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EVALUATION REPORT



**TRANSTEC
PROJECT
MANAGEMENT**

**UDF-AFG-08-249: Enhancing the Capacity for Inclusive Local Governance
through Synergies and Sustainable Linkages between Communities and
Government in North Afghanistan**

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the Evaluators. They do not represent those of UNDEF or of any of the institutions referred to in the report.

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I. Executive Summary

i. Project Data

This report is the evaluation of the project entitled “Enhancing the Capacity for Inclusive Local Governance through Synergies and Sustainable Linkages between Communities and Government in North Afghanistan”, implemented by The Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) Afghanistan, an international NGO, based in Kabul, between October 1 2009 and October 31 2011 (25 months, including a 6-month extension). The project benefited from an UNDEF grant of \$350,000, with a project budget of \$325,000, plus an UNDEF monitoring and evaluation component of \$25,000.

Activities took place in selected districts in three provinces in the NE of Afghanistan. It was implemented by the grantee alone, in cooperation with government authorities at local and provincial levels, as well as civil society and community representatives. Through the project, the grantee sought to address a major development problem, blocking the nurturing of a democratic society and hindering the accountability of government to citizens. The problem concerned the absence of a connection between local communities, on the one hand, and structures of governance and decision-making, on the other. The focus of the project was on strengthening stakeholder capacities to build and utilize effective linkages between community institutions and government at local, district and provincial levels.

While ACTED had no formal partners for the project, the “training of trainers” activity was contracted out to a well-known Afghan NGO, the Organization for Human Resource Development (OHRD). The same organization was also responsible for development of training materials.

ii. Evaluation Findings

Relevance: Local governance in Afghanistan is characterized by a mix of formal and informal structures, with little integration or coordination among them. Further, the Afghan state is highly centralized, with decision-making concentrated at national level. Hence the aim of the project to build the practical skills of local community leaders, civil society representatives and government officials working at local level, to participate more effectively, and on a collaborative basis, in local governance was highly relevant to the goal of strengthening local democracy and contributing to better governance.

In that it supported political inclusion and the more effective engagement of local communities and civil society groups with governance processes, the project was also highly relevant to the UNDEF priorities of democratic development and political participation.

The training provided was well-attuned to local needs, practical in its focus, and delivered in such a way as to equip beneficiaries with the ability to put new knowledge to work in their daily life, in community activities and in working with others to seek solutions to local issues.

The training-of-trainers course, training curriculum and methodology, all designed by a contracted provider, the Organization for Human Resource Development (OHRD), appear to have been well-done, and well-matched to trainee learning needs and capabilities. The project took place in a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic environment,

and the main weakness in preparation of its training plan was the failure of the project to translate learning materials from Dari to Pashto, and recruit a cadre of trainers capable of operating in the Pashto language. Similarly, the needs of female trainees would have been better-served had ACTED proved able to recruit at least a few female trainers; none was hired.

Effectiveness:

The major activities supported by the project were: the training of local stakeholders on advocacy and gender-sensitive development; and capacity-building for community leaders and local organizations; training of stakeholder groups on vulnerability assessments and vulnerability mapping; and, the holding of forums at district and provincial levels to bring together key stakeholders, including government officials, and provide a platform for presenting local priorities to those in a position to address them.

For the most part, training was rated very highly by project participants interviewed for the Evaluation. Most of the trainees interviewed were able to give examples of the ways in which they have been able to put their newly-acquired skills to work. A partial exception was the course on gender-sensitive development, which seems to have succeeded in building a better understanding of the importance of the role women play in society, but not in moving beyond this into an appreciation of gender mainstreaming in development planning and local decision-making. This seems to have resulted from the limited skills of trainers in this sphere, but was primarily a consequence of the social conservatism of the local communities from which the trainees were drawn.

While women trainees were included in project activities in some districts, in others they were absent, or largely absent. The project experienced great difficulty in recruiting women trainees, as well as women trainers.

One of the strengths of the project was the “local knowledge” of ACTED, which had offices and active projects in the three target provinces, and which recruited its staff from the region. Drawing on its experience, the grantee began the project with careful and thorough consultations with major stakeholders. This enabled the project to obtain strong local buy-in and support for its activities in all its target districts, as well as in the three provincial capitals. The key stakeholders were also the nominators of trainees. While most trainees met the selection criteria, a minority of as many as 25-30 per cent, were thought by project managers to be friends or relatives of those who nominated them, and had little interest in proceedings, being motivated by the travel expenses and food provided.

