system)

- Computers (availability for staff and visitors, access to the Internet, use by visitors, quality of condition of computers)
- Visitors (number and gender breakdown of visitors, reasons for visiting, borrowing regulations, marketing and outreach activities)
- Staffing (number and gender breakdown of staff, tenure at job, educational background, training received)
- Problems/challenges (challenges faced, possible solutions)

A final set of questions asked about the respondent's communication with other librarians, interest in a professional association for librarians, and contact information of other libraries in the respondent's area. Respondents also had the opportunity to provide any final thoughts or comments. The instrument was translated into Dari and Pashto by the research assistant, and trialed for accuracy before being deployed.

Method

The research assistant was trained by the lead researcher on the instrument, who then conducted the survey by telephone. Starting with the list of Lincoln Learning Centers, the research assistant telephoned the respondents and requested participation. When feasible, the lead researcher or an individual known to the respondent would notify the possible respondents in advance, so they were not taken by surprise by the request. Telephone surveys are not a common method of data collection in Afghanistan, and Afghans are usually reluctant to respond to questions from a stranger. With the connection established, the respondents contacted were more apt to participate. Any additional contacts obtained from the survey were entered into a list for follow-up, noting the name of the respondent to use as reference.

The research assistant called between 4 and 7 respondents per day, depending on the rapidity of the survey completions. As the surveys were conducted, the responses were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, which was then reviewed by the lead researcher. Two NGOs assisted with data collection: Womanity Foundation, which provided data from its participating schools (15); and ABLE, which provided data from a sample of its libraries (60 surveys). Representatives from each NGO were trained by the lead researcher on the instrument, who then conducted the survey interviews themselves. The data were provided in batches to the research assistant, who checked and transferred them into the spreadsheet.

While some questions used a Likert-scale or were yes/no, other questions were more open-ended and required coding, which was done by the lead researcher. The data were then cleaned by the lead researcher and transferred to SPSS for analysis.

Key Individual Interviews

Interviews with key individuals who have an interest and connection with libraries in Afghanistan were also conducted to expand upon the picture provided by the survey. The lead researcher carried out seven interviews with leading figures in education, government, and non-governmental organizations to gain additional information about the history of libraries in Afghanistan and impressions of their current and future state.

The lead researcher conducted interviews with Mr. Osman Babury, Deputy Director of Academic Affairs at the Ministry of Higher Education; Dr. Mohammad Qayoumi, the Presidential Adviser on Technology; Ms. Nancy Dupree, the Executive Director of the Afghanistan Center at Kabul University (ACKU); Ms. Rula Ghani, the First Lady of Afghanistan; Mr. Abdul Jahani, the current Minister of Information and Culture; Ms. Atifa Rawan, a long-time champion of and consultant to Afghan libraries based in Arizona University; and Mr. Sober Zia Urrahman Banouri, Dean of Faculty

and Acting Chairman of Library & Information Science Department at Laghman University. Although attempts were made to interview a representative from the Ministry of Education and the Presidential Adviser on Culture, they did not come to fruition.

These interviews all started with a simple question: what do you believe is the role of libraries in Afghanistan today and in the future? Notes were taken, but the interviews were not audio recorded. The interviews lasted about an hour, and the discussions touched on their personal experiences with Afghan libraries, how Afghan libraries were in the past, and ideas for their future role.

Limitations

The study faced some limitations due to the timing of the research, inaccurate contact information, and limited period of surveying.

Ramadan occurred during the data collection period, from June 6 to July 5. This limited the amount of time and effort expended by the research assistant. Libraries were closed or reduced hours during this four-week period. Nevertheless, the research assistant was able to complete several surveys per week.

Obtaining the names and contact information for the public libraries proved impossible. Despite repeated requests, the Ministry of Information and Culture did not supply a list. It is unknown whether this was due to a lack of available data or reluctance to provide. Still, some public libraries were captured through the snowball technique.

Besides the lack of any contact information provided for the public libraries, the lists provided by the Ministry of Higher Education had outdated or inaccurate contact data, especially for the private universities. This reduced the overall possibility to reach all the possible libraries and demonstrates the typical lack of accurate data that plagues any research in Afghanistan.

A general limitation to all research conducted in Afghanistan is the lack of general basic data, and libraries are not exempt. Not knowing the overall number of libraries in Afghanistan means that it is impossible to ascertain any statistics that can be extrapolated to the population of libraries. Without knowledge of the population, an appropriate sample cannot be determined to use for any statistical significance. The statistics produced from this research are descriptive only.

Given that the overall population is unknown, it was impossible to determine a sample size as a target during the data collection period. Therefore, the approach was taken to attempt to reach as many libraries as possible, but this was limited by the grant available. With a limited funding, the data collection period could only be 3.5 months long. Although 324 libraries were reached, there remain many more to contact still.

Results

From the fieldwork period, 324 surveys were collected and six interviews were held. This section will present an overview of the findings and highlight particularly interesting findings from each section of the survey. Also, a summary of the interviews is presented.

Survey

Demographics

Of the 324 surveys, the respondents were primarily male (262 or 81%), but one-fifth were female (62 or 19%), and the majority of the surveys were conducted in Dari (285 or 88%).

Nearly every province in Afghanistan was covered by at least one survey, thanks in large part to the contribution from the sample from ABLE. The only provinces that were not reached were Farah and Nuristan. Not surprisingly, the most surveys came from Kabul (119), where most libraries are located. The following chart shows the breakdown by province.

Province	# of surveys		Province	# of surveys		Province	# of surveys
Badakshan	6		Jawzjan	5		Paktia	3
Badghis	2		Kabul	119		Paktika	6
Baghlan	4		Kandahar	13		Panjshir	22
Balkh	15		Kapisa	17		Parwan	17
Bamyan	6		Khost	8		Samangan	9
Daikundi	2		Kunar	6		Sar-e-Pol	4
Farah	0		Kunduz	9		Takhar	3
Faryab	5		Laghman	7		Uruzgan	0
Ghazni	5		Logar	6		Wardak	2
Ghor	3		Nangarhar	5		Zabul	1
Helmand	3		Nimroz	3			
Herat	8		Nuristan	0			

A variety of types of libraries was also achieved, as the following chart and graph display.

