Technical Assistance to the USAID EQuALLS Project  
(Education Quality and Access  
for Learning and Livelihood Skills)  

OCTOBER 1, 2004 - AUGUST 3, 2006  

FINAL REPORT  

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through a Task Order issued by USAID to the  
Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity  
Contract No. HNE-I-00-00-00038-00; Task Order #820
6. IMPROVING ACCESS AND QUALITY IN MADRASAH EDUCATION

Long before the arrival of the Spaniards and Catholicism, as early as the 14th century, Muslim communities in Mindanao have established and supported their local madrasah (pl. madaris) as an expression of piety. Throughout the centuries of Spanish and American colonialism and all that has transpired in the past 600 years, the madrasah remains a central feature of Muslim life in Mindanao. Amidst an increasingly complex and globalized society, the madrasah provides young Filipino Muslims with a foundation in the cultural traditions of Muslim Mindanao. There are madaris scattered throughout the Philippine islands, but the overwhelming majority may be found in Central and Western Mindanao.

The madrasah typically functions as a privately-owned school where a religious teacher (ustadz, pl. asatidz) instills his pupils with the basic tenets of Islam and Arabic language. The main subjects of Muslim education - Qur’an, Hadith, and Fiqh - are the focus of the curriculum, but there is no fixed course of study and the interpretation of these texts may vary greatly from one madrasah to another. The word madrasah comes from the root *drash* which means repetition and drill. Pedagogy is mostly through chanting and rote memorization. Discipline is usually quite strict. Sometimes subjects such as geography, history, science and math are also introduced if the ustadz is sufficiently well-versed in those subjects. The language of instruction is usually Arabic, though local dialect may also be used.

Madaris vary widely in size and quality, and also in duration of study. Most informal madaris offer a few hours of instruction over the weekend, in makeshift classrooms. Some madaris are “full-time” (offering class 5 days/week) but most – 80 to 90% - are weekend madaris (offering class 1 or 2 days/week). A few well-endowed institutions (usually called ma’ahad) offer a 12-year cycle of intensive study often leading to tertiary Islamic studies overseas. Depending on the madrasah and its resources, it may offer classes to young children (ibtida’i is the primary level typically offered for 4 years), children (edadi is the intermediate level of 4 years) or youth (thanawi is the high school level, also for 4 years). Unfortunately the typical madrasah in Mindanao is located in a poor community and is woefully ill-equipped in terms of furniture, books, teaching/learning supplies, and even toilets.

The student population also varies. Many students study in madrasah over the weekend and attend public school during the week. On the other hand, some attend only the local madrasah because the nearest school is too far away or because of other access barriers such as household work, childcare, or financial constraint. In conservative communities, some parents simply prefer the madrasah form of education for its focus on spiritual and moral development. Both girls and boys attend madaris and ma’ahid (pl. pf ma’ahad) though male enrollment tends to be slightly larger.

If educational statistics are somewhat inconsistent in the formal sector, they are so much more so in the madrasah sector. The number of madaris in Mindanao seems to range from 600-1,000 and the student population ranges from 60,000-100,000. The provinces with the largest number of madaris (over 100 madaris in each) are Lanao del Sur, Basilan, and Maguindanao.

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Generally speaking, students pay a nominal tuition to the madrasah operator. The remaining costs are borne by community donations, though there is often an affiliation with a madrasah or a religious institution in the Middle East or South Asia that provides additional financial support. In fact, some asatidz are alumni from advanced Islamic study in the Middle East or South Asia, and they carry an affiliation with their alma mater back to their madrasah in Mindanao (Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan are frequently cited as examples though other examples may range from Libya to Indonesia). Some asatidz are quite well educated, while others have little or no formal education. Unlike other private schools in the Philippines (e.g. Catholic schools or Chinese schools), most madaris have very little to do with the Philippines Department of Education (though this is starting to change) so there are no fixed qualifications for asatidz nor is there DepEd support or supervision.\footnote{A small number of well-established and well-resourced madaris in urban areas (14 according to DepEd) have incorporated a “standard curriculum” that incorporates DepEd’s Revised Basic Education Curriculum or RBEC (see DepEd Order No. 51). These are formally recognized and accredited by DepEd.}

**Legal Aspects and the Relationship of Madaris and DepEd**

The legal bases for madaris and their relationship to DepEd is an extraordinarily thorny issue that will not be explained here. The issues are made more complex by the fact that DepEd National and DepEd ARMM view the status of madaris differently and it is not usually clear which has the final say, i.e. which has jurisdiction. Even among experts - especially among experts - opinions on this matter vary widely.