The project achieved positive results through its training program, and contributed in a general way to the overall objective of enhancing prospects for inclusive local governance. Beyond this, the specific claims set out in the Project Objective focusing on establishing: ***enhanced mechanisms for inclusive local governance in Afghanistan by enabling synergies between communities and the government and promoting suitable linkages between sub-national government, CDCs and civil society groups*** proved to be overly ambitious. Insufficient attention was given to the planning of the final set of activities in the project, intended to bring the stakeholders together and take some initial steps towards promotion of cross-stakeholder dialogue on local priorities.

Efficiency: Examination of the project budget reveals a somewhat imbalanced allocation of resources. Staff salaries, administration and overheads account for 52.6

per cent of planned expenditures, while program costs amounted to 44 per cent. The allocation of resources, both human and material, to activities other than training, which were critical to the achievement of results, was inadequate.

The management of project operations in the field was perfectly competent, and administrative systems seemed to work well. However, a major deficiency in overall management rested with the centralization of decision-making by ACTED Kabul. The project design had a “generic” quality to it, and it is apparent that operations managers in the field had no input into decision-making, including work and expenditure planning. The weakness of two-way communications at this level reduced the opportunity for the project to learn from experience and adapt operational plans accordingly.

Impact: At local level, it may well be that the enhancement of organizational/managerial and advocacy skills will make a difference to the energy and effectiveness of governance processes. The experience of participating together in the workshops may also have resulted in new possibilities for collaboration among stakeholder groups. In addition, the training on vulnerability assessment will have enabled local leaders, civil society organizations and community groups to use consultative methods in determining local priorities and allocating scarce resources.

Over time, if reinforced by further practical experience and on-going technical support to local institutions and social groups, as well as further practical training for qualified individuals, these developments could also have a broader impact. However, for the present, the project is unlikely to have made a significant impact at institutional level.

Sustainability: Essentially, without on-going international donor support, there is little prospect of sustainability for most of the development work currently underway in Afghanistan, since, what is required is a very long-term engagement to build the necessary capacities. For efforts to support democratic development and an active and dynamic civil society, prospects of sustainability are yet more limited.

In the short term, it seems likely that ACTED will be able to secure the funding required to build on the work of the UNDEF project and retain the gains made through training. There was enthusiasm among trainees interviewed for the Evaluation for further training. However, if progress is to be made, what will be required will be a linking of project work with the planning and decision-making agendas of governance institutions, initially at local and district levels.

UNDEF Added Value: In a difficult and conflict-plagued environment, the UN label was beneficial to the project. At the same time, it was an important initiative for UNDEF itself, since, by its presence, UNDEF demonstrates its confidence in the ability and will of Afghan citizens to work toward a more democratic and inclusive society.

iii. Conclusions

- The project was largely successful as a training project, which delivered significant benefits to trainees. However, the potential for it to be more than this was not realized.
- The project was relevant to UNDEF priorities through its effort to build the capacity of local leaders, at community and district level, along with members of civil society organizations and government officials, to participate more effectively in local governance.
- One of the strengths of the project was its investment in comprehensive and broad-based consultations as a mean to building stakeholder support and ownership prior to beginning core activities.
- Local recruitment of trainers and community mobilizers was a positive factor in project effectiveness in that it enabled the project team to build rapport with local stakeholders and trainees. To set against this was the failure of the project to recruit any female trainers, or a sufficient number of Pashto-speakers to conduct training in those districts where Pashto was the language of a significant proportion of the local population.
- In deference to local authorities, the project accepted trainees nominated by others. While most participants reflected the criteria communicated to nominators by project management, a significant minority of trainees was not motivated to learn, but rather to take advantage of other benefits offered (food and travel costs).
- Despite this, in the view of the participants interviewed for the Evaluation, all training workshops were successful in meeting their learning objectives and endowing them with new knowledge and skills, relevant to their own priorities, and which they were able to apply.
- While the project did attract some female trainees, in some cases, no women were included. This reflected local conservatism and perceived security threats. The failure of the project to recruit women trainers also had an impact on this state of affairs.
- In terms of efficiency, there is an apparent imbalance in the deployment of project resources, with more than 52 per cent of the budget allocated to staffing, administration and overheads, and leaving only 44 per cent for program costs. Further, it is apparent that there was a shortage of program funds in the latter part of the project, and economies were introduced.
- Project management was administratively competent, but its overall effectiveness was undermined by the failure of ACTED Afghanistan's HQ in Kabul to include Project Managers in the field in major decisions on work planning and re-profiling the budget. The project lacked the overall guidance and direction, at both planning and implementation stages, which might have enabled it to do better in achieving its objectives.
- While it is probable that the project contributed in a general way to the overall objective of enhancing prospects for inclusive local governance, the specific elements of the project objective: building **enhanced mechanisms for inclusive local**

governance in Afghanistan by enabling synergies between communities and the government proved to be beyond its reach.

