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# Innovations for Accountable and Responsive Local Governance

Afghanistan  
Sub-National Governance Study Paper No. 1

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## A. Acronyms and Abbreviations

ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
APRP	Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme
ASGP	Afghanistan Subnational Governance Programme
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ASOP	Afghan Social Outreach Programme
BRAC	An international NGO based in Bangladesh
CBRF	Capacity Building Reform Facility
CDC	Community Development Council
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor
DCC	District Coordination Council
DDA	District Development Assembly
DfID	Department for International Development
DG	District Governor
DoLSA	Department of Labor and Social Affairs
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MP	Member of Parliament
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NABDP	National Area Based Development Programme
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPP	National Priority Programme
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
PC	Provincial Council
PDC	Provincial Development Committee
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RAMP-UP	Regional Afghan Municipality Programme for Urban Population
SNG	Sub-National Governance (or Sub-National Government)
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WADAN	Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan

## B. Executive Summary

This study discusses a set of innovations introduced in recent years at sub-national level, aimed at improving local government accountability and service delivery in Afghanistan. It highlights “good fit” innovations that are tailored to the specific situations in individual Afghan regions or communities, and considers whether there is potential to replicate them elsewhere in the country. The study also provides contextual information about the enabling factors necessary for implementing such innovative practices, as well as challenges faced when doing so, given the complex and constrained operating environment.

This study was conducted at the request of the Sub-National Governance and Development Unit of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) country office in Afghanistan, as input for the further elaboration and operationalization of UNDP’s Sub-National Governance and Development Strategy (SNGDS) for Afghanistan. The focus of this strategy is on building responsive and accountable sub-national state institutions, while improving civil society capacity to hold government accountable. Using a multi-dimensional conceptual framework (discussed briefly below and explained in detail in the next section of this report), the study identified eight promising good-fit approaches:

- **Social auditing in local communities** (Balkh and Herat);
- **Training local *maliks* as good governance partners** (Nangarhar);
- **Bringing community-based schools to rural communities** (Herat);
- **Improving knowledge-sharing through provincial governance working groups** (Herat);
- **Strengthening local governance coordination within districts** (Kunar);
- **Generating employment by supporting local entrepreneurship and training programmes** (Balkh);
- **Establishing local recruitment centers** (Herat); and
- **Partnering with the private sector to improve women’s access to markets** (Laghman).

The study seeks to identify “good-fit” practices that are innovative and uniquely adapted to the contextual realities in Afghanistan, rather than the more typical “best practice” or “good practice” approach. Although the broad goals of good governance such as transparency, accountability, equity, and efficiency are universal, the specific means that can be employed to achieve these goals tend to vary across provinces. The term “innovative” in this context does not imply a first-time approach to sub-national governance worldwide, but rather aims to identify approaches that have not been tested successfully before in Afghanistan—and are thus innovative in comparison with past practice in this specific country context of post-conflict development. Indeed, most good-fit practices identified in this study have been implemented in other developing countries—in most cases, including India, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

Research was conducted over a period of two months in late 2012 in six provinces (Balkh, Herat, Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar, and Samangan). These provinces were selected for their different economic situations and levels of development, as well as logistical practicality in terms of relative safety, authorized UN travel modes, and quick access for the research team given the duration of the study. Building on a literature review, information was collected by

conducting in-person field interviews with provincial, district, and municipal representatives and officials from the six provinces, relevant GIRoA ministries and departments, international donor programmes and projects, and selected development partners in Kabul and the provinces. Given the paucity of quantitative data, interviews focused on qualitative accounts and *ad hoc* assessments by persons interviewed for this study.

Potential good-fit innovations were assessed, first, according to where they fit among the three main dimensions of governance (political **authority**; governance **capacity**; and **legitimacy**). Next, in order to identify which constituted innovative good-fit approaches within the conceptual framework of this study and assess whether they may be potentially replicable in other provinces, the study used six main evaluation criteria:

- **Relevance** to improving sub-national governance and service delivery;
- **Appropriateness** given the local political, social, and cultural context;
- **Efficiency** in utilizing available technical and financial resources;
- **Effectiveness** in quickly providing necessary public services;
- **Impact** in terms of improving people's lives and access to government; and
- **Sustainability** of initiatives in the long run.

## KEY FINDINGS

### **Governance Challenges at the Sub-National Level:** *Minimal Political Authority, Weak Governance Capacity, and Low Public Legitimacy*

- A brief literature review suggested that existing sub-national governance institutions in Afghanistan are characterized by inadequate representation and poor accountability, as well as weak service delivery performance; this was corroborated through the interview process. These challenges are primarily a result of **minimal official authority** at the local levels mainly due to strong centralization of power and authority in Kabul, **weak governance capacity** given pervasive deficits in technical expertise, and **limited control over budgetary resources** at the sub-national levels. These conditions have resulted in the inability of local governments to responsibly represent the people or to deliver necessary public services such as health, education, water, sanitation, and social protection efficiently and equitably. Consequently, formal local governance institutions generally have **low public legitimacy** within communities.

### **Enabling Factors for Governance Innovations:** *State/Non-State Institutional Partnerships, Strong Leadership Committed to Public Service, and Significant Donor Support*

- **State-Non State Institutional Partnerships:** Given the weak sub-national institutional capacity, public-private partnerships are increasingly stepping in to compensate for the governance gap in local communities. They center around collaboration between formal governance institutions and informal or traditional bodies, as well as small businesses and other private sector actors, local *shuras* or *jirgas*, NGOs, CSOs, and various donors, where *de jure* and *de facto* authority combine with varying levels of capacity and legitimacy to facilitate better delivery of and access to public services.
- **Strong Leadership Committed to Public Service:** There is a link between the community's willingness to participate as a proactive actor in service delivery, area development, or demanding good governance with the prevalence of strong leaders, such

as provincial and district governors and/or educated *shuras* of elders, mullahs, and *maliks* and other respected community members, be it in the form of an enterprising DDA chair in Dehdadi or a dedicated NGO leader in Jalalabad. It also remains especially critical for a good-fit approach to have the buy-in of traditional elites and the respective *shuras* as a way of influencing public opinion to participate actively in the initiative.

- **Significant Donor Support:** Last, and perhaps most important given the current national political context and resource constraints, long-term support from donor partners is critical for creating an environment conducive for governance innovations to flourish. Long-term commitment from donors will heavily impact each innovation's potential for long-term sustainability. Without the availability of donor resources, including technical expertise and financial support during the inception phase of programmes, almost none of the good-fit approaches would be possible.

**Issues to Consider:** *Need to Contextualize Sub-national Governance Initiatives, Address Monitoring Challenges at Local Levels, Focus on Community-Centric Approaches that Facilitate Citizen Ownership, and Importance of Knowledge-Sharing Mechanisms that can Identify Good-Fit Innovations*

- **Need to Contextualize Sub-national Governance Initiatives:** Over the last 30-odd years, different types of governance models have been applied in Afghanistan, resulting in a wide variation of *de facto* authority, governance capacity, and public expectations across the country at local levels. These variations are affected not just by ethnographical considerations, but also by the historical levels of development (urban vs. rural) and political dynamics within each province. Such factors have created extremely diverse political environments within which current sub-national governance programmes are attempting to build local capacity and deliver key services. The international donor community has yet to fully grasp the nuances of these variations and how they impact the efficacy of donor assistance at the sub-national level. Under these circumstances, it remains extremely challenging to assess whether a good-fit approach that works in province A will be effective in province B. It thus remains critical to contextualize sub-national governance initiatives to ensure their relevance, appropriateness, efficacy, and efficiency in target communities.
- **Address Monitoring Challenges at Local Levels:** In most provinces there is limited monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of ongoing governance capacity-building and service delivery initiatives. Much of the current monitoring apparatus at the provincial, district, and municipal levels suffers from significant degrees of overlap across the main stakeholders, with little to no information sharing taking place across various monitoring teams. In addition, most M&E activities face significant pressure of providing quick-impact results for contributing donor partners. The institutional memories of local practitioners with years of experience in testing innovations at the sub-national level are often not tapped enough to capitalize on their learning experiments, resulting in a cyclical reinventing of the wheel as posts are filled with new staff. In addition, insufficient data are collected about various ongoing programmes, making it nearly impossible to quantifiably verify the positive impact of these programs over a relatively limited period of time.
- **Focus on Community-Centric Approaches that Facilitate Citizen Ownership:** In combination with strong local leadership, more citizen-centric approaches play a pivotal role in the success of innovations for good governance and proactive change. Strong leadership allows for greater commitment towards development progress and a more hands-on sense of ownership of delivered services and infrastructure. In addition, civic-minded leaders are

more likely to mobilize their communities to increase awareness of their basic right to improved and responsive public services and hold government more accountable.