There are a number of DepEd (National) policies which ostensibly apply to madrasah education: DepEd Letter of Instruction [LOI] 1221 is an issuance defining guidelines and standards for madaris and their gradual integration into the Philippine Education System; LOI 71-A adopts Arabic as an “Alternative Medium of Instruction in Muslim Areas”; LOI 897 permits teaching Arabic language in areas predominantly populated by Filipino Muslims.

On the other hand, the Organic Law that established autonomy in the ARMM region (Republic Act 6734) gives DepEd ARMM the authority to decide all matters related to education in the ARMM and that education should be “meaningful, relevant, and responsive to the needs, ideals and aspirations” of Muslim Mindanao. Similarly the Muslim Mindanao Autonomy Act (MMAA) No. 14 gives DepEd ARMM the mandate to control all aspects of education in the ARMM and recognizes the madrasah as “an integral part of the education system”. DepEd Order No. 51 of 2004 allows for a “standard curriculum for private madaris” that incorporates basic education subjects in to the daily schedule of madaris and would ultimately allow for “a smooth transfer of students from public school to private Madrasah or vice versa (and thus) unify the long history of dichotomy among Muslims and promote the Filipino national identity while preserving the Muslims’ cultural heritage.” Some madaris operators accept this notion of unification, others do not. Some see it as an opportunity to offer a more comprehensive basic education for children in madaris while others see the standard curriculum as State intrusion into their sacred tradition (sometimes called “secularization”).

The DepEd ARMM has a small Bureau of Madaris which is meant to prescribe policies for the ARMM madrasah sector and to promote the role of madaris as a component of ARMM’s basic
education system. On the other hand, DepEd National has an Undersecretary for Muslim Affairs who has developed a comprehensive and ambitious Roadmap for Upgrading Muslim Basic Education that addresses seven critical issues for the improvement of Muslim education (nationwide):

- Developing madrasah education as a vital component of the national education system
- Upgrading the quality of secular basic education in formal elementary and secondary schools serving Filipino Muslim children (including the introduction of Arabic Language and Islamic values)
- Implementing an Alternative Learning System for Muslim Filipino out-of-school youth
- Developing and implementing appropriate livelihood skills education and training for present-day students of private madaris and Muslim out-of-school youth
- Supporting Government efforts to provide quality early childhood development programs for Muslim Filipino pre-school children
- Creation of a special Fund for Assistance to Muslim Education (FAME) by an Act of Congress
- School feeding and improved nutrition

The Roadmap is truly a pioneering initiative but it has not yet received any Government funding for implementation and opinions vary on whether DepEd ARMM fully endorses the DepEd Roadmap.

The “integration” or “mainstreaming” of madaris into the Philippines system of public education is complex and controversial. The issues represent a fascinating case-study in the occasional dissonance of culture, education and the state (for example see Islamic Identity, Postcoloniality, and Educational Policy: Schooling and Ethno-Religious Conflict in the Southern Philippines by Dr. Jeffrey Ayala-Milligan).

Many of the legal issues (and ambiguities) relating to education in the ARMM including Madrasah education are explored under the EQuALLS Policy component (see Section 7). The strategy was to steer clear of the controversy and focus on a few (eight) pilot madaris where children and their teachers would benefit from straightforward material support and teacher training to improve the provision of foundation skills related basic education, i.e. English, Filipino, Reading and Math. This strategy fit comfortably within the parameters of the USAID Strategic Objective (IR 1 and IR 2) and avoided any Constitutional quagmires with respect to separation of Church and State (the US and the Philippines constitutions both stipulate a separation of Church and State).49

49 A closely related squall is brewing around the integration of Islamic Values and Arabic Language in the public schools of ARMM and other provinces or municipalities outside ARMM with large Muslim student populations, which does indeed run up against constitutional questions. In fact there is already legislation and a DepEd Order to implement this integration but few public schools have actually integrated Arabic Language and Islamic Values as subjects due to a lack of teachers, textbooks, instructional materials or a validated grading system for assessing student achievement. Clearly, legislating integration is only the first step. DepEd (with assistance from the Australian BEAM project) has struggled to develop an integrated curriculum for ARMM public schools that compresses the hours in order to incorporate both RBEC and madrasah subjects. They have also developed some

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The EQuALLS strategy for improving madrasah education did not just target madrasah students but also madrasah graduates. Madrasah graduates (especially those who attended full-time madaris through the primary or elementary level) may find themselves at a serious disadvantage if they want to continue their education in the formal school system. They face a host of access barriers above and beyond the "usual" access barriers of poverty, opportunity costs, and distance because they also tend to be quite weak in English and Filipino languages. In most cases, a student who completed his madrasah studies and earnestly wants to continue his education in the public school will be woefully behind when it comes to English and Filipino – the two mediums of instruction in the public school system. This inevitably lead to poor performance, frustration, and dropout.