iv. Recommendations

In order to strengthen efforts by ACTED to work towards enhancing its work in northern Afghanistan, ***It is recommended that:***

- ACTED ensures that project design and implementation planning takes full account of local conditions and that the project management team in the field is included in decisions on project work planning and budgeting.

- Given the difficulties it has experienced in recruiting both women trainers and trainees in NE Afghanistan, It is recommended that ACTED develops a guide for project design on how best, under admittedly difficult conditions, to mainstream gender equality into project results frameworks.

- Given the generally positive character of cooperation between ACTED and OHRD in training of trainers and the preparation of training materials, the two organizations review the experience of the UNDEF project with a view to ensuring that all trainers are well-prepared to plan and deliver courses to male, female or mixed training groups on gender equality topics.

- ACTED takes greater care in the future in ensuring that its training team includes those with the linguistic capabilities to match the linguistic profile of trainees, and that OHRD ensures that training materials are prepared in both Dari and Pashto.

- ACTED gives careful attention to ensuring a reasonable balance between programming and staff costs.

- More careful consideration is given to the crafting of project objectives and to ensuring that project activities are planned in such a way as to facilitate the achievement of intended results.

II. Introduction and development context

i. The Project and Evaluation Objectives

This report is the evaluation of the project entitled “Enhancing the Capacity for Inclusive Local Governance through Synergies and Sustainable Linkages between Communities and Government in North Afghanistan”, implemented by The Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) Afghanistan, based in Kabul, between October 1 2009 and October 31 2011 (25 months, including a 6-month extension). The project benefited from an UNDEF grant of \$350,000, with a project budget of \$325,000, plus an UNDEF monitoring and evaluation component of \$25,000.

The Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) is an international NGO, based in Paris, France. The organization was established as an international relief agency in Afghanistan in 1993, and has since expanded, with activities today in 30 countries. Currently, it is one of the principal international NGOs operating in Afghanistan, with 16 active projects, focused in the north of the country, and a staff of 874 national and 14 international staff.¹ It has received support from a variety of bilateral and multilateral donors.

The project was implemented by the grantee alone, in cooperation with government authorities at local and provincial levels, civil society and community representatives in three provinces (Badakhshan, Baghlan and Takhar) in the north-east of Afghanistan. While ACTED had no formal partners for the project, the “training of trainers” activity was contracted out to a well-known Afghan NGO, the Organization for Human Resource Development (OHRD). The same organization was also responsible for development of the training materials for the gender and advocacy components of the project.

Through the project, the grantee sought to address a major development problem, blocking the nurturing of a democratic society and hindering the accountability of government to citizens. The problem in question is the absence of a connection between local communities, on the one hand, and structures of governance and decision-making, on the other. The focus of the project was on strengthening stakeholder capacities to build and utilize effective linkages between community institutions and government at local, district and provincial levels.

UNDEF and Transtec have agreed on a framework governing the evaluation process, set out in the Operational Manual. According to the manual, the objective of the evaluation is to “undertake in-depth analysis of UNDEF-funded projects to gain a better understanding of what constitutes a successful project which will in turn help UNDEF devise future project strategies. Evaluations also assist stakeholders to determine whether projects have been implemented in accordance with the project document and whether anticipated project outputs have been achieved.”

ii. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was conducted by two experts, one international and one national, under the terms of a framework agreement between UNDEF and Transtec. The

¹ See ACTED web-site: <http://www.acted.org/en/afghanistan>

methodology of the evaluation is set out in the Operational Manual governing this framework agreement, as well as in the evaluation Launch Note. A set of project documents was provided to the evaluators in the weeks preceding the field mission. On that basis, they prepared the Launch Note (UDF-AGF-08-249) setting out key issues and particular areas of focus to be considered during the field mission, which took place from February 1 - 5, 2013. Additional documents drawn on in the Evaluation were obtained from the grantee and its local offices during the field mission and from other relevant sources.