- **Importance of Knowledge-Sharing Mechanisms that Can Identify Good-fit Innovations:** In order to devise effective strategies to strengthen sub-national governance in Afghanistan, it is critical to periodically assess and map existing governance structures, both formal and informal, and institutionalize information sharing among sub-national governance practitioners. The level and effectiveness of information sharing and coordination between the GIRoA, international development partners, and the various sub-national governance programmes remains quite variable. Part of the problem is a lack of on-the-ground visibility of what is working well in different provinces, municipalities, and districts and lessons learned from past efforts. Without systematic ways to collect information and share key lessons learned across sectors, regions, and among practitioners, any policy or strategy formulated in Kabul will most likely be based primarily on *ad hoc* reporting, which does not generally capture emerging good practices across provinces.

## LIMITATIONS

The good-fit innovations highlighted in this report are by no means an exhaustive list of the innovative approaches being tested and implemented across Afghanistan to improve local governance. With imperfect monitoring and information-sharing, the identification of appropriate activities was challenging, especially in a limited period of time. In addition, some governance approaches, such as AKDN's block grant scheme or MRRD/NABDP's district information centers, would need to be in effect for a longer period of time in order to evaluate their impact on accountability and public welfare. Nor does the study imply that all the approaches identified are without certain technical flaws in design and implementation, if analyzed in a best-case scenario context. However, given the political and social environment and the operational challenges in each province, they are a sample of the types of contextual good-fit practices that can help improve sub-national governance in local communities.

Given the limited information base, it is difficult to assess the replicability of each approach in other provinces—especially for insecure provinces. A significantly larger sample size of innovative practices captured over a longer time frame would help to assess more fully the impact and replicability of enabling conditions in one province with existing conditions in other areas. The approaches highlighted above do, however, demonstrate the *potential* for duplication and scaling up of activities in other provinces with similar demographic, political, social, and economic environments and with comparable levels of technical and financial support given the current 'post-conflict' context being witnessed in Afghanistan.

## C. Introduction

### 1. Research Objectives

The UNDP country office in Afghanistan recently prepared a Sub-National Governance and Development Strategy (SNGDS) to provide a strategic framework for future policy and programming support to Afghanistan in this crucial area. The strategy has two broad areas of focus:

**Pillar A – Building capable and accountable sub-national government Institutions for service delivery.** This pillar aims to promote the capacities of sub-national executive institutions at Provincial, District and Municipal levels to provide services in an accountable, inclusive, responsive manner, while ensuring more involvement of women.<sup>1</sup> It may be viewed as promoting the “supply” of good, conflict-sensitive local governance and accountable service delivery.

**Pillar B – Empowering the population, civil society, and sub-national elected bodies to hold sub-national governments accountable, ensuring stabilization, peace-building, and inclusion.** This pillar aims to ensure that the population, representative bodies, and civil society organizations have the ability to engage with, influence, and hold sub-national government institutions accountable for the effectiveness, quality, and equity of public service delivery. This pillar will seek to ensure that marginalized and vulnerable groups take part in prioritizing and monitoring service delivery. It may be viewed as promoting the “demand” for good local governance and accountable service delivery.

As part of the process of designing an operational program for Pillar A, UNDP has had a number of studies conducted to identify experience with the operation of sub-national governance and service delivery institutions, their interaction with the central government, and possible ways to improve government accountability, its responsiveness to citizens' needs, and its ability to manage conflicts at the local level.

This particular study was intended to identify and provide a better understanding of recent innovations that have proven to be effective in improving sub-national governance and service delivery. It was expected that some such innovations would be in support of formal local institutions, implemented as parts of various local, regional, and national programmes (such as the National Solidarity Program (NSP), or the UNDP-supported Afghanistan Subnational Governance Programme (ASGP) and National Area Based Development Programme (NABDP)). Others might have been introduced by traditional or informal local bodies, such as councils and *shuras* or *jirgas*, or by NGOs and CSOs at local levels.

Against this background, the study was designed to address two purposes: (i) to examine formal, semi-official, and informal governance practices that have proven to be innovative, “good-fit” solutions for improving accountability and service delivery at the local levels; and (ii) to explore the factors that make such innovations effective, given the complicated and diverse political and social contexts in various parts of Afghanistan.

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<sup>1</sup> These objectives also apply at the national level, insofar as central government institutions are involved in facilitating sub-national governance and service delivery.



## 2. Methodology

The emphasis is on “good-fit” practices that are innovative and uniquely adapted to the contextual realities in Afghanistan, rather than the more typical “best practice” or “good practice” approach.<sup>2</sup> Although the broad goals of good governance such as transparency, accountability, equity, and efficiency are universal, the specific means that can be employed to achieve these goals tend to vary across provinces. An in-depth understanding of the historical, political, institutional, and other on-the-ground realities of each province is essential before deciding upon the strategies and means for local governance reform. For instance, what may work well in Balkh province may not be as successful in Nangarhar, given the complex geopolitical dynamics and institutional realities of each province. In this sense, “best” or “good” practices, however well chosen, may nevertheless be considered too much of a “one-size-fits-all” approach.

This study sought to gain an understanding of the various formal and semi-official sub-national governance programmes, along with their interactions with informal governance mechanisms, at the provincial, district, and municipal levels. In each province, interviews focused on members of provincial, municipal, and district administrations, provincial councils, members of the DDA, and provincial and district line departments, as well as other key actors such as civil society organizations and NGOs. In Kabul, the study interviewed representatives of key donor programmes and NGOs focusing on sub-national governance capacity-building. Given the SNGDS focus on provinces, districts, and municipalities, the study did not include members of the CDCs (although it did interact with organizations that work extensively with CDCs, such as UN-Habitat). In addition, due to time and security constraints, the study reached out to CSOs that work closely with stakeholders such as *ulemas* and the commanders of armed groups, in place of corresponding direct, one-on-one interviews.

The primary method used for collecting information was semi-structured interviews in Kabul and selected provinces, to identify and solicit feedback about potential innovative good-fit practices. Interviews covered a series of designated topics based on three governance dimensions (authority-capacity-legitimacy) and six evaluation criteria (relevance, appropriateness, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability) for each interview. The interviews were conducted in a flexible manner, leaving room for interviewees to discuss other issues they deemed relevant for accountable governance and service delivery. Where possible, information collected through interviews was informally verified with relevant implementing partners. Most interviews were conducted in Dari or Pashtu, and translated into English by the national consultant.

**Site Selection.** Provinces were selected to ensure inclusion of both secure and insecure areas that were known to possess some examples of success stories, while also reflecting varying socio-economic conditions and levels of development. In addition, logistical practicality in terms of relative safety, authorized UN travel modes, and quick access for the research team affected site selection. Feedback was sought from the UNDP sub-national governance team, peer reviewers, and donor/NGO partners to identify provinces with emerging success stories for sub-national governance. Based on these considerations, the on-site field interviews focused on six provinces—Balkh, Samangan, Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar, and Herat.

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<sup>2</sup> Here, the term “innovative” does not imply a first-time approach to sub-national governance worldwide, but rather aims to identify approaches that have not been successfully tested before in Afghanistan at the local level. Indeed, most good-fit practices identified in this study have been implemented in other developing countries, including India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. However, many have been introduced in Afghanistan for the first time, rendering them innovative in this specific context of post-conflict development in comparison to past practices.

**Conceptual Framework: Key Dimensions of Governance.** The study sought to identify innovative practices within the conceptual framework of three main governance dimensions considered relevant for state-building in fragile, conflict-affected environments such as Afghanistan:

- Strengthening **Political Authority**
- Building **Governance Capacity**
- Improving **Public Legitimacy**

**Figure 1: Criteria for Assessment of Sub-National Governance Practices/Programmes**

Key Governance Dimensions	Aspects of Particular Relevance
Strengthening Political Authority	Political representation
	Public administration and decentralization
	Sufficient financial resources and stable funding sources
Building Institutional Capacity	Technical capacity-building to fulfill service delivery role
	Simplification and harmonization of rules, regulations, and procedures
	Fiscal management of funds and costs of coverage
	Development results, including cross-cutting issues
Improving Public Legitimacy	Responsiveness to local needs and priorities
	Public willingness to use mechanism
	Improvements in trust in government

The three key governance dimensions – **political authority**, **governance capacity**, and **public legitimacy** – when considered together, highlight the centrality of GIROA and donor/ NGO efforts focused on state-building activities at the national and sub-national levels. These efforts include improving governance practices in the country and its disparate (secure and insecure) provinces and building or strengthening the political and economic structures necessary to provide public services in a timely, accountable, and sustainable manner while responsibly engendering and maintaining public trust. The aspects of particular relevance to this study are summarized in Figure 1, and discussed further below.