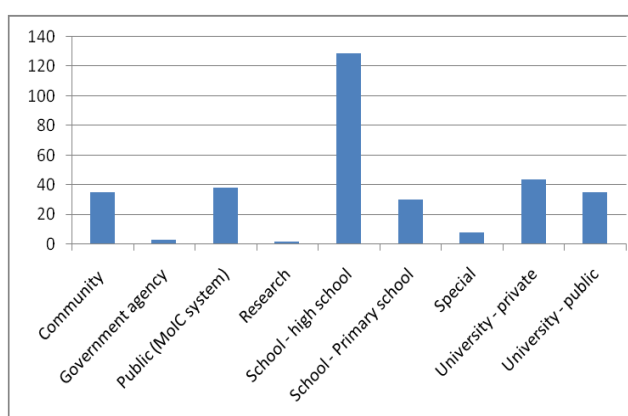| Type of Library	# of surveys
Community	35
Government agency	3
Public (MoIC system)	38
Research	2
School - High school	129
School - Primary school	30
Special	8
University - private	44
University - public	35

Figure 1: Types of Libraries Surveyed

Community libraries were defined as libraries available to the public, but not part of the MoIC system, such as the Lincoln Learning Centers and libraries run by local NGOs for the benefit of a local community. Government agency libraries were those libraries in government agencies such as Parliament or ministries. Public libraries were defined as libraries that are part of the system managed by MoIC. Research libraries have a specialty focus on supporting research. School libraries were split into high school or primary school levels. Special libraries were defined as having a specialized area of service, in terms of collection and audience. University libraries were split into those that are public and those that are privately run (but still authorized by the MoHE).

The high number of high schools participating in the survey is due to the participation of ABLE, CW4WA, and Womanity Foundation, all of which have libraries located in high schools. Even though an official contact list was not received from the MoIC of the public libraries, the survey still managed to contact 38 of them. All Lincoln Learning Centers were reached. All public universities were reached, as well as some additional departmental branches, teacher training centers, and national institutes of higher education.

Altogether, the survey corpus represents a fairly broad snapshot of libraries in Afghanistan.

Basic Information

The first section of the survey asked respondents to provide some basic information about their libraries: how easy or difficult it is to access, how old it is, its size and condition of the physical facilities.

The majority of libraries surveyed were in urban areas, with 110 (34%) being in a busy, easily accessible part of their community, and 140 (43%) being in a less busy but still easily accessible locale. There were a few libraries, however, that defined their location as rural (58 or 18%).

The oldest libraries surveyed were the Herat Public Library (founded in 1931), the Kabul Medical University Library (founded in 1932), and the Kabul University Library (founded in 1932). As the chart below illustrates, there was a small but steady growth in libraries throughout the 1950-2000 period, then a sharp increase before a decline in the last few years.
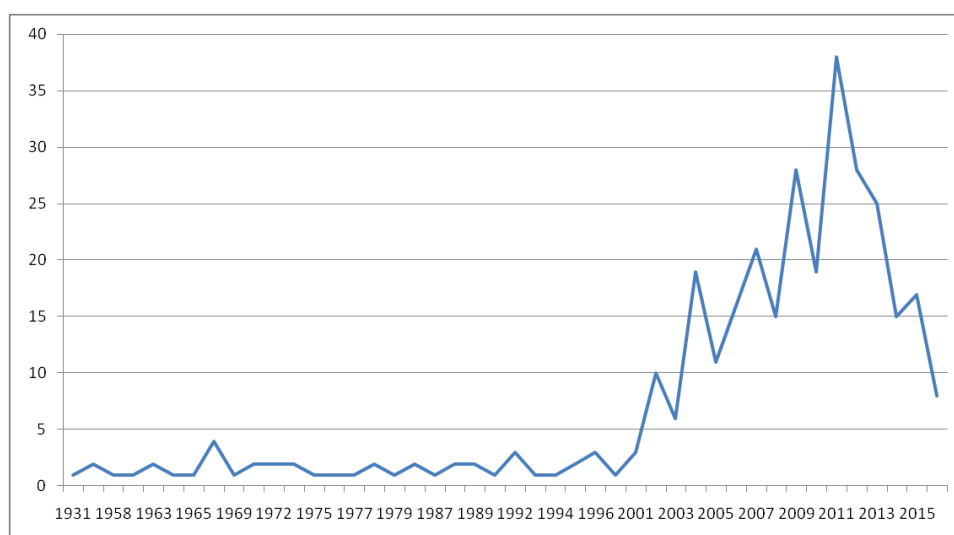

Figure 2: Library Foundation Dates

Even during the periods of civil war and Taliban occupation, libraries were opening; for the most part these were university libraries. Post-2001 however shows the significant spread of libraries through schools and private universities. It seems a peak was reached in 2011 and a decline from that date, but as the survey was based on a convenience sample, this may not accurately represent the entire picture of library openings.

Concerning the size of the physical spaces of the libraries, the majority of the libraries were small, consisting of just one room (200 or 62%), and only a few had their own building (8 or 2.5%) or were larger than 5 rooms (10 or 3%). The skew towards small libraries likely reflects the larger proportion of school libraries included in the survey, which would naturally consist of one room inside a school building. The condition of many of the libraries were described as "new" (127 or 39%) reflecting the uptick in library openings since 2001, and 82 (25%) described the condition as "good," but some were also described as "poor" (31 or 10%) or "terrible" (13 or 4%). Three were in a temporary location.

The vast majority of the libraries were open Saturday-Thursday (292 or 90%), and while open hours varied, a schedule of 8 am to 4 pm with one hour off for lunch was most frequently cited (135 or 42%). However, some university libraries stated they were open very early, such as 5 or 6 am, and stayed open until 7 or 8 pm (22 or 7%). School libraries tended to open at 7 am and close at 4 or 5 pm (59 or 18%).

Book Collection

The second section of the survey asked about the libraries' book collections: the size and quality, the topics and languages, and the source of acquisitions, whether from donations or purchases.

There was a good distribution to the sizes of the collection, as the chart below illustrates.
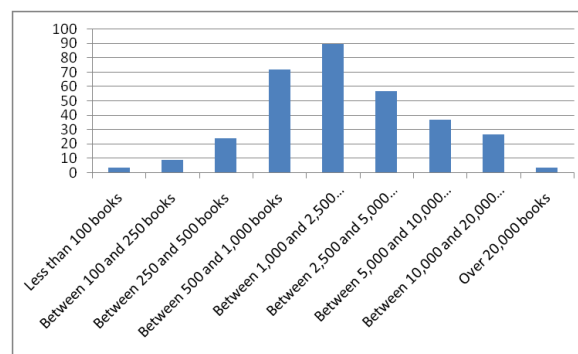

Figure 3: Collection Size

The most frequently cited size of collection was between 1,000 and 2,500 books (90 or 28%), followed by between 500 and 1,000 books (72 or 22%). Four libraries (1.2%) stated they had over 20,000 books; these were the Kabul Public Library, the Afghanistan Center at Kabul University, the American University of Afghanistan, and the National Institute of Management and Accounting.