To make matters worse, the public school system does not exactly have an open-door policy of enrollment and admittance. The school administrative system is not equipped or prepared to handle a transfer student from an unaccredited private school. With no recognized academic record and no recognized paperwork, the madrasah graduate will often face a brick wall when trying to transfer to the formal school system. Indeed there are exceptions to this conundrum, and there may well be obscure rules and guidelines that govern a transfer case like the one described above. But that does not deny the reality in Mindanao that most madrasah students (of full-time madaris) have no place to go after graduation. They join the ranks of OSCY that were discussed in the previous section on ALS.50

EQuALLS Interventions in Pilot Madaris

Within this challenging and intriguing context, Creative’s first strategy was to introduce basic education (foundation skills) into 8 pilot madaris. This was not envisioned as an overnight shift from traditional madrasah to state-of-the-art, integrated madrasah. On the contrary, though the madaris operators were all willing to join the experimental effort, they also wanted to take it slow, one step at a time, to assess the communities' reaction and see whether and to what extent a madrasah could integrate secular subjects and promote a Filipino identity while still preserving its Muslim heritage. For this reason, the strategy was to introduce the standard curriculum one grade at a time, starting with Grade 1.

Coupled with the introduction of the standard curriculum, Creative staff organized and engaged in a significant number of workshops and discussion forums which continued and deepened the debate on the best way to improve madrasah education in Muslim Mindanao. Some of these are described in the next section Building Relationships through Consultation, which precedes a more detailed description of the actual interventions and accomplishments in pilot madaris.

50 Of course there are exceptions. Outstanding students may find their way into the formal school system, perhaps where the principal is lenient on the enrollment requirements. Other top students may go on to pursue secondary or tertiary Islamic studies overseas. But it would be a mistake to take comfort in these exceptions. The problem is a very real and pervasive one.
Building Relationships through Consultation

From the first weeks of the project through its final weeks, Creative Associates focused a great deal of energy on participatory consultation with DepEd, DepEd ARMM, and other stakeholders in the madrasah “community” (which is a misnomer as there is substantial disagreement among madrasah operators and others in the Islamic community about change vs. tradition in madaris). Creative consulted widely with national, regional and division officials of DepEd and DepEd ARMM, at a time when each of these institutions was literally in the throes of defining and advocating its views on reforming madrasah education. Consultations were also held with institutions such as the Accrediting Association of Muslim Schools and Colleges, Inc. (AAMSCI), the National Federation of Madaris, and of course with many madaris operators. Throughout the project, Creative maintained close communication with, and provided occasional technical support to, the DepEd’s Undersecretary for Muslim Affairs and the DepEd ARMM Bureau of Madaris.

Two “watershed” moments were realized when Creative organized workshops with madaris operators in Davao City and Iligan City in mid-2005. Each was attended by DepEd personnel, operators of private madaris, and other leaders in the Muslim Education community. The agenda was to understand the requirements of the new Standard Curriculum for Private Madaris and to establish guidelines for its implementation in ARMM madaris. A side agenda was to discuss how private madaris could achieve formal recognition – and eventual accreditation - from DepEd ARMM. Perhaps the most significant accomplishment here is the fact that DepEd (representing the government and “secular” sector) sat for days with madaris operators (representing the private and “sectarian” sector). For the most part, and despite recurrent debates and policy forums in the past, such face-to-face meetings had not taken place in the past. It is a notable accomplishment thanks to the willingness of DepEd ARMM and madaris operators to reach across the divide for the sake of improving education for the children of ARMM. It was also a proud moment for Creative Associates to facilitate discussion among stakeholders who rarely had an opportunity to discuss, let alone agree on, sensitive issues regarding the evolution of Muslim education in Mindanao.²⁵