*Political authority* is defined as the ability of the state to project its political power over all its sovereign territory, to reach all citizens regardless of their location, to maintain law and order, and to protect its citizens from predation and violence. It may also be seen as the ability of the laws and rules of the state to trump all other laws and rules. Customarily “authority” is used to mean legal (formal or *de jure*) authority; however, given the typical difficulty of establishing and enforcing this in a fragile, conflict-affected context, here it refers more to the actual exercise of authority, regardless of its legal source.<sup>3</sup> This is a particularly important distinction in Afghanistan, where *de facto* authority, such as that of traditional and informal institutions, often plays a stronger role than formal or *de jure* authority at the sub-national level. For the purpose of this study, given that the provincial government’s interaction with the security and justice sectors

<sup>3</sup> World Bank. *Guidance for Supporting State-Building in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States: A Tool-Kit*. Washington, DC: July 2012 (Hereafter referred to as World Bank, FCS State-Building Tool-Kit). For more information, please refer to <http://go.worldbank.org/9BKWHLH3A0>.

still needs clarification, political authority focuses on factors such as inclusive representation and control over public administration, as well as aspects of financial management.

*Institutional capacity* is the ability of the state to deliver or procure goods and services, design and implement policies, provide infrastructure, collect revenue, dispense justice, and maintain an environment conducive to private sector development. An institution has capacity when it can identify, plan, prioritize, implement, monitor, and learn from specific courses of action; mobilize and deploy resources (assets, people, money, and information); and discipline a heavily constrained system to pursue agreed objectives.<sup>4</sup> This study paid attention to a number of factors that indicate improved sub-national governance capacity, including technical capacity to fulfill specific service delivery roles; simplification, and harmonization of rules, regulations, and procedures; costs, overheads, and coverage; and development results, especially for cross-cutting issues such as gender mainstreaming. At present, there are significant weaknesses in both sub-national institutional capacity and related capacity-building efforts, with high levels of interim technical capacity substitution via foreign assistance to fill gaps in the delivery of necessary public services.

*Public legitimacy* is based on citizens' perceptions—of whether they feel the government has the right to govern, and whether they trust it. These cannot be dictated, but must be earned. Legitimacy can arise from sources such as how well the government is able to deliver necessary public services, whether it can maintain stability and security, how the provincial/district governors acquired power, and whether the given sub-national institutions have a process of dialogue and engagement of the public (including ethnic/excluded minorities) in policy implementation and service delivery choices.<sup>5</sup> Views of legitimacy are subject to change based on performance and perceptions and are very much shaped by local cultures, values, and experiences. For the purposes of this study, key legitimacy factors include government responsiveness to local needs and priorities, public willingness to use government mechanisms, and improvements in public trust in government.

**Evaluation Criteria.** In order to identify which sub-national governance practices constitute innovative good-fit approaches within the framework provided above and to further classify such practices into those that may be potentially replicable in other provinces, the study used six main evaluation criteria, as illustrated in Figure 2:<sup>6</sup>

- **Relevance** to improving sub-national governance and service delivery;
- **Appropriateness** given the local political, social, and cultural context;
- **Efficiency** in utilizing available technical and financial resources;
- **Effectiveness** in quickly providing necessary public services;
- **Impact** in terms of improving people's lives and access to government; and
- **Sustainability** of initiatives in the long run.

*Relevance* concerns the extent to which the selected initiative's intended outputs and outcomes are consistent with GIRoA's national and local policies and priorities. This criterion also considers the extent to which the initiative is responsive to development needs and GIRoA and donor goals in the specific area, taking into account the degree of congruence between what GIRoA and development partners perceive as being needed in the given local community and the reality of what is actually needed from the perspective of the intended beneficiaries.

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<sup>4</sup> World Bank, FCS State-Building Tool-Kit.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, FCS State-Building Tool-Kit.

<sup>6</sup> The study referenced the UNDP 2009 Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation for Development Results to help craft the evaluation criteria.

*Appropriateness* examines the extent of cultural acceptance as well as the feasibility of the activities or methods of delivery. It takes the local context into consideration while evaluating the utility of the activity in the targeted community. For instance, an initiative may be relevant since it addresses a need that the local stakeholders perceive to be important, but it may be completely inappropriate for that community because the method of delivery is incongruent with the culture or not feasible given geographic or other contextual realities.

*Efficiency* measures how resources such as donor funds, technical expertise, and time are being used to implement the initiative. An initiative is efficient when it uses resources appropriately and economically to produce the desired outputs. The application of this criterion can be challenging in conflict-affected environments since donor-funded initiatives do not always lend themselves to conventional efficiency indicators. In the Afghan context, given the paucity of reliable quantitative data, contextual improvements in using very limited resources to address the given community needs were taken into consideration.

*Effectiveness* considers the extent to which the initiative's intended outputs and outcomes are achieved. This criterion was difficult to measure for innovations that are still gradually gaining traction within various communities. The study focused on positive outcomes in the short-term to measure success so far, recognizing that long-term progress depends much on the sustainability of these approaches.

*Impact* refers to changes in human development and people's well-being that are brought about by an initiative, directly or indirectly. Even in the best of circumstances, this criterion may pose challenges in complex, conflict-affected setting with uncertain institutional arrangements and many actors, where it can be very difficult to assess whether the benefits experienced by the local population can truly be attributed to a particular initiative, or to some other factor. It is especially difficult to assess attributable impact in the absence of reliable data or M&E systems, as is typically the case in Afghanistan. The research team by evaluated each innovation against this criterion in comparison with conditions existing before the initiative was implemented, to provide relevant perspective.

*Sustainability* reflects the extent to which the benefits gained from the initiative are likely to continue, particularly in the event that international donor assistance slows or comes to an end after the 2014 transition. Assessing sustainability involves evaluating the capacity of key national stakeholders and sub-national institutions to support the initiative with financial and technical expertise as well as existing policy and regulatory frameworks. This criterion proved to be the most challenging of all, because almost all the practices that were identified as possible good-fit innovations depend heavily on donor assistance with little to no strategic clarity on how, or if at all, sub-national institutions could take over delivery in the long run.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This criterion was nevertheless kept in the evaluation matrix, because sustainability of a given development approach in a conflict-affected environment is a key factor in determining whether it can transition from being a *good fit (for now, i.e. short-term)* innovation to a *good practice* in the long run.

**Figure 2: Evaluation Matrix**

Key Governance Dimensions	Relevance	Appropriateness	Efficiency	Effectiveness	Impact	Sustainability
Strengthening Political Authority						
Building Institutional Capacity						
Improving Public Legitimacy						

**Limitations.** It is challenging to conduct this type of research within the operating environment currently prevailing in Afghanistan. Given the qualitative nature of this study, all responses were subject to perception and subjectivity. Respondents had varying institutional affiliations—with GIRoA (at national and local levels), international donors and foreign NGOs, local CSOs, or local communities—and differing perspectives and attitudes, which greatly influenced perceptions of success and its casual factors. Since the interviews were purposefully configured as semi-structured and the available pool of innovations in Afghanistan was relatively small, it is difficult to identify definitively the drivers of successful innovations. In addition, security and logistical constraints in most provinces restricted the geographical selection of interview sites. A majority of interviews had to be conducted in provincial capitals, which tend to have a higher number of trained local officials, better informed civil society representatives, and NGOs with better access to resources. The sample is therefore not completely representative of implementers on the ground.

The short duration of the project also presented other challenges, particularly in terms of geographical diversification. Results based on 6 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces provide merely a taste of the range of potential good-fit innovations in the country as a whole. Thus, all things being equal, the practices identified in this study should at best be considered contextual good-fit innovations for their given province, which may have the *potential* to be effective in other provinces with similar operating environments and resource availability. Broader and more inclusive results would require much longer and more comprehensive research, calling upon substantially greater resources.

In view of the limited information base, it was difficult to critically assess replicability and scalability of each innovation, in terms of financial and technical resources and policy changes required to extend them to other provinces, as well as the impact of contextual factors. Given the lack of basic security in most insecure provinces, while some of the local governance and information sharing innovations may be suitable for replication, it is tremendously problematic to assess the duplication of other service-based innovations. In addition, given the heavy dependence on donor funding, sustainability remains a concern in the long run in terms of financial and technical resources, as well as local stakeholder buy-in.

### **3. Team Composition and Acknowledgements**

The core research team consisted of Aditi N. Haté, Governance Specialist (International Consultant) and Shahzar Zadran (National Consultant). The views expressed in this study are solely the responsibility of the authors, and do not necessarily represent those of UNDP.