The respondents also tended to rate the quality of the condition of their collections as rather good. Most frequently cited was "somewhat new" quality (122 or 38%), followed by "very new" (106 or 33%). Only 19 (6%) said their collections were "somewhat old" and 19 (6%) said they were "very old." These were public and public university libraries, while the newer collections were found in the school libraries set up by NGOs.

Every library except one had Dari language books (323 or 99.7%); the one that did not was the National Institute of Management and Accounting, which teaches entirely in English. Nearly all libraries had materials in Pashto as well (308 or 95%). The majority did not have books in other Afghan languages (292 or 90%); those who did have other languages focused on Uzbeki (27 or 8.3%). English language materials were prevalent, with 313 libraries (97%) reporting English books in their collections, and the other important non-Afghan language was Arabic (203 or 63%); however, 106 (33%) libraries reported not having any other languages in their collection.

Respondents were asked about the topics in their collections in an open-ended question, allowing them to state as many as they wanted. The most frequently cited topic was history (202 or 62%), followed by literature (178 or 55%), Islamic studies (127 or 39%), and general science (123 or 38%). Many other topics were mentioned as well, covering the scope of human knowledge. The least frequently cited topics were Dari grammar (3 or 1%), Pashto grammar (4 or 1%), IT/computer science (5 or 2%), and engineering (6 or 2%); physical science topics and business topics were not frequently cited in general. The libraries also typically had fiction collections (277 or 86%) and materials for children (231 or 71%).

The libraries depend largely on donations for procuring their materials: 174 (54%) rely only on donations; 19 (6%) only purchase materials; and 131 (40%) use both donations and purchases. Those that only purchase were primarily private universities. Of those that purchase books, 149 (46%) use the local market; 133 (41%) procure from Kabul; and only 13 (4%) purchase from foreign countries (mostly Iran). A little less than half of the libraries surveyed received donations from their local communities (157 or 48%), while 134 (41%) received donations from Afghan donor bodies and 214 (66%) received donations from international donors. Not surprisingly, given the source of a set of surveys, the most frequently cited national donor was ACKU's box library extension (61 or 19%); the Ministry of Higher Education was next most frequent (17 or 5%), followed by the Ministry of Education (14 or 4%), the Bayat Foundation (12 or 4%), and the rest were from a variety of local NGOs or community figures (businessmen or politicians). As for international donors, Canadian Women for Women of Afghanistan was most frequently cited (54 or 17%; also a source for a set of surveys), followed by the EQUIP program (53 or 17%), the Asia Foundation (32 or 10%), and a variety of Embassies and other international NGOs. Taken altogether, the libraries source their materials from a wide variety of resources.

When asked their opinion of visitors' perceptions of usefulness of the collections, the large majority of respondents stated the collections were "very useful" (139 or 43%) or "mostly useful" (118 or 36%). Only a few said the collections were "little useful" (8 or 2.5%) or "not at all useful' (5 or 1.5%).
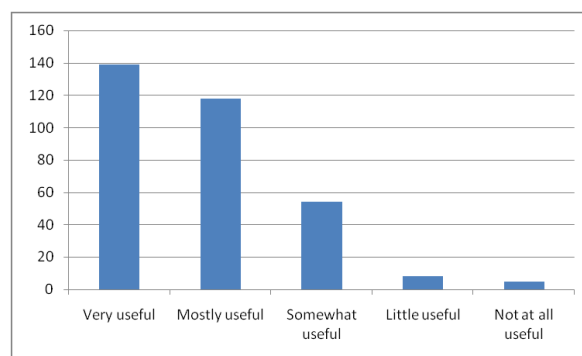

Figure 4: Usefulness of Collection

This indicates a degree of satisfaction with the collection, but as the question is based on the perception of the librarian, it is likely inaccurate. Querying the visitors directly would provide a better picture of possible satisfaction with the libraries' collections, but that was outside the scope of this survey.

Finally, the survey asked about a system used by the librarians to track the collection. The majority stated they used a paper-based system only, such as a ledger or log (221 or 68%); others supplement the paper log with a spreadsheet (38 or 12%) or a database (2 or 0.6%). A few use a database (30 or 9%), but it was not clarified if these are made in-house or provided by an outside

source. Four libraries (1%) stated they did not use any system at all; these were the Bamyan and the Nangarhar university libraries, the Parwan public library, and a local NGO.

To summarize, the surveyed libraries relied primarily on donations, from both Afghan and international donors; offered fiction and children's materials besides a variety of non-fiction topics, although history, general science and Islamic studies were most favored; tended to use paper-based collection management systems; and rated their collections as being good quality and providing satisfactory resources to visitors.

Computers

The next section of the survey queried the respondents about the presence and use of computers and the Internet in their libraries, focusing primarily on their use by visitors.

The majority of respondents stated that their libraries did not have computers, neither for staff or visitor use (208 or 64%). Of the 116 libraries that do have computers, 42 (36%) only have computers for staff use, with the remaining 74 (68%) offering computers for visitor use as well. Of the 42 computers used only by staff, 32 (76%) of them do not have access to the Internet, but 10 (24%) do have access to the Internet. Of the 74 that offer computers for visitor use, 31 (42%) provide only one computer, 14 (19%) provide two computers, and 10 (14%) provide 15 computers. Also of these 74, 19 (26%) do not have Internet access, but 55 (74%) do have access.
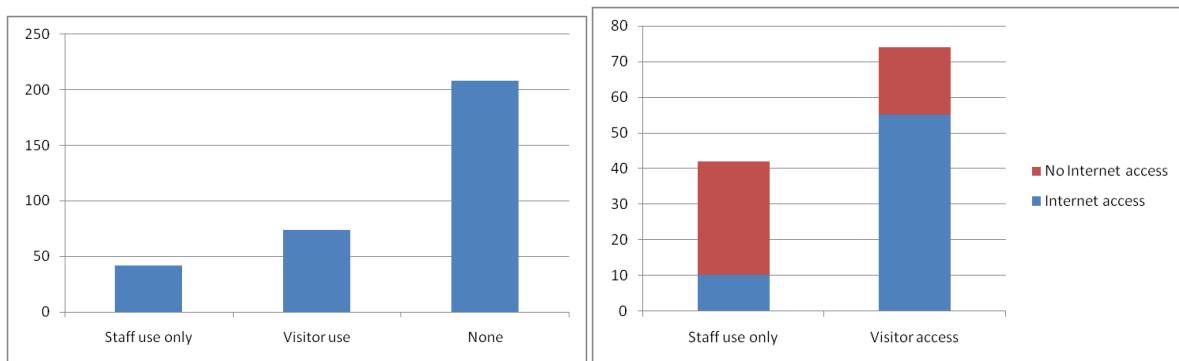

Figure 5: Computer and Internet Access

Penetration of computers and the Internet remains low in the libraries surveyed.