In May 2006, the EQuALLS project conducted a Strategic Planning Workshop on Madrasah Education in Iligan City. Participants came primarily from DepEd, DepEd ARMM, and private madaris. The agenda was to assess the current state of problems and opportunities in madrasah education. The workshop provided an opportunity for DepEd National to present its evolving Roadmap for Upgrading Muslim Basic Education to DepEd ARMM officials and private madrasah operators. The Roadmap was greeted with the corresponding concern from madaris operators that this could constitute undue state interference leading to the secularization of their community-based madaris. Of interest to all was a discussion about the creation of a special Government-supported Fund for Muslim Education. In the end however, it appears that many private madaris are wondering if the political will exists to transform all the laws, orders and

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²⁵ As a substantive expression of support to private madaris, four DepEd Superintendents who participated in these workshops committed to assign 4 public school teachers to 4 pilot madaris so that the public school teachers could help their ustadz colleagues with the gradual introduction of basic education subjects in the madrasah. This was no small commitment considering the shortage of public school teachers and overcrowding in ARMM public schools.

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pronouncements into real, tangible improvements for the region’s madaris and real opportunities for professional development for the region’s asatidz.

Another key relationship was forged with the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) which was formed in 2001 in response to ongoing peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Likewise, Creative staff engaged with other foreign-funded education initiatives in the ARMM, such as the AusAID-supported BEAM project and the Asia Foundation, both of which have components that support madrasah education, as well the ASCEND Mindanao PPA that also has a madrasah component. Like the In-school Component and the ALS Component, the EQuALLS Madrasah Component did not operate in a vacuum and it was critical to coordinate EQuALLS interventions with other likeminded projects and donors in the region.

Selection of Pilot Madaris

In selecting the pilot madaris, Creative Associates engaged stakeholders in DepEd ARMM and madaris operators. The most important criterion for selection was the willingness of the madrasah operator to cooperate with EQuALLS and to implement the standard curriculum for private madaris. At first, the plan was to start with one pilot madrasah in each school division of ARMM (ARMM has 8 school divisions). After field visits to all 8 divisions on the mainland and islands, it was decided instead to focus the first round entirely in the mainland provinces – with a view to concentrating this small intervention rather than diluting it.

As shown in the Table below, eight pilot madaris were selected, 2 from each school division of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur 1, Lanao del Sur 2, and Marawi City.

Table 19: EQuALLS Pilot Madaris in ARMM, 2005-06

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Madrasah</th>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Division</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ma’had Mahwi Al-Ommiah Al-Irshadie</td>
<td>Sultan Kudarat</td>
<td>Maguindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrasah Datu Manguda Timan</td>
<td>Datu Odin Sinsuat</td>
<td>Maguindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma’ahad Ad-Dawah Al-Islamiah</td>
<td>Balindong</td>
<td>Lanao del Sur 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma’ahad Darul-Uloom Al-Islamie</td>
<td>Tamparan</td>
<td>Lanao del Sur 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma’ahad Tangkal Bayang Al-Islamie</td>
<td>Bayang</td>
<td>Lanao del Sur 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrasah Nurul Huda Al-Islamiah</td>
<td>Malabang</td>
<td>Lanao del Sur 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrasah Amanoddin Mascara Litt’a’lem Ash-shamil</td>
<td>Marawi City</td>
<td>Marawi City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma’had Angoyao Al-Islamie</td>
<td>Marawi City</td>
<td>Marawi City</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total enrolment in Grade 1 during SY 2005-06 was 253 (57% male, 43% female). A map showing the location of pilot madaris is on the following page. A brief profile of each pilot madrasah is contained in Annex 21.

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52 Despite the very interesting and timely achievements of Madrasah Component, it really was a small, pilot intervention in comparison with other EQuALLS interventions. In terms of financial resources, it was 1/20th the size of the In-school Component or the ALS Component. In terms of human resources, there was one Manager and one administrative assistant.
Figure 6: EQuALLS Pilot Madaris (Creative Associates)

- Amanoddin-Mascara ILC Lilod Madaya, Marawi City
- Ma’had Angoyao Al-Islamie Ambolong, Marawi City
- Ma’had Ad’Dawah Al-Islamiah Salipongan, Balindong
- Madrasah Tangkal Bayang Al-Islamiah Tangakal, Bayang
- Madrasah Nurul Huda Al-Islamiah Lalabuan, Malabang
- Ma’had Dar-Al-Uloom Al-Islamiah Lalabuan, Tamparan
- Ma’ahad Mahwill Ommiah Al-Irshadie Limbo, Sultan Kudarat
- Madrasah Datu Manguea Timan, Taviran, Datu Odin Sinsuat

Region IX

Region XII

ARMM
In effect, Creative introduced three interventions in the pilot madaris:

- Improving the learning environment
- Providing textbooks and other supplementary reading/learning materials
- Teacher training

These are basically the same strategies that were introduced by the In-School Component in EQuALLS elementary schools.