The team is grateful to colleagues, internally and externally, who provided valuable guidance and support. In particular, thanks are extended to: Shoaib Timory and Noriko Oe from UNDP Afghanistan's Sub-National Governance and Development Unit; Tom Thorogood from NABDP; Mohammad Yaqub Gulzai, Yugesh Pradhanang, and Atul Shekhar from ASGP; and all other colleagues interviewed during this study—from IDLG, MRRD, and other GIROA line ministries, other UN agencies and UNDP-supported projects, partner donor programmes, and NGOs—for their feedback on the framework and for providing input on various aspects of subnational governance and public sector work in Afghanistan. The team also thanks Soraya Soffeizada for her able support in arranging the study's logistics and consultations in Kabul and the selected provinces. The peer reviewers for the study were Anne Falher, Amita Gill, Michael Winter, and Roger Shotton. The research team thanks them for their considerable feedback on the study framework, inception report, and final report. The research team also remains grateful to UNDP for commissioning this study as part of its strategic thinking on sub-national governance and development.

For more information about UNDP's sub-national governance programming, please visit <http://www.undp.org.af>.

## D. Background

### 1. Local Governance Has Improved Since 2001

Afghanistan has experienced marked progress, since the fall of the Taliban administration in late 2001, in providing necessary public services across a widening geographic area, extending increasingly beyond the political center in Kabul. These have included the creation of a basic but functional health system that did not exist during the Taliban period, a significant increase in physical infrastructure to link rural and urban areas, and improved domestic airports that are better connecting major regional hubs across the country with one another and with the rest of the world. In addition, even remote and insecure parts of the country are now increasingly likely to have access to public communication channels via radios, televisions, and mobile phones. Likewise, a higher number of vulnerable and impoverished communities are receiving subsistence assistance and livelihood training. School enrollment rates of both boys and girls demonstrate an encouraging upward trend every year, and more teachers, including female instructors, are enrolling in and successfully graduating from training institutes. Energy and water distribution mechanisms are also gradually beginning to reach more communities, although reliable coverage remains a continuing challenge in the north and in remote areas farther away from provincial centers. In general, public awareness about the need for good governance has improved, and public expectation of better performance by government institutions at the central and local levels is rising, albeit from a very low base.

These improvements reflect efforts by GIRoA, with significant technical and financial support from the international donor community and other development stakeholders. The Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) have taken a leadership role in overseeing these initiatives. Donor-supported efforts have included UNDP's ASGP, NABDP, Afghanistan Social Outreach Programme (ASOP), and Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP); USAID's Regional Afghanistan Municipalities Programme for Urban Populations (RAMP-UP); DfID's Strengthening Municipalities Programme (in partnership with UN-Habitat); and the World Bank's National Solidarity Programme (NSP), to name a few.<sup>8</sup>

GIRoA and its international partners have invested significantly in strengthening sub-national governance structures that fit Afghanistan's political and social context, such as the provincial and district governors' offices and provincial councils, as well as more recent official or semi-official bodies such as Provincial Development Committees (PDC), District Development Assemblies (DDA), Community Development Councils (CDC), District Coordination Committees (DCC), and ASOP Councils. These committees and councils are meant to temporarily fill the lack of governance capacity at local levels in delivering necessary public services. Equally important to consider are the various traditional or informal bodies, such as *jirgas* and *shuras* comprised of community elders, *ulemas*, and other relevant elites, as well as civil society stakeholders, all of which function in parallel with the official and semi-official sub-national governance structures and typically enjoy relatively high(er) levels of public trust and legitimacy.

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<sup>8</sup> The list of donor programmes providing support to sub-national governance initiatives highlighted in this report is not exhaustive. It only serves to provide a sampling of the types of programmes focusing on sub-national governance at present.

On balance, Afghanistan has benefited from a gradually improving the supply of accountable local governance and responsive service delivery. Alongside the outputs perceived by the public, in the form of increased availability of public services, there have been improvements in inputs such as better public administration and budgetary planning at the central level. However, the situation at sub-national levels is less clear. The Constitution adopted in 2004 defines Afghanistan as an indivisible, unitary state in which the principles of centralism shall be preserved. Provinces are recognized as the primary unit of sub-national government, but function mainly as de-concentrated administrative units of the central government, without autonomous decision-making power or budgetary financing. Thus, national ministries remain the most important actors, particularly in the areas of budget and development planning, decision-making, and service delivery. Only at the municipal level is there a significant degree of independent decision-making and, especially, revenue-raising and expenditure authority.

Recognizing the pivotal role of sub-national governance for the achievement of key political and development objectives, GIRoA has demonstrated a strong commitment towards strengthening sub-national governance and the decentralization or more meaningful de-concentration of activities. This was reflected in the 2006 Afghanistan Compact and the 2008 Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), along with its National Priority Programs (NPPs). The subsequent 2010 Subnational Governance Policy (SNGP) prepared by IDLG, in conjunction with the NPP for Local Governance, provided a prioritized roadmap for SNGP implementation across all layers of government while highlighting areas of continuing vulnerability that require further deliberation. With the basic administrative structure of central and local government now theoretically defined and falling into place—with the exceptions of district- and village-level representation, and the interaction between provincial governors and security and justice institutions, which remain unresolved—efforts are underway in SNGP implementation.

## **2. But Significant Challenges Remain**

Achievements in sub-national governance since 2001 remain heavily dependent on donor financing, technical assistance, and implementation mechanisms,<sup>9</sup> in the face of weak local capacity. While these efforts provide short-term relief for local communities, they cannot substitute for sub-national institutional capacity and Afghan resources in the long run. Local governance institutions – formal or informal – serve as the primary bridge and sometimes the singular point of contact between the national government and the average citizen in provinces, districts, or local communities. Thus, the performance of these institutions is a critical factor in helping influence positive public perceptions that form the foundation of state legitimacy in the country. Received wisdom tells us that improving levels of public satisfaction with the local government’s delivery of public goods helps in building state resilience to fragility—at least, insofar as these are attributed to the government, rather than to the donor, an implementing NGO or traditional body, or individual community leaders or regional power brokers on a personal basis. Improved perception of social inclusion and increased confidence in the state’s ability to run public services efficiently also go a long way in engendering higher levels of state legitimacy. Sustained high levels of legitimacy, in turn, strengthen the government’s authority vis-à-vis its citizens and create an environment favorable to long-term stability.

Despite the direct relationship between public perceptions of state legitimacy and a policy focus on sub-national governance by GIRoA, state-building efforts in Afghanistan remain weak at the

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<sup>9</sup> Implementation often relies on systems provided by development partners, which bypass Afghanistan’s budget, financial management, and procurement systems and may rely heavily on expatriate personnel (including ISAF’s Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)).



operational level. The complex political environment undermines institutional capacity and incentives. While the government and its partners have managed to craft civil service reform structures to improve local governance, there is a critical shortage of qualified public servants who can fulfill expected functions and expand the coverage of these mechanisms across all 34 provinces. Skills and capacities in the civil service across the country still remain extremely limited due to a lack of sufficient human resource capacity, low levels of educational attainment in much of the labor force, ineffective recruitment of qualified individuals, and poor training. With the notable exception of the NSP, most other development and reconstruction programmes at the sub-national level that remain key to moving Afghanistan forward – such as those focusing on improving access to water, roads, and power – can currently still only be envisaged at the national or regional levels, with some progress possible in certain municipalities. Improving accountable and responsive local governance and service delivery in most rural districts and villages remains a distant dream. Indeed, the farther one travels from the center, the harder it becomes to witness demonstrable success.

The situation is further complicated by the current disconnect between many local officials and the GIROA line departments responsible for service delivery—one that is pervasive at all levels of sub-national governance across the country. Officials often have little control over programmes and projects implemented in their jurisdictions, which makes effectively planning and monitoring activities – and the avoidance of duplication of efforts by different donor-supported programming streams – extremely challenging. This also constrains local officials' capacity to implement accountability mechanisms that can ensure transparency and more responsive service delivery in their communities. In most cases, there is little or no documentation of ongoing programmes, despite M&E efforts by relevant stakeholders. This makes it tremendously challenging to gain a better understanding of programmes that are working well or to define enabling factors that help ensure success.

There is little evidence of effective coordination among most formal, semi-official, and informal sub-national governance mechanisms to improve access to and better provide public services. While there are reportedly many innovative programming initiatives undertaken by these bodies, there is little evidence of any collaboration or information sharing, either among them or with GIROA and the donor community. On the government end, the provincial and district offices have access only to the limited financial resources channeled to them by provincial line departments, out of their own budgetary allocations; thus far they have demonstrated little capacity to manage limited budgetary resources and coordinate service delivery projects, including those implemented by NGOs and CSOs. Moreover, most of these mechanisms have overlapping mandates, often due to a lack of donor and GIROA coordination, which results in confusion and duplication of efforts. The SNGP recognizes the capacity deficit in the area of sub-national governance and stresses the need to define local representative bodies and devolve power to them, in order to strengthen sub-national governance mechanisms.