When there are computers available, they are of good quality, according to the respondents. Of the 116 libraries with computers, 36 (31%) are "new," 27 (23%) are in "very good" condition, and 39 (33%) are in good condition; only 10 (8%) are in very bad condition.
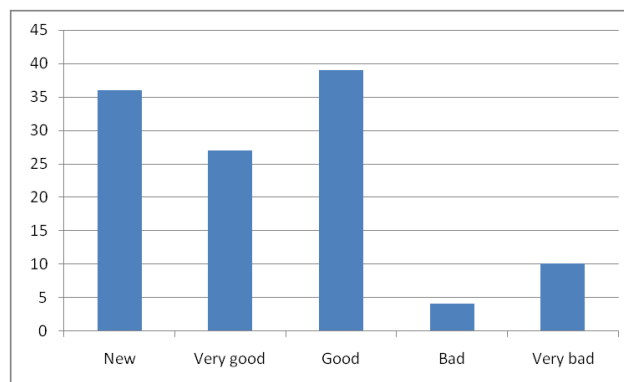

Figure 6: Quality of Computers

Visitors use the computers for a variety of tasks, including checking email or Facebook (41 or 55%), searching online (55 or 74%), using Word (67 or 90%) or other Office software (73 or 99%), and printing (43 or 58%).
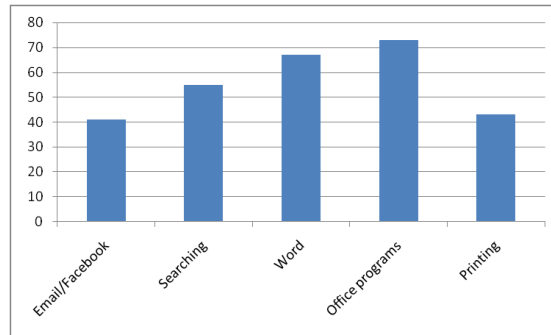
Figure 7: Visitor Use of Computers

Although there are far fewer computers available to visitors in the libraries than one would hope, the computers are in good or better condition. Visitors use them primarily for Office programs and word processing, but also some online searching.

Visitors

The next section of the survey asked the respondents about the visitors to their libraries. Of particular interest was the gender breakdown of visitors, average number per day, borrowing privileges and use, and whether or not the library does outreach or promotion of its activities to its audience. The respondents were also asked if visitors gave any feedback, and if so, what comments they made.

Most of the libraries received fewer than 50 visitors per day. The most frequently cited was between 10 and 25 (92 or 28%), followed by between 25 and 50 (76 or 24%), then declining in frequency to 7 libraries claiming 500 or more visitors per day (2%). Thirty-five respondents (11%) stated they had fewer than 10 visitors per day, which could also include 0 visitors.
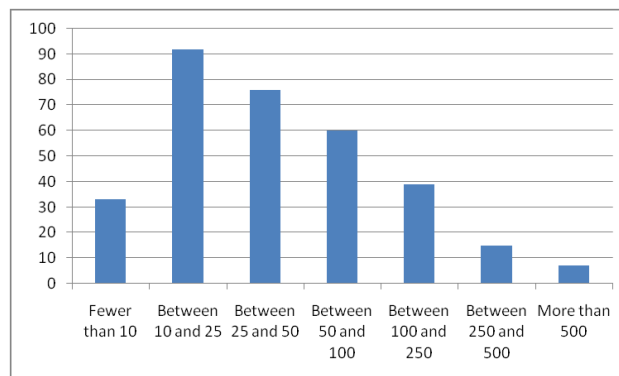

Figure 8: Average Daily Number of Visitors

The gender breakdown of the visitors was fairly balanced, with 203 respondents (63%) stating a balance between male and female visitors. However, 63 (19%) stated that only men came to their libraries, and 58 (18%) stated only women visit.

Respondents were asked an open-ended question concerning the activities of the visitors in the libraries, allowing the respondents to provide multiple answers. Reading books was the most frequent answer (311 or 96%), followed by attending seminars (51 or 16%) or book discussions (48 or 15%), preparing monographs (47 or 15%), as well as a variety of other activities, as illustrated in the chart below.
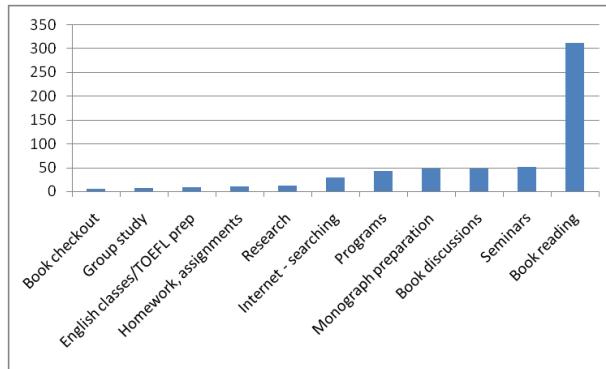
Figure 9: Visitor Use of Library

Checking out books is a very infrequent activity, according to the respondents. However, nearly all the libraries offer the option for checking out books (296 or 92%), and do not charge a fee for the privilege (317 or 98%). Of the 7 libraries that charge a fee, five public libraries charge 500 Afghanis per year, a private university library charges 400 Afghanis/year, and a community library charges 200 Afghanis/year. Most of the surveyed libraries allow books to be taken for one week (154 or 48%), while the rest range from a few days (40 [12%] allow 3 days and 11 [3%] allow 2 days) to three weeks (15 or 5%) or one month (3 or 1%). Six libraries (2%) – five university libraries and one community library – have no length limit.
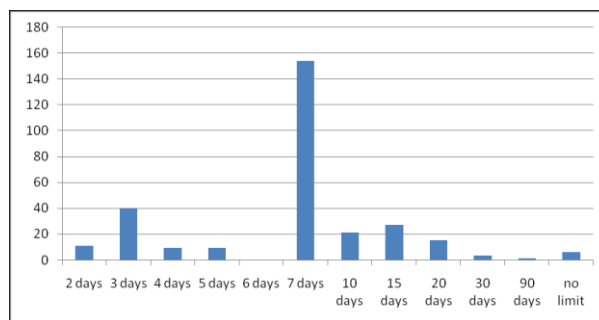