Since the madaris are not DepEd schools, there is no *Brigada Eskwela* Program to encourage enrollment and welcome new students. Nevertheless, Creative introduced a similar intervention by providing big Welcome banners for each school in the weeks leading up to June 2005 (most madaris operate on a similar school calendar as the public school system) and a welcome ceremony at the opening of classes. This was also an opportunity for Creative Associates representatives to address the madrasah staff, the students, the parents, and the community at large in order to introduce the USAID EQuALLS project and the objectives of its Madrasah Component.

Some of the pilot madaris already had the equivalent of a PTCA, others did not. Creative made sure that each pilot madrasah organized a team of teachers, madrasah administrators and parents so that there could be adequate communication and decision-making with respect to project interventions. Creative also set in motion a process for each pilot madrasah to apply for DepEd “recognition” through issuance of a Permit to Operate. This is not the same thing as DepEd accreditation, but it is the first step on that journey. By the end of the year, Creative had helped all 8 madaris acquire a Permit to Operate (which required formalized inspections of madrasah facilities and records).

The first task for improving the learning environment, as in the In-School Component, was to assess and prioritize the infrastructural needs of each madrasah. Madrasah owners, teachers, and parents participated in the assessment and the result was a prioritized list of repair materials. EQuALLS provided an in-kind grant of materials assistance up to PhP 50,000 (about $950). In addition to plywood, sheet metal, cement and paint for minor repairs, several madaris also installed toilets. The same fund was also used to procure school bags for incoming Grade 1 students, filled with pencils, pens, crayons, notebooks and other school supplies. A simple raincoat was also tucked into the EQuALLS school bag.

When the next academic year opened in June of 2006, Creative provided a new set of school bags to incoming Grade 1 students, in addition to school desks (the same plastic 2-3 seaters procured by the In-school Component), DepEd-approved textbooks (Grade 1 and 2), and hundreds of supplementary books imported from the US by the BATS PPA. All these donations engendered an extraordinary outpouring of gratitude and goodwill from the teachers, parents and students. While books, bags and desks do not improve the quality of education per se, they certainly raise the level of student/teacher motivation and they can be combined with other quality interventions to improve the overall learning environment and learning outcomes.53 One

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53 Because our task order expired in August 2006, Creative was only able to “launch” the second academic year of the Madrasah intervention but was not able to conduct any further activities, monitoring or TA. In any case, it was...
of the most frequently heard complaints from madrasah operators and teachers is that they have no books: no textbooks, no supplementary books, no reference books. Creative was pleased to provide these essential materials to pilot madaris.54

Along with providing books, bags, desks, and repair materials, Creative planned to conduct teacher training so that madrasah teachers could begin integrating the standard curriculum. It quickly became apparent what a tall order this would be. If public school teachers in ARMM were ill-prepared to teach English, Reading, Math and Science to their pupils, one can imagine the situation with madaris teachers who qualified for their positions through Islamic institutions not TEIs. When it comes to teaching English, Math, and reading, not to mention the skills related to pedagogy, lesson-planning, student assessment, grading, and classroom management, it is safe to say that most madaris teachers have very limited proficiency.55 Fortunately, 4 of our pilot madaris had been assigned a public school teacher to assist with the Grade 1 RBEC introduction. Unfortunately, those 4 teachers had the same low levels of proficiency as their madrasah peers.

Creative staff pondered for some time about how to prepare madrasah teachers to introduce the standard curriculum. When you think about it, the entire DepEd strategy of upgrading basic education in madaris and introducing a standard curriculum for private madaris is utterly dependent on the madrasah teachers’ proficiency in those subjects and on their capacity to teach those foundation skills to their pupils. What madrasah teachers need from DepEd and/or donor agencies is a substantial and long-term commitment to their professional development as teachers. In order for the standard curriculum to work, there is really no shortcut or magic bullet that would avoid this essential requirement.