In sum, existing institutions of SNG in Afghanistan are characterized by inadequate representation and poor accountability as well as weak service delivery performance. These challenges are primarily a result of **minimal official authority** at the local levels due to strong centralization of power and authority in Kabul, **weak governance capacity** given pervasive deficits in technical expertise and less control over budgetary resources at the sub-national levels, and **low public legitimacy** arising from a resulting inability to responsibly represent the people and deliver necessary public services—such as health, education, water, sanitation, and social protection—efficiently and equitably. This prognosis was confirmed during the interviews conducted by the research team.

**Weak authority.** A major factor that is seen as contributing to weak authority is the central selection and control over representatives within various provincial, district, and municipal offices, making them unaccountable to local communities. For instance, all provincial and district governors are appointed rather than being subject to elections. Provincial governors answer only to the President, while district administrations serve largely as sub-offices of the provincial governor. In addition, while governors play important roles – to varying degrees depending on their position and location – in public administration, policy implementation, and security within their communities, official policy planning and fiduciary decisions remain centrally controlled in Kabul. Central line ministries in turn are seen as unresponsive to local needs. Provincial and district planning bodies have no effective input into national development plans and policies; similarly, provincial and district officials have little influence on budget allocations or development plans and policies relevant for their constituencies.

Despite their limited formal authority, some provincial and district officials (especially governors) exercise considerable *informal* authority within their constituencies. Such authority may derive from a variety of sources, such as personal ties to the President, strong tribal and religious connections, control over armed groups, and licit or illicit revenues (including taxes or fees extracted at national borders and along major highways). Major power brokers who succeed in securing such positions are likely to exercise a degree of indirect influence over decisions in Kabul related to their constituencies. They also influence how fiscal resources channeled through line ministries are utilized once these funds reach their respective communities, thus playing a role in influencing state legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

**Low capacity.** GIRoA remains unable to effectively target its resources to improve governance capacity and service delivery at local levels. It remains highly dependent on donors both for financing and for technical expertise to manage and implement donor-supported programmes. Central ministries which control the disbursement of donor funds have little capacity to identify and prioritize local needs, or to manage the disbursement of funds to various provinces accordingly. In general, provincial and district priorities as identified in the respective development plans have little impact on development and budgetary planning at the center. This mismatch is compounded by a lack of coordination among central line ministries that manage downward budgetary flows with their provincial counterparts, provincial departments that in turn determine how much funding will be transmitted to districts, and municipal authorities which have independent resources but responsibilities which often overlap with other levels of sub-national governance. This leads both to a lack of coherence between local priorities and actual funding allocations, and to overlap and duplication of efforts that reduces the effectiveness of public spending and service delivery.

**Fragile Legitimacy.** Corruption and perceptions of unbalanced political representation of ethnic groups are pervasive within national and sub-national governance structures. Compounding the fact that the highest officials in the formal governance bodies at sub-national levels are appointed, many semi-official and traditional bodies also lack a transparent and inclusive selection process—often effectively reinforcing existing tribal elites and historically embedded patterns of hierarchy. In addition, because the state provides local officials no real incentives to govern responsibly, rent-seeking, nepotism, and patronage networks often thrive and can trump “good governance” motivations at every level of government. The lack of robust accountability mechanisms and the often unsupervised flow of off-budget resources add to this challenge, creating a conducive environment for the mismanagement and misuse of resources for personal gain instead of the public good. This widens the deficit of political legitimacy for those appointed in the eyes of the marginalized groups and engenders significantly low levels of legitimacy for the government in the eyes of local communities.

## **E. Good-Fit Innovations in Accountability and Service Delivery**

Keeping in mind Afghanistan's considerable challenges in terms of weak political authority, low institutional capacity, and fragile public legitimacy at the sub-national level – and being cognizant of the challenges of long-term impact and sustainability – the research team identified a number of promising good-fit approaches. These initiatives are innovative in their design and implementation plans in provincial, district, and sub-district communities and are intended to enhance the responsiveness and accountability of sub-national bodies and institutions. That said, given the limited sample size of provinces selected for this study, it is difficult to assess the replicability of each approach in other provinces. At best, all approaches highlighted below show promise and possible scope for duplication in other provinces, if employed within similar demographic, political, social, and economic environments and with similar levels of technical and financial support. Obviously this list is by no means exhaustive, nor does the study imply that all approaches are without certain technical flaws in design and implementation, if analyzed in a best-case scenario context. Given the political and social environment in different parts of the country and operational constraints faced by implementing partners, it serves instead as a snapshot of the types of good-fit innovations that are serving local communities as efficiently and effectively as possible in the current political and socio-economic context.

Among the good-fit innovations highlighted below, three help improve local government accountability and create improved mechanisms for sharing information and knowledge between the local government and relevant implementing partners. The other innovations are led mostly by non-state entities that are helping fill governance capacity gaps in local communities. While local government bodies were included in the scoping study, very few examples emerged that highlighted any good-fit innovations aimed at improving local government accountability or service delivery—probably because most sub-national government bodies are focused primarily on implementing existing policies and programmes within significant technical and resource constraints that leave little room for innovation.

### **1. Social Auditing in Local Communities (Balkh and Herat)**

Social audit processes are being used successfully to enable communities to monitor the implementation of development projects and to increase transparency and accountability. The increasing use of social auditing—of CDC's and provincial and municipal administrations—represents an institutional basis for more effective governance and for extending democratic control and accountability at the local level. It improves transparency in information sharing regarding disbursement of funds and fiscal management of community-selected development projects. It also helps hold governing bodies publicly accountable for progress made or challenges faced during project implementation. It supports government responsiveness to addressing local needs and priorities by creating space to hear public grievances in relation to these projects. These processes in turn help to facilitate trust and confidence-building between these implementing bodies and the communities they serve.

Social auditing is a good fit for a number of reasons. To begin with, it directly links to performance-based legitimacy for the government since it weighs progress on tangible outcomes, which can be used by the government to showcase improvements in providing necessary services, improving accountability, and building process-based legitimacy through a

shared interest in community dialogue.<sup>10</sup> It can also play a critical role in connecting what GIRoA and donor partners perceive as being needed in local communities with the reality of what these communities believe they need for improving their daily lives. AKDN's Aga Khan Foundation, UN-Habitat, UNDP's ASGP, and USAID's RAMP-UP programs have all provided significant support in varying degrees to organizing social audits in district, municipal, and village communities. For instance, both ASGP and the RAMP-UP programs support the municipal council of Mazar-e-Sharif (Balkh province) in organizing regular social audit meetings where budget allocations, project reporting, and participatory discussions between mayors, council members, and citizens in a public forum are encouraged.

Social audits are also appropriate given the cultural and historical precedent of holding large-scale gatherings to discuss community issues and facilitating open discussions among community members. For instance, as part of the social audit process, AKF and UN-Habitat help CDCs organize social audit meetings where CDC members inform citizens (in a large gathering) about progress in ongoing and completed projects and account for how relevant resources have been used to improve the provision of public services in a more efficient, equitable, and transparent manner. This includes a robust question and answer session, where citizens are encouraged to question CDC members about discrepancies or gaps in information about incomplete projects. They arguably also represent an efficient way of using limited resources to engage with communities. Relatively modest amounts of funding are required under this initiative to organize large local gatherings and build local networks that ensure participation of key community members.

With ASGP support, the Herat provincial administration also publishes a governance and development annual report that complements the social auditing process by providing a detailed summary of ongoing and completed projects, along with budget allocations and a summary of resources used as part of these projects. This report, also known as the Year Book, can be disseminated to the public and is available in local government offices. This helps provide a written record of activities that can be used to inform the public about each year's progress outside the regular social audit meetings.

In terms of effectiveness and impact, social auditing continues to engender community participation. Indeed, an increase in social audits across provinces reflects the growing popularity of using such mechanisms to reach out to local communities. For instance, the mayor's office in Mazar-e-Sharif was initially hesitant to engage in such a large and public information-sharing event given the potential risk involved in public audits. However, once the first social audit was completed, the officials recognized the value of having a forum to showcase achievements and progress made thus far, in terms of managing expectations and building public legitimacy, and were enthusiastic the second time onwards to have more social audits in the future.