Figure 10: Book Checkout Length

Libraries are generous when their visitors do not return the book on time. Of the 296 libraries that allow checkout, 185 (63%) do not charge any late fees at all, and 65 (22%) block the visitor from further checkouts until the book is returned. A few libraries do charge fines: 12 (4%) charge 5 Afghanis/day, 10 (3%) charge 10 Afghanis/day, five (2%) charge 50 Afghanis/day, and three (1%) charge 100 Afghanis/day. Eight (3%) charge for the replacement cost of the book, and at three libraries (1%), the visitor must replace the book with a similar one.
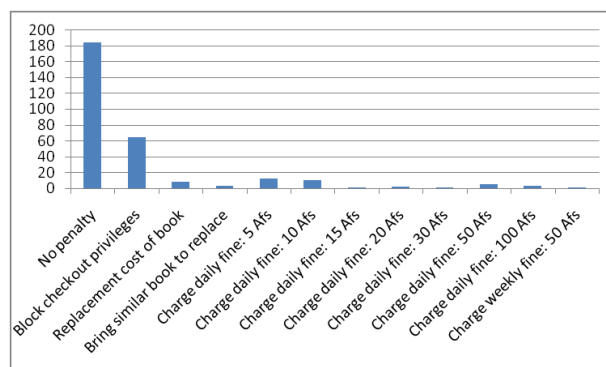

Figure 11: Penalties for Returning Books Late

The process for checking out a book is rather basic in most of the libraries: simply recording the name of the visitor (or their library card ID) and the book in a paper log (246 or 83%). Sixteen libraries (5%) enter the transaction into a database for tracking, while 23 (8%) hold a form of ID until the book is returned. Eleven libraries (4%) take a financial guarantee as well as recording the borrower's name and book information in a paper ledger.
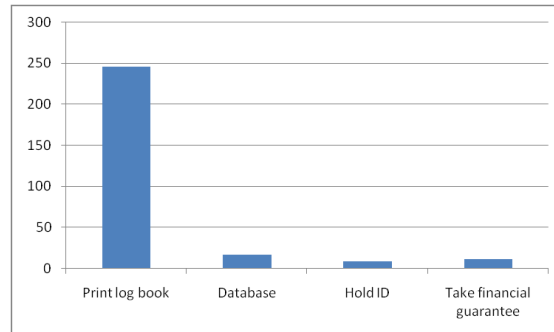

Figure 12: Book Checkout Process

Finally, the survey queried the respondents on whether or not they conduct any form of marketing or outreach to encourage visitors. Nearly half (144 or 44%) stated they did not do any type of marketing at all. Of the 180 that do marketing, 118 (36%) stated they did not do anything specific, but the remaining 62 (19%) provided a variety of outreach activities they conduct. For example, 35 (56%) do presentations to classrooms, 19 (30%) do presentations to the community, and 14 (23%) rely on word of mouth. Interestingly, two libraries (3%) – a public library and a high school library – include mosque announcements and seven (11%) use Facebook. The 180 libraries that reported they conducted some form of marketing were also asked their opinions on the effectiveness of the marketing. Overall their opinions were positive, with 60 (19%) giving an overall positive opinion but no specific rating, and 90 (28%) stating the marketing is "very effective."

Figure 13: Marketing Techniques and Effectiveness

Finally, respondents were asked if visitors ever provided them with feedback, and if so, what did it concern. Thirty respondents (9%) stated they had never received feedback. The remaining 294 respondents gave multiple responses, the most frequent of which was the library needs more and newer books (155 or 53%), computers and Internet access (37 or 13%), and better or larger physical space (29 or 10%). According to 82 respondents (28%), the visitors are satisfied with the library.

Figure 14: Feedback from Visitors

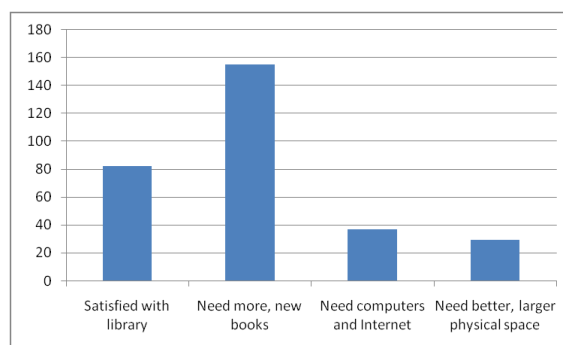Most of the libraries participating in the survey had fewer than 50 visitors/day, but there was a good balance between the genders. Visitors came to the libraries to read books, attend seminars and book discussions, do research for monographs, and other typical library activities. Although checking out books was not a frequent activity, nearly all the libraries offered the function, without a fee, and with minimal penalties for late or lost books. Just over half the libraries do some form of marketing, usually presentations or relying on word of mouth, and most respondents found their marketing very effective. Feedback from visitors indicated their strong desire for more and newer books, access to computers and Internet, and better physical space.

Staffing

This section of the survey aimed to gather data on the quality of the staff, including their tenure in the library, formal educational level, and whether they had had any library training.

Of the 324 libraries surveyed, 217 (67%) only had one staff member, and 38 (12%) had two staff members; others ranged from three to 15 members. The most staffed libraries are Kabul University Library (34 staff), ACKU (40 staff) and the Kabul Public Library (45 staff – although this is likely to include the branches). Nineteen school libraries (6%) stated they had no staff at all; the library is likely managed by the school principal or a teacher.

Gender breakdown among staff showed 62 libraries (19%) have no male staff members, while 218 libraries (67%) have no female staff members. Of the 106 libraries with female staff members, 59 (18%) are staffed solely by women, and 11 (3%) are dual-staff libraries, with one man and one woman. Men are sole staff members of 162 libraries (50%). The tenure of staff members ranged from a few months to 38 years (Badakhshan University Library), with the most frequent tenure being 3 years (47 or 15%), 4 years (46 or 14%), 2 years (39 or 12%), 1 year (31 or 10%), and 5 years (29 or 9%).

The staff of the libraries have at a minimum a 12th grade education (29 or 9%), and most have a Bachelor's degree (152 (47%), but one staff member at a community library had a 6th grade education. Many staff at school libraries had a 14th grade education (118 or 36%), reflecting the tendency for teachers to staff the libraries there. Finally, eight libraries (2.5%) had staff with Master's degrees. Although the survey did not ask for the subject specialization for those with Bachelors and Masters degrees, it can be presumed that none of them have library science degrees, as it is known where those with formal education in librarianship work.
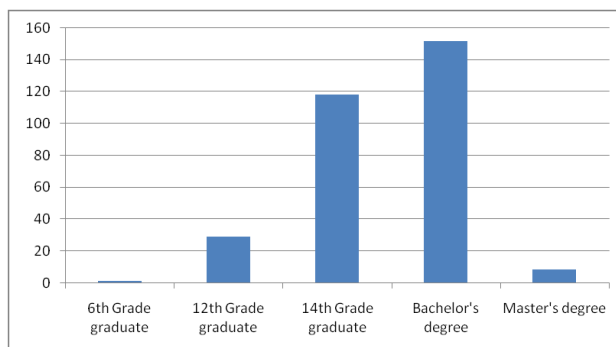
Figure 15: Education Levels of Library Staff