For financial and security reasons, it was not possible for the International Consultant to travel to the field for the Evaluation. Consequently, the field research in NE Afghanistan, along with briefing meetings in Kabul, was conducted by the National Consultant, under the guidance of the International Consultant, who had worked in the country before, and who designed the evaluation framework, managed the process and prepared the Final Report. Travel to NE Afghanistan is complicated by the need to take into account security concerns, as well as difficult weather conditions. Given these constraints, as well as the limited time available for the field mission, a manageable plan was developed in consultation with ACTED Afghanistan for a mission to three of the target districts for the project.

The International Consultant provided an interview guide for the different categories of interviewee and advice on the interaction with focus groups. The field mission conducted by the National Consultant included meetings in Pul-i-khumri, Taloqan and Kishim districts in NE Afghanistan, as well as initial briefing and mission planning meetings in Kabul. Focus group meetings were held with Project beneficiaries, including members of Community Development Councils (CDCs), as well as representatives of government authorities and civil society organizations. Interviews were also conducted with project managers and trainers. In addition, a meeting was held with a senior trainer with the Organization for Human Resource Development (OHRD) in Kabul, which had been responsible for training of trainers for the project, as well as for the development of training materials.

The two Evaluation consultants debriefed by Skype after the National Consultant had the opportunity to review his field notes and recordings. They continued to exchange ideas during the preparation of the draft final report.

iii. Development context

One of the poorest countries in the world, ranked at number 172 of 187 countries on the Human Development Index (2011), Afghanistan has suffered from decades of conflict and instability, dating back to the 1970s. It is estimated that, over the past four decades, as much as one-half of the population has been displaced as a result of conflict and insecurity, and that as many as one-third have left the country as refugees, or, in the case of those with the education and the opportunity, as migrants.² Despite the overthrow of the Taliban in late 2001, followed by the arrival of NATO forces and extensive international donor support over the past 12 years, economic and social indicators remain at a low level. The national government has been unable to make progress in the collection of revenues, and the Afghan economy remains heavily dependent on international assistance, and, despite efforts to curtail it, the opium trade.

² See: Introduction to J. Alexander Their, Ed., The Future of Afghanistan: Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace (USIP), 2009, p.2.

The country suffers from high levels of crime, insecurity and lawlessness, poor public infrastructure, weak and ineffective governance, limited governance capacity, and high levels of corruption in public life. While there have been some improvements in recent years, especially in health and education, the ability of the state to provide basic social services is extremely limited. Hence, the under-five mortality rate is at a rate of 199/1000 of live births, and the mean number of years of education for the adult population is 3.3 years. The literacy rate is 28 per cent overall (Males 43% and Women 12.6%).³

As is well-known, gender inequality, reinforced by traditional beliefs and a conservative political culture, is marked. On both human development more generally, as well as on gender equality, Afghanistan is the lowest ranked Asian country, falling significantly below the levels of gender equality attained by Pakistan and Bangladesh.⁴

The population of 32.4 million remains predominantly rural, with 78.6 per cent of the work-force engaged in agriculture. However, migration from rural to urban areas is significant, with urban population growth at 4.7 per cent annually, compared with 2.8 per cent for rural areas. Continuing high birth rates, along with poor sanitation, inadequate housing and poor health care for the elderly, result in a pyramidal population structure, with 46 per cent of the population in the 0-14 year age bracket.⁵

Local Governance: The Afghan state is highly centralized. Development planning takes place in Kabul, with little opportunity for the administration at provincial level to make funding decisions based on an assessment of local needs. Government efficiency, as measured by its capacity to disburse and use funds, is exceedingly low and demonstrates the centralised system's failure to deliver. In the 2010 budget year, the execution rate for the government's development budget was only 37 percent of the funds allocated.⁶ Although some improvements have been introduced in recent years, the overall model of sub-national and local governance lacks coherence and is weakly integrated. Formal administrative structures take second place to political and patronage networks.

Provincial governors are appointees of the president, and have substantial powers. Central government ministries maintain control over financial resources and their allocation. Representative bodies, including Provincial Councils and District Councils, fall under the authority of the Independent Directorate for Local Government, set up in 2010, while District Development Assemblies (DDAs) and Community Development Councils (CDCs) fall under the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD).⁷ There are no official mechanisms through which cooperative linkages among the various bodies and power centres may be established, with the partial exception of arrangements for the National Solidarity Program (discussed below), which brings together local communities, NGOs, the government and international donors.