Lastly, this approach appears to be easily replicable in other provinces, given the relatively low financial and technical costs involved in terms of planning support, community-driven advocacy

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<sup>10</sup> Legitimacy is often said to arise from either *performance* (e.g. how well the government is doing in creating jobs, delivering safe water, or standing up to neighbouring states) or from *process* (ranging from how the current government acquired power to *whether the institutions have a process of dialogue* and engagement of women and ethnic/excluded minorities in policy making and service delivery choices). Legitimacy is often fragmented: different groups in society may have different views about the legitimacy of the state and of specific institutions. Views of legitimacy are also very much shaped by local cultures, values and experiences. Source: World Bank, FCS State-Building Tool-Kit.

for holding government accountable, and GIRoA interest in using this approach as an outreach mechanism to build legitimacy in local communities. That said, continued administrative and technical support for such bodies, provision of basic security, and community support remain keys to ensuring the longevity of such activities in secure provinces. It would most likely be difficult to expand such a process to insecure areas at local levels, given the challenges of access and security. Engendering and maintaining community support for such audits, especially from tribal elites and community elders, remains especially important.<sup>11</sup>

## **2. Training Local *Maliks* as Good Governance Partners (Nangarhar)**

The National Maliks Association was established in January 2005 by the Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan (WADAN), a capable local NGO. The association is a network of *maliks* trained by WADAN who are committed to building lasting peace, national unity, and development through encouraging good governance practices at the local levels. WADAN's mobile teams of civic education trainers provide training workshops for the *maliks* on issues such as democratic representation, electoral rules and procedures, women's rights, health, education, and conflict resolution in communities across Afghanistan, paying special attention to remote rural areas that had previously been left out of civic education efforts. The mobile teams connect these issues to verses in the Quran to show the applicability of a pro-rights approach without going outside the tenets of the religion. This has succeeded in bringing *maliks* on board in support of a number of pro-poor and pro-women issues, which would have been much more challenging in a secular training context.

*Maliks* are also provided with training on provisions in the Afghan Constitution that promote equal access of all groups, including marginalized communities such as women, to basic services and freedoms. The trained *maliks* share information with their communities to improve public awareness regarding democratic governance and social welfare issues. For instance, during election periods, *maliks* help to educate their constituents about democracy and work to correct local misconceptions about elections and democratic governance. In addition, once they have a stronger understanding of the Constitution and governance principles in general, many such *maliks* have found themselves better equipped to participate actively in social auditing activities, to promote transparency and accountability in political processes and government.

At present over 2000 *maliks* are members of this association. They meet regularly at district and regional levels and also conduct bi-annual meetings. The association is an innovative way of engaging local community leaders in villages throughout the country to raise awareness about human rights, women's issues, and the importance of investing in democratic processes. *Maliks* serve as an excellent conduit for communication between the government and citizens because they enjoy stronger levels of credibility and legitimacy as indigenous authority figures rooted in cultural and local traditions. Training willing and interested *maliks* provides an excellent opportunity to introduce key concepts of democracy, good governance, the rule of law, peace, and sustainable development at the grassroots level. Core messaging of such concepts is much more likely to resonate with local populations if delivered via trusted leaders rather than through foreign actors or the central government.

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<sup>11</sup> For more information about this example, please contact Yugesh Pradhanang, ASGP – Balkh; Dr. Niamatullah, UN-Habitat – Nangarhar; or Tressan Sullivan, USAID/RAMP-UP – Balkh. Annex I provides contact information.

*Malik* training programmes also seem to have great potential to be replicated and scaled up in a larger number of provinces. There are approximately 28,000 *maliks* in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> WADAN has been able to train about 30 *maliks* using a “train-the-trainer” model, and they can now train fellow *maliks* in their specific regions. WADAN has also created a national assembly of *maliks* in Kabul with the participation of about 1,500 to 2,000 members in 2012. It has been challenging to reach out to *maliks* in insecure areas as compared to those inhabiting secure areas. Funding is also a major concern for ensuring a greater coverage of mobile training activities.<sup>13</sup>

### **3. Bringing Community-Based Schools to Rural Communities (Herat)**

One of the primary reasons for poor school enrollment and attendance rates in Afghanistan’s rural areas is the long distance between schools and most homes. Children living in rural areas must usually walk long distances to reach the nearest government schools. Parents often refuse to send young girls across large distances for schooling given the high levels of insecurity and lack of safety, for women in particular, in rural areas. The international NGO BRAC works with the Ministry of Education to address this challenge by establishing “community-based schools,” which bring education closer to remote communities.

The process is simple yet effective. BRAC works with the provincial Department of Education to identify villages that do not have a functioning school available within a reasonable walking distance. A BRAC programme organizer (PO) then contacts the elders of selected villages and other leaders to discuss access to education issues, the impact of illiteracy on families, and the benefits of a village school in their communities. Upon acquiring consent from these local representatives, the PO conducts a house-by-house survey to identify children who are currently not enrolled in school. Special attention is paid to families with female offspring currently not enrolled in school. The PO then discusses the benefits of education with the heads of these households and encourages them to allow their children to gain an education with the help of the government and BRAC. The PO also identifies potential teachers with intermediate (high school or lower) degrees who can be trained to work in a given village school. Teachers are always selected from the same community in which they will serve, to ensure trust can be gained and maintained with the local community. The PO then presents the survey results and requests permission from BRAC to begin constructing the school. Such schools are provided to the communities free of cost (including teacher and student supplies).

The BRAC community-based school program follows two innovative models for educating vulnerable children, depending on the context. The “feeder school” model trains out-of-school boys and girls between the ages of 7 and 9 for a period of two years to help prepare them to re-enter formal schools at grade level 4. The other “accelerated learning” model is for girls between the ages of 10 to 15 years who have either never attended school or have dropped out due to family censure. Here, the female students are taught for two years with the government education curriculum for grades 1 through 3. Class size is kept to a maximum of 35 students per class to ensure individual attention.

This program is currently working particularly well in two districts of Herat province. Overall, the community-based schools have witnessed a greater degree of success, with improved

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<sup>12</sup> This is an estimate by WADAN.

<sup>13</sup> For more information about WADAN and the National Maliks Association, please visit: <http://www.wadan.org/maliks.asp>. For more information about this example, please also contact Dr. Sherali, WADAN Provincial Manager.

enrolment rates and better attendance of incoming students. Research shows that students tend to learn much better in such schools than in other formats, despite the lower level of teacher training. Interestingly, a large majority of enrolled students tend to be girls even though the programme focus is not exclusive to female education. This is likely due to the safer and more culturally-acceptable environment provided by community-based schools that meets the specific needs of female students and makes education more accessible to them. Community *shuras* have stepped forward to help monitor BRAC school performance to ensure quality of education. While in some villages, BRAC had to build a brand new school building from scratch, in other cases BRAC rented rooms from local community members who support BRAC's involvement in youth education. Indeed, families were more willing to send children, including girls, to school if the security and cost questions were resolved. Expected social barriers to educating the girl child were not as high as one would expect. Such community consent – especially for female education – is one of the key first steps to changing local perceptions and improving standards of education.

This program appears to hold strong potential for being replicated and scaled up in other rural communities. Specifically, it not only responds to local needs by effectively addressing social and geographic challenges, but it also demonstrates that communities are indeed willing to participate in education programs *for female students* if done in a contextually-appropriate manner. Given public willingness to use this mechanism and the local need for better education, such a program could also help build public trust and confidence in the government's responsiveness in providing access to basic services like education, insofar as it is associated with the government rather than just the community leaders and the NGO.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4. Improving Knowledge-Sharing through Provincial Governance Working Groups (Herat)**

Herat province recently spearheaded a new discussion forum to improve information- and knowledge-sharing between the provincial government and international development partners, with the support of ASGP. This forum, known as the Development and Governance Working Group, allows for the exchange of information and synchronization of implementation efforts in the fields of development, governance, and service delivery. Participants include GIRoA representatives at the provincial level (including the governor), ISAF PRTs, UNAMA, and UN agencies. Meetings focus on projects concerning governance, infrastructure, water, roads, health, and energy distribution. Participating bodies use this forum to provide updates on ongoing and planned projects within their own focus areas in the region. The working group meets regularly, with an aim to meet once a month, and shares input and feedback from these meetings with the PDC for further action. The working group also considers issues and complaints made by the public to the governor's office in relation to development activities, and tries to collectively ascertain possible solutions to address public concerns.

The working group helps to improve public administrative capacity to ensure a harmonized approach to the delivery of key services while facilitating greater coordination between the various implementing partners. Often complex operational environments such as those found in various provinces in Afghanistan suffer from a great deal of unintended overlap of service delivery programming, with little transparency about ongoing activities and even lesser coordination among various implementing stakeholders. The working group is an innovative way

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<sup>14</sup> For more information about this example, please contact Abdul Aziz, BRAC Regional Manager for Education Programme. Annex I provides contact information.

of bringing together not just key stakeholders from the provincial government, but also other significant actors that play a key role in development programming and service delivery. The ISAF PRTs and various UN agencies provide strong support to the government in delivering services, but a lot of information related to project planning, prioritization, and implementation gets lost among the multiple layers of planning, programming, reporting, and monitoring structures. The working group helps to simplify and harmonize development efforts and increases the likelihood of more effective and efficient use of donor and government resources.