However Creative Associates, with its 10-month EQuALLS task order (and later 12-month extension) had to set its sights on more feasible objectives and more realistic results with respect to the 8 pilot madaris. Thus, once again looking to existing DepEd models and approaches,

interesting to note that only 75% of the Grade 1 madrasah students enrolled in Grade 2 during the next academic year. While the 25% “dropout” rate was alarming at first, we received a variety of explanations ranging from poverty to conflict-related disruption (particularly in Lanao del Sur). Another reason given by some madaris was that the students had not dropped-out but rather their parents had decided to transfer them to a local public school instead of enrolling them again in madrasah.

54 Donations of this sort are always greeted with sincere appreciation. However there is a critical concern that lies behind the gracious smiles of gratitude. Many asatidz, parents and others are quite concerned about the “insensitivity” of DepEd-approved textbooks and books imported from the west. DepEd ARMM officials are even more vociferous on this topic, and never fail to raise the concern at every meeting, workshop or forum. While the slights may not be intentional, it is easy to find examples of insensitivity in almost any Filipino textbook, from drawings that “show too much” of a woman’s body to sweeping statements about Filipino identity that ignore or snub the Filipino Muslims. The solution is simple of course: DepEd ARMM needs to re-write all the textbooks used in ARMM (it already has the legal mandate to do so enshrined in the Organic Act and MMAA No. 14). What it does not have, even with a generous stretch of the imagination, is the financial, technical, and human resources to do so. For the meantime, the choice is between DepEd National textbooks or no textbooks at all, BATS supplementary books or no supplementary books at all. The next phase of USAID EQuALLS may want to explore the possibility of helping DepEd ARMM re-write or contextualize its textbooks, at least those that relate to the Intermediate Results of improving foundation skills in English, Math and Science at the elementary level.

55 Diagnostic Testing of madrasah teachers was not part of the work plan. Creative did however invite a few madaris teachers to participate in the diagnostic testing process when it was offered to public school teachers. The results confirmed that their proficiency in English and Math was alarmingly low.
Creative offered asatidz a 23-day training in English language proficiency and pedagogy called Language Enhancement and Pedagogy (LEaP). LEaP had been designed by DepEd in association with the AusAID BEAM project in 2005. The BEAM project shared its training curriculum, training materials, and even its trainers with Creative Associates in a commendable display of inter-project collaboration.

The EQuALLS-supported LEaP training was conducted in Cotabato City in June-July 2006, just before the conclusion of Creative Associates' task order. The 20 asatidz who participated evaluated the training very highly, and trainers noted a real difference in the asatidz’ English fluency after the intensive “English immersion” program. Another EQuALLS PPA, ASCEND Mindanao, also sent asatidz from its pilot madaris to a BEAM-supported LEaP training in August of 2005.

Creative Associates also invited madrasah participants to most of the trainings it offered to school teachers in the In-school component, e.g. INSET-English and INSET-Math. Although these activities were not targeted to asatidz, nor were they followed-up or supported by EQuALLS at the madrasah level, the asatidz were always happy to broaden their horizons and learn some new things (not to mention socialize with their In-school counterparts) at EQuALLS INSET trainings.

A new player with respect to the professional development of asatidz is the Institute for Training and Development (ITD), which in 2005 received a grant from the US Department of State to select 28 asatidz and madrasah operators for a study visit to the US to compare different forms of private and religious education. Creative met with a number of times in Manila and Mindanao with ITD representatives to link their selection of participants with Creative’s pilot madaris. Several asatidz from pilot madaris were ultimately selected as participants and Creative’s Coordinator for ALS, a Muslim, was also invited to participate in the study visit as a resource person and interpreter.

BEAM had a slightly different intent when it helped DepEd design LEaP. DepEd and BEAM were preparing asatidz to teach Islamic Values and Arabic Language in the public schools. While asatidz had plenty of proficiency in those two subjects, it was felt that they could not function well in the public school environment without improved skills in English language and public school pedagogical methods. LEaP was designed to train asatidz in English proficiency and pedagogy so that they could teach in public schools – but the model suited the objectives of EQuALLS just fine even though EQuALLS’ intention was to train asatidz to teach RBEC subjects inside their own madaris.