The representation of local communities in official bodies remains weak, and, as a result of the ineffectiveness of official structures to meet the needs of local communities, many issues which fall into the sphere of what might be termed governance are dealt with through traditional mechanisms, despite their limitations. One positive development has been the establishment of the National Solidarity

³ Date from UNDP HDI Profile of Afghanistan 2011, and [Afghanistan Country Profile](#), UN Statistical Office, 2013.

⁴ <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/68606.html>

⁵ Sources: as for Footnote 2.

⁶ See: Douglas Saltmarsh and Abhilash Medhi, [Local governance in Afghanistan: A View from the Ground \(Synthesis Report\)](#), Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2011, pp.1-3.

⁷ *Ibid*: pp.1-7.

Program, run by MRRD and supported by donor funding. The program has proved to be effective in providing funding for local infrastructure projects and strengthening governance at local level by giving authority for setting priorities and allocating funding to the Community Development Councils (CDCs). At the same time, the CDCs are viewed as dependent on donor funding, and, hence, as transitory bodies. They exist in parallel to long-established community-level bodies, including the village shura, linked to the mosque.⁸



Map of Afghanistan, Showing Centres of the Three Target Provinces in the NE

Civil Society: There has been a rapid expansion in the numbers of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Afghanistan in recent years (since 2005), as well as a general improvement in levels of professionalism. There has also been an increase in the number of CSOs operating in more than one province, with 53 per cent achieving this benchmark in 2010.⁹ However, civil society remains entirely dependent on donor financial support, and efforts to build up CSOs beyond Kabul and the other large cities have had very limited success, and capacities of organizations in smaller centres remain low.¹⁰

As elsewhere, civil society provides a significant base for preparing members of the government elite. Many senior staff members in government ministries have an NGO background, as do several MPs, including a few women, as well as provincial governors and ministers. Many CSO leaders and activists also play a role in influencing government decision-making by advising and briefing parliamentarians and government officials, and by taking part as experts in local television current events programming.¹¹ They also play a key role in working with, and advising, international organizations seeking to support improvements in social, economic and political life in Afghanistan.

⁸ See: Barnett Rubin, "The Transformation of the Afghan State", in J. Alexander Therier, Ed., *The Future of Afghanistan*, Op. Cit., pp.17-20.

⁹ See: Counterpart International, *Afghanistan Civil Society Assessment 2011*: Kabul, December 2011, p.6.

¹⁰ See: *Ibid.*

¹¹ See: Elizabeth Winter, *Civil Society Development in Afghanistan*: London School of Economics and Political Science, Centre for Civil Society and ESRC Non-Governmental Public Action Programme, June 2010, pp.37-38.

III. Project strategy

i. Project approach and strategy

The Project Objective was stated thus: *“To enhance available mechanisms for inclusive local governance in Afghanistan by enabling synergies between communities and the government and promoting suitable linkages between sub-national government, CDCs and civil society groups.”*

Particular attention was given to the Community Development Council (CDC), an officially-established body with an important role in local development activities, but without a functional relationship to government structures. There are no formal linkages among CDCs within a district, or between them and the District Development Council (DDC) and the associated District Development Assembly, which, in some cases, have not been established. As a result, there has been weak performance by the government in addressing the needs of local communities, and an absence of mechanisms through which citizens might provide feedback on government policies, programs and services. The project intended to contribute to addressing these gaps in governance processes, and, specifically, to enhance participation in decision-making by citizens, community-based organizations and local civil society groups.

The approach adopted by the project focused on taking action at local community, district and provincial levels in the project’s three target provinces, Baghlan, Badakhshan and Takhar, all in the north-east of the country. Key interventions included: training of local stakeholders on advocacy and gender-sensitive development; and capacity-building for community leaders and local organizations; training of stakeholder groups on vulnerability assessments and vulnerability mapping; and, the holding of forums at district and provincial levels to bring together key stakeholders, including government officials, and provide a platform for presenting local priorities to those in a position to address them.

The initial plan was for five group forums to be held, followed by the provincial forums. Instead, the focus moved to the district level, with the number of group forums increasing from the five originally planned to 13, one for each target district. In addition, three provincial forums were held: one in Pul-I-Khumri in Baghlan Province with beneficiaries from two districts; a second, in Taloqan, Takhar Province, for participants from six districts; and, a third held in Fayzabad, Badakhshan, with attendees from five districts.¹²

The training methodology and curriculum, developed by OHRD under contract to ACTED, emphasized a participatory approach and small groups. All trainers who were recruited for the project undertook a training-of-trainers course focusing on the methodology for delivering the curriculum and meeting the learning needs of participants, delivered by OHRD.