The impact of such a working group is reflected in improvements seen in knowledge management of ongoing service delivery efforts and information sharing among the key stakeholders, as well as improved coordination with the PDC in highlighting key development priorities for the province. Such a working group should be replicable in other secure and insecure provinces, as long as the provincial governor's office and PDC members invest in the knowledge sharing process and international partners prioritize participation, allow transparency in sharing programmatic activities/outputs, and provide feedback to the working group for essential action.<sup>15</sup>

## **5. Improving Local Governance Coordination within Districts (Kunar)**

Coordination and information sharing are challenges that hamper most efforts to improve governance in Afghanistan. This is especially true at the sub-national level, where the adage that the left hand is clueless regarding what the right hand is doing applies constantly. Indeed, there are significant gaps in information sharing and program coordination at all levels of governance—between the center in Kabul and provincial governments, among provincial, district, and village level authorities, and within each tier of sub-national governance. At the district level there is generally little to no information-sharing regarding ongoing programming by various implementing partners. Sarkano district of Kunar province is one of the few known places where information sharing has improved recently due to a new coordination mechanism put in place with participation from the district governor's office, DDA, and the district *shura* comprised of community elders.

This coordination mechanism is based on cross-participation in regular meetings at district level. Each month, two representatives from the district community *shura* and one official from the district governor's office participate in a DDA meeting, to discuss ongoing projects and district development priorities. In the same vein, DDA and *shura* members participate in the district governor's monthly meetings; similarly, the *shura* encourages participation of the other two bodies in its own meetings. As a result, there now exists a triangular mechanism to ensure that information is shared among these three bodies in a more efficient and timely manner. This creates opportunities for collaboration and coordination, as well as providing space for improved transparency about ongoing resource allocations and budget priorities within the DDA and governor's offices. DDA members are expected to share information gained through these various meetings with their own local communities through the respective DDA cluster groups. Correspondingly, the DDA chair and district governor now also participate in the monthly PDC meetings where they provide Sarkano district's perspective on and expectation of development priorities for the area with PDC members from other parts of the Kunar province.

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<sup>15</sup> For more information about this example, please contact Atul Shekhar, ASGP - Herat. Annex I provides contact information.



Although this approach of triangulating participation among the district governor's office, DDA, and district *shuras* is relatively new in Sarkano district, it has already demonstrated improvements in increasing coordination and information sharing at the district level. There is greater clarity on local needs and priorities because the district *shura* members are able to voice their opinions and share information more regularly with DDA members. DDA members are better able to help prioritize and coordinate development projects for the community and highlight local needs to the governor's office. The governor's office in turn is able to demonstrate interest in public welfare and in providing services to the community, thereby improving government legitimacy in the eyes of the public. While this approach may be basic in its structure, one of the reasons it is proving to be effective, impactful, and sustainable in a local setting like Sarkano is because it employs simple human resources of coordination and organization to achieve desired results. Different local communities may have similar coordination mechanisms. That said, this approach seems worthy of encouragement and replication in other areas that lack effective coordination and communication at the local levels between the governor's officer, DDA, and local communities. District governors' offices could benefit greatly from leading such an initiative that is more inclusive, encourages community participation, and demonstrates responsiveness to local needs.<sup>16</sup>

## **6. Generating Employment by Supporting Local Entrepreneurship and Training Programs (Balkh)**

The Dehdadi DDA in Balkh province recently established a carpentry center in its community, to help create livelihood opportunities and supply necessary construction services to private homes and businesses in the area. In Dehdadi district, there is considerable local demand for carpentry skills. At the same time there are many unemployed individuals who have the potential to be trained to become carpenters and serve the community for a modest income. Through the establishment of this center, the DDA has achieved the dual purposes of addressing a gap in labor supply for carpentry work and creating jobs to reduce the number of unemployed youth in the community.

The carpentry center sustains itself with the income generated from these activities, which is then utilized for much-needed small-scale development projects in the community via the DDA. Some of the profits are also used for the maintenance of the DDA office and supplies. The center provides training to young, interested students who work with trainers for a short period of time (3-6 months), after which they are encouraged to open their own small-scale businesses closer to home. Interestingly, one of the main reasons Dehdadi has thus far managed to fund this center sustainably is because it is run by a dynamic DDA chair who is committed to public service and shares a strong relationship with his donor partners and the local community. He has thus far been able to successfully acquire needed financial and community support for this center. Nevertheless, the center is being organized to withstand his eventual replacement in the DDA, should that occur—especially by ensuring that responsibilities are divided as per roles within the DDA itself and not centered on any one individual.

This initiative is a dynamic and effective way to address youth unemployment and provide a much-in-demand service to the local community. Youth unemployment is often highlighted as a key driver of state fragility and conflict in impoverished communities. This livelihood training not only creates income for the carpentry center and DDA to finance daily operations, but also provides students with a profitable skill that they can use to earn a stable living independently.

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<sup>16</sup> For more information about this example, please contact the Sarkano District DDA.

The center is effectively and efficiently managed by a strong management structure led by the DDA chair and his staff. Thus, while such an approach appears to be replicable in other secure areas, a principal element to ensure success would be the selection of a competent management team led by individuals who (i) buy into the concept of sustainable livelihood training combined with supply of a service needed by the community (it does not have to be just carpentry), (ii) are committed to public service and are respected in their communities, and (iii) can effectively manage the allocation and distribution of funds for such a programme.<sup>17</sup>

## **7. Establishing Local Recruitment Centers (Herat)**

The Department of Labor and Social Affairs (DoLSA) in Herat city has recently developed an innovative and practical approach aimed at addressing the gap between the need for qualified labor supply for small and medium-sized businesses and the presence of large numbers of unemployed individuals living in the same communities. In Herat, DoLSA recently created an employment and recruitment center where qualified individuals are matched with job opportunities available in the private sector. The process is quite basic: DoLSA conducts an assessment of Herat's private sector companies to gain a better understanding of the types of qualified staff required for business and the level and types of vacancies. Individuals looking for employment are asked to register with the center by submitting all their details, including qualifications, previous employment history, personal data, and contact information. DoLSA also identifies NGOs that are able to provide individuals with vocational training to gain qualifications, if there are gaps in skills, necessary for filling these vacancies. DoLSA then either matches already qualified individuals with interested companies that have vacancies or connects NGOs with interested, under-qualified youth who wish to gain the vocational training necessary to be eligible for current vacancies in the market.

This approach is a good fit for Herat city, given the growing number of small and medium businesses with a demand for labor and the large pool of unemployed individuals who have thus far relied on word-of-mouth social networks to find employment. In addition, international experience shows that traditional vocational training programs without clear links to the labor market tend to be ineffective. A more promising intervention is a program that includes work placement opportunities.<sup>18</sup> By providing one center where employers and interested applicants can announce and fill vacancies, DoLSA has laid the groundwork for a harmonized recruitment center that not only links unemployed youth to training opportunities, but also links youth to the labor market. In addition, by bringing under-qualified individuals together with NGOs providing vocational training, it helps solve two problems: (i) it links NGOs that provide vocational training to local labor markets, which boosts the appeal of NGO training programs by increasing the prospect of employment after training and providing corresponding incentives for unemployed individuals to participate in extended training; and (ii) it enables unemployed individuals to improve their skill sets and become competitive for vocational jobs. This also reduces the load on small businesses that usually hesitate to take on new, untrained labor. Finally, a local recruitment center run by the government also demonstrates to the public that the government is indeed sensitive to local needs and is actively involved in finding innovative solutions to create growth and employment within the community.

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<sup>17</sup> For more information about this example, please contact Sayed Mustafa, Dehdadi DDA Chairman, or Eng. Habib Amerkheil, NABDP Regional Manager for Balkh Province. Annex I provides further information.

<sup>18</sup> Lamb and Dye 2009; Beasley 2006.

This is a relatively low-cost approach with large returns. It has thus far proven to be efficient in utilizing minimal costs for overhead in Herat. Moreover, it has demonstrated impact since local businesses now come directly to the center to check the ledger for potential labor supply, and unemployed individuals are also willingly registering with the center to find employment opportunities. Such an approach appears to have great potential to be reproduced and scaled up in other provinces, including not just secure but also some insecure areas, as long as there is potential for DoLSA to work with local communities and to enlist their cooperation in maintaining security for its operations. Such an initiative, however, would be very challenging to implement in highly insecure areas.<sup>19</sup>

## **8. Partnering with Private Sector Actors to Improve Women's Access to Markets (Laghman)**

One of the main challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in rural communities is a lack of market access to sell their wares with a fair profit margin. As a result of business monopolies (mostly controlled by men), women may be able to gain vocational skills (e.g. carpet weaving) with the help of donor-supported programs, but cannot always use these skills to generate income due to barriers to access in a tightly controlled and monopolized market. To help more women business owners (mostly carpet weavers at present) overcome this barrier, the Karghaio DDA in Laghman province has a memorandum of understanding with a private carpet-weaving factory in next-door Jalalabad to purchase carpets made by Karghaio women at a preset fair market price for sale. Women entrepreneurs in the district weave carpets with the support of NABDP, which ensures provision of cost coverage for materials purchase. Once the products are ready, they are sold to the factory for marketing, ensuring completion of the supply cycle and income generation for the women. Profits are distributed fairly among the women based on the individual's percentage of total production; the more carpets you make, the higher your share of the profit.