Given the strong likelihood that staff do not have formal education in librarianship, the survey asked about training the staff may have had. The number of respondents was nearly evenly split on those who had and those who had not training (145 or 45% versus 179 or 55%). The survey also asked what type of training was received. This was an open-ended question and respondents who had had training could include many topics. The most common type of training was on basic organization of the books (120 or 37%), followed by training on classification and cataloging (37 or 25%), management (33 or 23%), and leadership (22 or 15%). Those who had training found it "very helpful" (41 or 28%), "somewhat helpful" (45 or 31%), or were neutral (43 or 30%); only a few found it unhelpful (12 or 8%) or repetitive (4 or 3%).
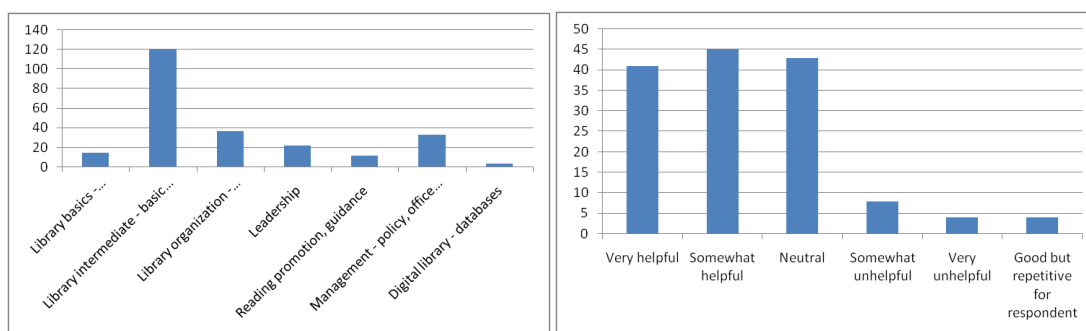

Figure 16: Training Type and Helpfulness

Staff of the libraries were fairly evenly distributed in terms of gender, and many had several years' tenure in the library. Although not quite half of the staff of the libraries surveyed had had training, the training they had received was on topic and perceived as useful.

Challenges

The final section of the survey asked about the challenges the libraries faced. This was an open-ended question, and respondents could name as many challenges as they liked. They were also asked how these challenges could be fixed.

The respondents identified many of the same challenges. The most frequently mentioned was a lack of books (189 or 58%), followed by a lack of space (123 or 38%), lack of technology such as computers or printers (111 or 34%), and lack of furniture (110 or 34%). Other issues mentioned included lack of staff (51 or 16%) and lack of electricity (32 or 10%), as well as a general "lack of everything" (42 or 13%).

Figure 17: Challenges Identified

When asked why these were challenges, the respondents identified various reasons, such as outdated materials (142 or 44%), space is too small (93 or 29%) or not conducive to study (83 or 26%), lack of professional standards (78 or 24%), or patrons' requests (74 or 23%).

Figure 18: Reasons for Challenges

Finally, respondents were asked how these challenges could be fixed. The most common response was to have materials donated (226 or 70%), purchase materials (48 or 15%), build a new space (35 or 11%), or have the government provide (33 or 10%). Many respondents made a general request for assistance in all areas (148 or 46%).

Figure 19: Possible Solutions

Although earlier in the survey the respondents had indicated the visitors were generally satisfied with the libraries, they were able to identify many challenges they face. The most frequent challenges were the expected ones of not having enough materials and computers, not having

enough space or needing better space, and needing more staff. Solutions to these challenges were also unsurprising; respondents most commonly indicated a reliance on donations.

Wrap-up

The conclusion of the survey included a few questions about the respondents' connections to other libraries, and offered the respondents a chance for any final comments.

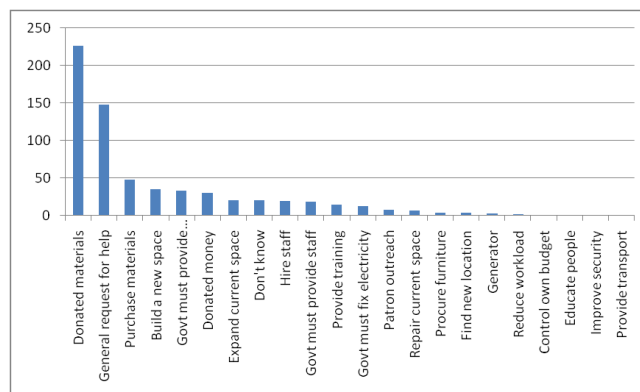Just over two-thirds of the respondents stated they do not communicate with other libraries (224 or 69%). Of the remaining 100 respondents who stated they do communicate with other libraries, the most commonly discussed topic was exchanging materials (24 or 24%), followed by general problems they face (12 or 12%). Other topics identified by a small number of respondents were how to obtain updated materials, and how to serve visitors better.

Respondents were also asked if they would be interested in joining a professional library association. Nearly all indicated their interest (310 or 96%); those that were not interested (14 or 4%) stated it was because they did not have an email address or way to communicate with an association; notably these were all school libraries.

Finally, respondents were invited to give any final comments. While 121 (37%) declined, 203 (62%) took the opportunity. The most frequent comment was a request to help the library and pay attention to their needs (56 or 17%), followed by requests to provide training (37 or 11%), appreciation for the opportunity to share their problems (33 or 10%), and a hope that the survey will help libraries (30 or 9%). In particular were a few requests to share the findings of the survey with donors and the Afghan government, to encourage them to help libraries (14 or 4%).

Figure 20: Final Comments

In the final questions of the survey, the respondents indicated a strong interest to be part of a national professional library association, even though many do not communicate with other librarians now. Some respondents took the opportunity to share their last comments, emphasizing their need for assistance in general, as well as requests for trainings and donations.

Interviews

Between April and August, the lead researcher secured interviews with six key informants to gather their perspectives on Afghan libraries. As stated in the methodology section, the interviews started with a simple question: "what do you believe is the role of libraries in Afghanistan today and in the future?" The interview then followed the course of the discussion as led by the interviewee. The key informants had various experiences and perspectives on libraries, but they all agreed on their importance to society.

The Executive Director of ACKU, Ms. Nancy Dupree, gave a historical background to libraries in Afghanistan based on her long history of living and working in Afghanistan. She noted that although the majority of the rural population of Afghanistan is illiterate, they share information

through story-telling and other verbal communication. Thus, when an ABLE library comes into a community, it reaches many more people than just those checking out books, as readers share what they have learned with others in their families and communities. Thus, an ABLE library has a wider impact than may appear.