At the field level, BEAM and EQuALLS often collaborated, formally and informally. For example, Creative shared its Diagnostic Testing technology with BEAM and tested a number of teachers from BEAM-supported schools. In fact, the objectives of EQuALLS and BEAM are very similar, and BEAM’s geographic targets are about 70% overlapping with those of EQuALLS. Coordination and collaboration are thus quite essential to avoid duplication of effort and/or confusion among stakeholders. In the coming years, the BEAM project is embarking on an ambitious plan to assist DepEd in the development and implementation of long-term professional development of asatidz including an accelerated teacher training course that would provide the same level of certification as a TEI. USAID may wish to explore further collaboration with the BEAM project and its new Expanded Support to Muslim Education Component.

The LEaP training design consists of four (4) modules: The first two modules use an immersion approach and focus on developing listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The third module focuses on strengthening skills in lesson planning and pedagogy. The fourth module focuses on student assessment, test construction, and classroom management.
Bridging Program for MadrasahCompleters

While the strategies described above were all related to improving the quality of madrasah education, the second major strategy was to explore ways to develop "bridging" mechanisms for madrasah completers so that they could continue their education by entering the formal school system at an age-appropriate level. Since the standard curriculum will take some time to take hold in the madaris, there are still hundreds or thousands of madaris students who will complete their madrasah studies without acquiring a basic education with little hope for continuing their education in the formal system.

As discussed earlier, madrasah completers who graduate from full-time, unaccredited madaris are often left with very limited options for continuing their education. They may be able to continue their Islamic studies elsewhere, but not every madrasah graduate wants to pursue that option. Many want to get a basic education, acquire some marketable skills, and get a good job in the public or private sector. But madrasah completers (especially those that attended full-time madaris) often find themselves at a serious disadvantage and may face a host of access barriers above and beyond the usual access barriers of poverty, opportunity costs, and distance because of their weak English and Filipino skills — the two languages of instruction in public school. It is also difficult to transfer into the formal system if one has no academic records and no paperwork from a previously-attended Dep-Ed accredited school. Hence the need to devise one or more bridging mechanisms for madrasah graduates, without which they would most likely join the ranks of OSCY.

Two approaches were developed with regard to bridging, but only one was pursued. The first approach was to develop an intensive review and remediation class for madrasah completers as a prelude to enrolling in formal school. The idea was to utilize existing flexible DepEd materials from the ALS program as well as the IMPACT and EASE programs, alongside a newly-designed TOT that would prepare the trainer (preferably an Arabic speaking, Muslim teacher from the public school system) to handle the unique remedial needs of this student population. After the class, participants would take the Philippines Education Placement Test (PEPT) to assess their skills and place them at an appropriate grade-level (as well as provide the key administrative "paperwork", i.e. the PEPT result card, which opens the door into the formal school bureaucracy and administration.

The plan had its merits, but ran into a number of obstacles the most important of which was the time required to design and deliver a customized curriculum that would not only prepare madrasah completers for the PEPT but also focus on specific areas of remediation such as English and Filipino literacy. Although DepEd ARMM and USAID supported the strategy in principle, there was a lack of consensus on what remediation would be needed, and no data to support any hypothesis. There is a real shortage of data on all aspects of the madrasah system and this has only exacerbated the apprehension on both sides regarding standardization, mainstreaming and/or secularization. Ultimately DepEd ARMM and USAID decided that there was insufficient time to conduct an adequate needs assessment, develop a responsive PEPT review course, train the trainers and conduct the classes all in well under a year's time. There was concern among EQuALLS staff as well as USAID and DepEd colleagues that a hurried design and a rushed delivery could result in a poor outcome (e.g. participants performing poorly...
on the PEPT and not willing, naturally, to enter the school system at a grade-level far below their age-cohort) ultimately spelling disillusionment for the participants and bad publicity for EQuALLS and DepEd. With that disturbing scenario in mind, it was decided to delay further consideration of the PEPT Review approach until the second phase of EQuALLS when the idea could be properly fleshed-out, adequate data could be collected and analyzed, and the pilot review course could be properly designed and conducted.59

Creative found a second madrasah bridging strategy in a rather obvious place, right next door in the ALS Component. While it is technically incorrect to label madrasah completers as dropouts or OSCY, their condition is quite similar to the thousands of OSCY that were lining up to participate in EQuALLS ALS classes. Most ALS participants, at least the younger ones, were school dropouts looking to ALS as an “accelerated learning” opportunity which could guide them back into the formal school system. Madrasah completers essentially have the same objective, looking to continue their studies by enrolling in the formal school system. In theory ALS could provide a convenient bridge for both OSCY and madrasah completers. But the ALS had never been used or applied in this way.