This approach addresses a key challenge in helping women gain the capacity to earn their own livelihoods. Most vocational training programmes, whether for men or women, provide training without being able to assure access to markets or employment opportunities in order to earn a livelihood. Some NGOs even provide the basic supplies necessary to start a small business (such as chickens, chicken feed for the first few months, carpet weaving tools, or wool to make the first batch of carpets), but they are often unable to find access to local markets and entry into a competitive supply chain. In addition, given that women face numerous social and cultural constraints that restrict their movement outside the home, they have few if any opportunities to participate in the local economy. This approach of partnering with a local company that can serve as a guaranteed buyer of goods at preset prices greatly improves the potential for individuals to earn a sustainable income (even if it is not very substantial) on a regular basis, provided the goods provided meet preset standards of quality assurance. Such a practice appears to have significant potential to be scaled up and replicated in other secure provinces where women can learn vocational skills through donor and NGO-supported livelihood training programmes and earn a living, albeit from the confines of their homes.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For more information about this example, please contact Ahmad Shahir Salehi, ASGP - Herat. Annex I provides contact information.

<sup>20</sup> For more information about this example, please contact Mohammad Yaqub Gulzai, ASGP - Nangarhar. Annex I provides contact information.

## F. Enabling Factors for Governance Innovations

While these good-fit innovations may not be considered unique by international standards, they are demonstrating tangible progress in improving local accountability and responsive service delivery in vulnerable communities. In almost all cases, the three factors that emerge as central to successful implementation in the Afghan context are state/non-state institutional partnerships, strong leaders committed to public service, and sustainable donor support.

### State/Non-State Institutional Partnerships

Partnerships between state and non-state actors can play a pivotal role in the delivery of key public services, especially health, education, employment, and livelihood training. Given the weak sub-national institutional capacity, public-private partnerships are increasingly stepping in to compensate. These can entail collaboration between formal governance institutions and traditional or informal bodies, small businesses and other private sector actors, local *shuras*, NGOs, CSOs, and donors, where *de jure* and *de facto* authority combine with varying levels of capacity and legitimacy to facilitate better delivery of and access to public services. Indeed, a majority of the identified good-fit, innovative practices is characterized by some form of partnership between DDAs, CDCs, NGOs, PRTs, local small businesses, and donor programmes.

### Strong Leadership Committed to Public Service

Another trend observed is link between the community's willingness to participate proactively in improving service delivery, area development, or demanding good governance is the prevalence of strong leaders, such as provincial and district governors, educated *shuras* of elders, mullahs, and *maliks*, and other respected community members, be it in the form of an enterprising DDA chair in Dehdadi or a dedicated NGO leader in Jalalabad. It remains especially important for a good-fit approach to have the buy-in of traditional elites and the respective *shuras* as a way of influencing public opinion to actively participate in the initiative. Buy-in from local stakeholders is also pivotal in mobilizing the community to hold the local government accountable regarding issues and complaints relevant to service delivery sectors, especially in the cases of education and health. For instance, while the study did not find any good-fit approaches specific to female education beyond the BRAC community-based schools, it did note that ensuring consensus among local elders was instrumental in convincing families to send their girls to school. In addition, development projects are more likely to experience long-term sustainability in terms of maintenance and care when the local leadership has a sense of ownership and, thus, a sense of responsibility for the completed project.

### Significant Donor Support

Last, and perhaps most important given the current national political context and resource constraints facing local communities, long-term support from donor partners is critical for creating an environment in which governance innovations might flourish. Long-term commitment from donors will heavily impact the potential of each of the above innovations for long-term sustainability. Across all sectors and governance mechanisms, the heavy dependence on donor funding remains striking. Without the availability of substantial donor resources, including technical expertise and financial support during the inception phase of programmes, almost none of the good-fit approaches would be possible. For instance, the GIRoA's national budget for the SY1390 (2011-2012) fiscal year was approximately US\$ 4.8 billion, which is

approximately how much public service delivery costs the government annually. The Government's "internal" or core development budget for SY1390 was about US\$ 1.6 billion. Although comparably recent figures are unavailable, the SY1389 (2010-2011) "external" development budget <sup>21</sup> was about US\$ 4.1 billion – a little over 85% of the overall national budget.<sup>22</sup> With the 2014 transition approaching and the potentially substantial impact on resource availability over time, it remains to be seen how and to what extent the Afghan government will sustainably absorb the initiatives created thus far with the help of significant foreign assistance in health, education, and rural development, to name a few key sectors.

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<sup>21</sup> This is money provided by international donors that does not pass through the national budget, and is distributed directly through donors to their contracting partners.

<sup>22</sup> AREU, A to Z Guide, National Budget, pg. 59.

## **G. Issues to Consider**

### **Contextualizing Sub-national Governance**

Over the last 30-odd years, different types of governance models have been applied in Afghanistan, resulting in wide variations of *de facto* authority, governance capacity, and public expectations across the country at local levels. These variations are affected not just by ethnographical considerations, but also by the historical levels of development (urban vs. rural) and political dynamics in each province. Such factors have created extremely diverse political environments within which current sub-national governance programmes are attempting to build local capacity and deliver key services. The international donor community has yet to fully grasp the nuances of these variations and how they impact the efficacy of donor assistance. Given the lack of an in-depth understanding of the key drivers of the variation across provinces, it remains extremely challenging to assess whether a good-fit approach that works in province A will be effective in province B. As a result, it remains critical to contextualize sub-national governance initiatives, be they good-fit approaches or not, to ensure their relevance, appropriateness, efficacy, and efficiency in target communities.

### **Monitoring Challenges at Local Levels**

At present, there is limited M&E of ongoing governance capacity-building and service delivery initiatives in all provinces. Much of the current monitoring apparatus at the provincial, district, and municipal levels suffers from significant degrees of overlap across the main stakeholders, with little to no information-sharing taking place across various monitoring teams. In addition, most monitoring activities face significant pressures to provide quick-impact results for contributing donor partners. The institutional memories of local practitioners with years of experience in testing innovations at the sub-national level are often not sufficiently tapped to capitalize on their learning experiments, resulting in a cyclical reinventing of the wheel as posts within donor groups and NGOs are filled with new non-local staff. In addition, there is a lack of sufficient and reliable data regarding ongoing programmes, making it nearly impossible to quantifiably verify the positive impact of these programs in various communities over a relatively short period of time.

### **Need for Community-Centric Approaches that Facilitate Citizen Ownership**

Strong local leadership and citizen-centric approaches play a pivotal role in the success of innovations for good governance and proactive change. Whether it is the head of a rural DDA, a proactive provincial governor, or a public service-oriented civil society representative, strong leadership allows for greater commitment towards development progress and a greater sense of ownership regarding delivery of services and infrastructure. In addition, strong civic-minded leaders can mobilize their communities to demand better and more responsive public services from local government and to hold government accountable. The participation of women, who are often the most vulnerable beneficiaries of change, is also key to instituting change at the local levels for better governance. In many of the above examples, women are actively taking part in devising new ways to empower themselves and their communities and improve their access to public services. Finding and nurturing a cadre of strong leaders among women would greatly help improve the voice of women in local institutions, for the benefit of the country as a whole.

## **Importance of Knowledge-Sharing Mechanisms that Can Identify Good-fit Innovations**

In order to devise effective strategies to strengthen sub-national governance in Afghanistan, it is critical to periodically assess and map existing governance structures, involving both formal and informal institutions, and institutionalize information sharing among sub-national governance practitioners. The level and effectiveness of information sharing and coordination among GIRoA, international donor partners, and the various sub-national governance programmes remains variable. Part of the problem is a lack of on-the-ground visibility and an absence of documentation of past lessons learned from innovative sub-national programs in different provinces, municipalities, and districts. Communities and their development partners are constantly trying to implement innovative new approaches that constitute better-fit solutions for their respective governance challenges. The design of these innovations has not typically been informed by a well-planned regional or sub-regional strategy. Under these circumstances, the prospects for such innovations are varied and unpredictable, and communities seek instead to benefit from trial and error. The operationalization of new programs provides local leaders and implementers the opportunity to learn from the good (and bad) experiences of their neighboring villages and districts. However, without systematic ways to collect information and share key lessons learned across sectors, regions, and among practitioners, any policy or strategy formulated in Kabul will most likely continue to be based primarily on *ad hoc* reporting, which tends to fail at identifying causal relationships between influential factors and successful innovations and does not capture emerging good practices across provinces in a methodical manner.

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