The Presidential Adviser on Technology, Dr. Mohammad Qayoumi, made a point of the need for technology to support libraries. He noted in particular that online databases are needed for Afghans to learn about research and innovations from other countries. He also made the interesting point that in the past, libraries used to be held at mosques, where many members of the community could use them, but this practice has changed over the last decades. He suggested that integrating libraries with mosques again, with the support of the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, may be an effective way to revitalize the use of books again. However, he also noted this would be challenging with the current atmosphere of fundamentalism in many mosques.

The need for technological support for libraries was also underlined by the Deputy Minister of Academic Affairs of the Ministry of Higher Education, Mr. Osman Babury. He has long been a champion of libraries in tertiary education, and emphasized the importance of "digital libraries" as access points to raise the level of research in Afghan universities. Under his support, the MoHE has implemented an online catalog, which was installed by the University of Arizona in 2010, but it is now defunct due to staff turnover. He stated he was working with the international donors supporting the development of the Ministry and select universities to ensure libraries are included in their plans. Indeed, the University Support and Workforce Development Program (USWDP), funded by USAID, has training projects to improve the technical understanding of digital libraries and using online resources.

The current Minister of Information and Culture, Mr. Abdul Jahani, spoke of the purpose of libraries as points of access to information for all. He reviewed the growth of public libraries in the provinces. He also discussed the difficulty in procuring materials for libraries, both locally and foreign published, and noted that the MoIC is working to support the local publishers.

Ms. Atifa Rawan of the University of Arizona, a long-time consultant to Afghan library projects, spoke of the need for educated librarians. She highlighted the low level of understanding of the purpose of a library among librarians, let alone the populace, and emphasized the need for a formal education program in Afghanistan. With formally educated librarians, she noted, libraries can develop quicker and be of better service to their audiences. Although she has pushed for a formal education program at Kabul University, this has yet to come to fruition. She discussed the Bachelor's degree available at Laghman University, but pointed out that the program would be better placed in Kabul, where students would have more opportunities to observe and practice librarianship.

The Dean of Faculty and Acting Chairman of Library and Information Science Department of Laghman University, Mr. Sober Zia Urrahman Banouri, discussed the difficulties he faces in teaching library science and the opportunities for expanding the program. The library science program is based at Laghman University because the Chancellor needed original programs to open a new university. Unfortunately, according to Mr. Banouri, there are few women students at Laghman University, and none in the library science program. He believes that jobs in librarianship could be good opportunities for women in Afghanistan, and like Ms. Rawan, believes the program should be moved to Kabul for better access for women and exposure to libraries. He commented on the difficulties he faces in teaching students, as the curriculum is in English, which many of the students do not understand, and the students themselves are placed in the program not by university selection, not by their choice, so many do not have an interest or preliminary understanding of libraries and drop out. He also noted the lack of libraries in Laghman poses a problem for the

students to gain exposure and early experience. Moving the program to Kabul University would improve the ability to graduate interested and well-trained librarians.

Finally, the First Lady of Afghanistan, Ms. Rula Ghani, shared her perspectives on libraries as places for women to gain access to information. Education of girls is a key component of her work as First Lady, and libraries in schools help girls as much as boys. Also, libraries that cater only to women can provide a safe environment for learning, as well as activities to build community.

Each interviewee had a slightly different perspective on libraries, and taken altogether they provide a picture of the various issues and opportunities for libraries in Afghanistan. Issues such as access to technology, access to materials, and the need for formally educated librarians are widely recognized. The importance of libraries, even small ones like an ABLE library, is demonstrated in their wide impact, as Ms. Dupree noted.

Summary of Results

The survey was long, but informative data were gathered. By looking at the aspects of collection, computer availability, visitor use, staff, and challenges faced, a snapshot of the state of Afghan libraries emerges. The interviews with key informants highlighted particular areas as well, such as access to both technology and materials, and the need for formally educated library staff.

Analysis and Recommendations

The survey provided a snapshot of Afghan libraries today, and the interviews identified key areas of concern among influential individuals. This section presents an analysis of the survey, supplemented by input from the interviews, as well as recommendations where appropriate.

Modernization

In general, the libraries suffer from an overall lack of modernization, a challenge identified by the respondents in the survey. For example, the majority continue to use paper ledgers to track their collections and circulation. If they do use an online catalog or circulation system, it is likely built in-house and does not include all aspects of library services. However, a positive aspect of paper ledgers is they do not require electricity, which is unreliable at best in Afghanistan, especially in the provinces.   Modern libraries also rely heavily on Internet access to provide online databases and access to search engines for the World Wide Web. Over half of the respondents stated they did not have computers or access to the Internet; only 55 out of 324 libraries stated they offer Internet access to visitors. A likely reason is the cost to purchase the computers. The cost of Internet access is also quite high in Afghanistan for the amount of bandwidth that would be needed by most libraries.

Simple online library management systems are available, and should be introduced. They can easily handle small to medium sized collections, and do not require a lot of training. However, one issue is language, as these systems tend to be developed in English only. Another issue is the need for computers and Internet (and electricity) to run them. A feasibility study and comparison of various systems should be undertaken to explore options and applicability.

Collections

The quality and usefulness of the collections of the libraries surveyed were usually rated as satisfactory, but still were listed as challenges by the respondents. Most respondents stated that the quality of their collections was very good, but as pointed out in the results, these respondents were mostly from school libraries set up by NGOs, which would have provided newly published materials. Although a smaller group stated their collections were old, these were public libraries primarily, where the general population would go to seek information. These libraries should be the mainstay of information access for the general population, but if people do not find new materials – a common complaint acknowledged in the literature as well as by the respondents in the "challenges" section – they will cease going to the library and getting them to return may be difficult.

Nearly all the libraries rely in some part on donations, with many counting on donations as their sole source of books. Such a practice is never successful at providing visitors with exactly what they need, as libraries are at the mercy of whatever materials are donated. Sometimes donors allow the recipient library to select from a list (such as The Asia Foundation's Books for Asia and the ABLE program), but more often than not libraries simply receive what is given, resulting in a hodge-podge of unwanted and useless materials in a library. Yet librarians are hesitant to discard the unwanted materials, resulting in a lack of space and a confusing collection for the user, leading to user dissatisfaction. Ultimately libraries simply need more funding so they can purchase books directly, but in the meantime a national system for libraries to exchange donated books with each other would lead to libraries finding more appropriate books for their audiences.

When asked if visitors considered their collections useful, the vast majority of respondents said they were "very useful" or "mostly useful." However, when asked about feedback from visitors, the most common response was a request for more and newer books, which was also identified as a

challenge by the respondents. This is an apparent disconnect that may be explained by the respondents wanting to portray their libraries as successful at the beginning of the survey. Input from the visitors themselves is needed to fully ascertain how useful or not a library may be. In addition, according to the respondents, checking out books is not a frequent activity at their libraries, yet nearly all the libraries offer the possibility to check out books for free and usually without penalty for late returns. This begs the question: Why do visitors prefer to read in the library and not check out books?   To avoid speculation, research with the visitors themselves is needed to determine the reason.