To test the approach on a limited scale, Creative decided not to offer a customized ALS for madrasah completers but rather to recruit madrasah completers into regular EQuALLS ALS classes and see how they fared. Minimal adjustments or refinements were made on behalf of the madrasah cohort, though several ALS service providers (particularly the Muslim NGOs) committed to provide madrasah completers with special academic counseling, with tutoring, and with assistance with school registration when the time came. The target was to reach out to 500 madrasah completers starting with the ALS cycle of April-November 2006. Table 20 shows a summary of targets and accomplishments in the EQuALLS madrasah component.

Through intensive advocacy and social mobilization, Creative and its NGO partners succeeded in recruiting over 1,000 madrasah completers who enrolled in ALS classes in April 2006. Though Creative’s task order ended in August, it is hoped that USAID will find the results of the experiment (e.g. How many completed the ALS program? How many actually sat for the PEPT? How many successfully enrolled in school? What other factors contributed to their success or failure in the ALS?) useful in pursuing this innovative bridging approach for madrasah completers.

59 A “short-course” PEPT review may be unrealistic. It may be that the review class should be 8-10 months long, more like a bridging year between madrasah and formal school.
### Summary of Madrasah Targets and Accomplishments

**Table 20: Madrasah Targets and Actual Accomplishments, 2005-06**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Accomplishment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve the learning environment in pilot madaris</td>
<td>No. of pilot madaris receiving materials assistance for infrastructural improvement</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of pilo-textbooks delivered to pilot madaris</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of supplementary books delivered to pilot madaris</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support the introduction of basic education and foundation skills by</td>
<td>No. of asatidz and administrators trained</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training asatidz and madaris administrators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide assistance in the development of madrasah education policies and</td>
<td>Roadmap for Upgrading Muslim Basic Education in ARMM</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Roadmap was approved by DepEd(^6^1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accreditation criteria for madaris</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft accreditation criteria and guidelines for private madaris</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A(^6^2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot a bridging program for madrasah completers who want to continue</td>
<td>No. of madaris completers enrolled in a bridging program</td>
<td>500(^6^3)</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their education in public school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^6^0\) Scope of Work identified the target as 8 pilot madaris in year 1 plus 6 more in year 2. However, USAID later advised not to start with the second round of pilot madaris in Year 2 (see Quarterly Report #6).

\(^6^1\) EQuALLS TA was provided to this DepEd effort. It should not in any way be construed as an EQuALLS product as it is the result of intensive DepEd effort with TA from EQuALLS, SEAMEO INNOTECH, BEAM, and others.

\(^6^2\) While Creative did not have time to push through any final madrasah policies or final accreditation guidelines, the Strategic Planning Workshop (May, 2006) and the AAMSCI Accreditation Workshop (June 2006) were important processes toward those ends.

\(^6^3\) In the work plan, we proposed a two-pronged strategy targeting a total of 700 madrasah completers i.e. an intensive PEPT review and preparation class (for 200 learners) and an ALS program for 500 madrasah completers. After further consideration and consultation with DepEd ARMM (see Quarterly Report #6) USAID eliminated the first activity and maintained only the second.
Although the scope and scale of EQuALLS activities in the madrasah sector were smaller when compared with the In-school and ALS component, it is not really a valid comparison. The In-school and ALS components adapted, refined, and expanded DepEd models that had not yet been introduced in Muslim Mindanao or had only been implemented to a very limited extent. The madrasah component faced a different challenge. Not only were there no existing, proven models of integrating madrasah education with basic education but on the contrary there was heated debate and even protest in some corners regarding the appropriateness of developing such approaches. The EQuALLS madrasah component wisely navigated a path that was supportive of the DepEd ARMM Bureau of Madaris, the DepEd National Undersecretary for Muslim Affairs, the (private) Accrediting Association of Muslim Schools and Colleges, Inc., and perhaps most importantly the owners and operators of private madaris and their constituent communities. It is recommended that the EQuALLS project, in future years, continue to follow this path: deepening the engagement with the pilot madaris and expanding to new pilot madaris, extending materials assistance (infrastructure, desks, textbooks and other teaching/learning materials), expanding and enriching the introduction of DepEd’s standard curriculum coupled with an intensive commitment to long-term teacher training and professional development, and building positive mutually-respectful relationships while building capacity.