Surveys of visitors can be done as part of marketing, but this is apparently an area in which more librarians need training, given that nearly half of the respondents stated they do not do marketing of any kind. In addition, surveys of non-visitors should also be conducted, to determine if the library could be meeting their needs in some other way. For example, most libraries are only open from 8 am to 4 pm; while this is appropriate for school libraries, public and university libraries need to have longer hours to better accommodate their audiences' schedules. The university libraries captured in the survey did state they have longer hours, but public libraries did not. A better understanding of the timing availability of the target audience, gained through marketing research, would help encourage visits.

Physical Space

A majority of respondents described their physical spaces as new or good, but perhaps it would be better to interpret "good" as "good enough," as the respondents made clear in the challenges section that the physical space and facilities are lacking. Books can be fragile materials, subject to mold and insects if the environment is not adequately maintained. Computers are also sensitive to heat and cold. Good lighting is necessary for reading and studying. However, many respondents stated that they do not have adequate facilities for encouraging studying, without proper heating / cooling systems and lighting. The lack of adequate facilities for libraries underlines the inattention to the importance of libraries in general, and gives visitors (and non-visitors as well) the impression that libraries do not matter. Investment in facilities will not only protect the valuable book stock and computers, but will also give the impression of libraries as important places, encouraging people to visit.

Staffing

Unlike libraries in the West, where librarianship tends to be a female-dominated profession, libraries in Afghanistan were predominantly staffed by men. This is not surprising, given the cultural and traditional mores of the country. However, this gender imbalance in staffing may contribute to a lower visitor rate by women, if only men are working at a library. To encourage women to use libraries, more women should be employed as staff.

It was encouraging to find that nearly half of the libraries surveyed have staff with Bachelor's degrees, and an additional one-third had 14th grade certificates, as appropriate for schools. This indicates a respect for education among the hiring managers for libraries, and a level of education among staff that will enable understanding of training when provided.

It was not surprising to find that not even half of the respondents had received any form of training in librarianship, as librarianship is apparently not a valued occupation, as evidenced in the literature. There is an enormous need for sustained training for staff already on the job, not just the short trainings provided by individual NGOs. Most training is done as one-off activities, lasting only a week or two, without any logical and measured progression in skills from one training to another; as some respondents pointed out, they have had repeated trainings in some areas. Another issue is the

loss of knowledge when trained staff depart. The case of the online catalog system for the public universities (hosted by the Ministry of Higher Education), is an example of typical development project lifespan: as soon as the staff trained by the consultants left, the system became defunct and is not used.

Although a lack of training was not identified as an important challenge, nor selected frequently as a solution to challenges (even though it was mentioned frequently in the final comments), it may be a case of not knowing what you don't know. If library staff are not aware of what their libraries could be like (from lack of exposure to proper libraries), then they would not be aware of their own deficiencies nor the possibilities for service from the library. An exposure program to other libraries around the world, conducted virtually, could entice interest in library staff for self-improvement and future training.

Inciting interest in training is one half of the development coin; the other half is providing high quality training. This will be a difficult aspect of library development, given the few formally educated librarians in the country. With foreign experts and the support of international donors, however, a proper program of sustained professional training can be developed and implemented. Support will need to come from outside Afghanistan, however, as the Afghan government has neither the financial nor technical capacity.

While training those already on the job should be a high priority, this is for immediate needs and will not address the needs in the future. For that, a formal education program is needed and should be made available to the most potential students possible. As Mr. Banouri and Ms. Rawan pointed out, a Bachelor's degree in librarianship should be at Kabul University, or the Kabul Education University, to make it most useful to students as well as attract the most students. Also, associate degree level programs should be formulated and made available through the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) schools or Teacher Training Centers (TTCs) throughout the country to provide basic technical training for a future cadre of library assistants. A Master's degree program should also be investigated, as Master's degrees in Library Science can draw from a variety of Bachelor's degrees and may be more readily implemented. However, a lack of PhDs in library science will inhibit a Master's program, unless it draws faculty from other universities and classes are available online.

Another unfortunate finding was the lack of communication between libraries, with over two-thirds of the respondents stating they did not communicate with other librarians. Communication with others in the same profession is a keystone of professional development. It is not surprising then that nearly all the respondents indicated an interest in a professional association. They clearly understand the feasibility of such an association to help keep them informed and offer opportunities for training and other professional development. A professional association is under development, but has reached some challenges in terms of internal political maneuvering among members and has not yet been officially registered with the Ministry of Justice. Hopefully these issues will be resolved, the association will become official, and resources for professional development will start to be offered.

Conclusion

The first ever survey of Afghan libraries collected 324 responses from a wide variety of library types and geographic locations. To reiterate, the survey was based on a convenience sample drawn from known libraries, and augmented through snowball sampling, and so is not predictive in nature. However, the survey shows the common issues faced by the librarians surveyed:

- the need for more materials,
- the need for computers and Internet access,
- the need for modernization,
- the need for better physical spaces,
- the need for marketing to understand the potential audiences,
- the need for both formal education in librarianship and professional development through training, and
- the need for better communication among practicing librarians.

These issues were reflected in the interviews with key informants and the literature review. Indeed, many of these have been issues since the 1970s, according to the literature.

Several recommendations have been identified to improve Afghan libraries today and in the future:

- Comparison and feasibility study of implementing simple online library management systems
- National system of donated book exchange
- Surveys of visitors and non-visitors to explore their perceptions of libraries
- Investment in physical facilities
- More women staff members
- Virtual exposure program to libraries around the world
- Comprehensive and sustained program of on-the-job training
- Formal education programs at Associate's and Bachelor's levels

In particular, attention needs to be focused on the public libraries. These most often suffer from a lack of funding and require the most development, but their potential impact directly on the Afghan population is large.

A serious issue underlying all the challenges faced by Afghan libraries is the lack of funding. The development of libraries nationwide has not been a major focal point for international donors (with a few exceptions) or the Afghan government. Without a serious focus on libraries, backed by large funds, they will only continue to develop in a piecemeal, scattered fashion, with attention on clusters of school libraries or community libraries (such as those made through ABLE). The overall network of public libraries – a potentially significant multiplier of educational and democratic development of Afghanistan – requires major influxes of financial support accompanied by professional guidance from experienced library experts.

Based on the success of this survey, it is clear that further research needs to be done on Afghan libraries. This survey should be continued, with additional libraries added to the corpus. The survey could also become longitudinal, if conducted every year, which could provide a long-term picture of library development. Funding for continuing and repeating the survey would be needed, but as this project showed, it does not necessarily require a large budget.

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