The three principal training programs offered by the project in capacity-building, public advocacy and gender-sensitive development were all organized on a 3-stage basis,

¹² According to the [Final Report](#) and its review of Outputs, the provincial forums were cancelled, since “they were deemed too unsafe to implement”, in that they were thought to represent prime targets for insurgent attacks. Interviews and email follow-up with the Project Manager for the second half of the project, along with photographs, confirm that the provincial forums did take place.

with three 2-day workshops for each course. Typically, there were 25 trainees taking part in each 2-day workshop. In addition, 13 2-day workshops, one in each of the 13 target districts for the project, were held on Vulnerability Assessment and Social Mapping. On average, 40 participants took part in each of these workshops.



Training Session in Pul-I-Khumri, Baghlan Province

It should be noted that the project built on previous work conducted by ACTED and others in the target districts, mainly through the National Solidarity Program. Reportedly, the Community Development Councils were all said to be familiar, at least in a general way, with participatory Rural Appraisal methods, and had an appreciation of “social maps”, needs assessments and priority-setting for village development. The aim was to build on this prior experience in working towards

enhancing the capacities of local officials and other stakeholders to work together on a democratic basis to assess problems, develop solutions and advocate with higher-level authorities for the adoption of the proposed solutions.¹³

Management arrangements:

The management arrangements for the project, as planned, were straightforward. The project was managed by ACTED Afghanistan in Kabul, while operations were supervised by a team based in Baghlan in northern Afghanistan. A team of 13 was recruited to support project operations: the Project Manager, four trainers and eight community mobilizers/organizers. All staff members were recruited from the three north-eastern provinces in which the project operated. Ten months following inception, the project manager was promoted to another position within ACTED Afghanistan. One of the four trainers recruited for the project, who had prior management experience, was selected to replace him.

¹³ Source: Based on the Project Document, the Final Report, and Annexes to the Final Report.

ii. Logical framework

The chart is based on detailed information included in the project's results table

Project activities	Intended outputs/outcomes	Medium-term impacts	Long-term development
<p>Training of trainers; Identification of training recipients; Preparation of training materials Provision of training on <u>gender-sensitive development</u> (3 rounds)</p>	<p>689 beneficiaries trained (364 from local interest groups + 325 from CDCs, DDAs (District Development Assemblies), civil society and government) were identified and trained (slightly exceeds target for number of trainees)</p>	<p>CDCs, Civil society groups and local authorities are equipped with knowledge on gender-responsive budgeting & development</p>	<p><i>Enhanced mechanisms for inclusive local governance in Afghanistan by enabling synergies between communities and the government and promoting suitable linkages between sub-national government, CDCs and civil society groups.</i></p>
<p>Training of trainers; Identification of training recipients' Preparation of training materials; Provision of training on <u>capacity building</u> for local interest groups (3 rounds); Provision of public advocacy training (3 rounds)</p>	<p>39 training sessions held in 13 districts (3 rounds) on <u>capacity building</u> for 364 participants (local interest groups) Public advocacy: 39 training sessions held in 13 districts (3 rounds) for CDC& DDA members, civil society groups and district government officials</p>	<p>Enhanced Understanding among relevant actors of vulnerability & capacity to advocate for needs of communities</p>	
<p>Workshops on participatory rural appraisal (PRA) & vulnerability assessments held; Vulnerability assessments carried out and compiled into district and provincial vulnerability maps; 5 district- and 3 province-level forums organized; Half-day training on "Public Advocacy and the Use of the Forum" for CDC, DDA, civil society groups & government representatives</p>	<p>Workshops on PRA & vulnerability assessment held in 13 districts (520 participants, local interest group members, CDC, DDA members, CSOs & government officials) 13 district vulnerability maps compiled; provincial maps not prepared 13 district level forums held, 96 participants per forum, on average; 3 provincial forums held.</p>	<p>Capacity for inclusive governance at local level strengthened through enhanced cooperation among all stakeholders</p>	

IV. Evaluation findings

This evaluation is based on a set of Evaluation Questions or EQs, designed to cover the Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and value added by UNDEF. The Evaluation Questions and related sub-questions are presented in Annex 1.

i. Relevance

The focus of the project on enhancing synergies among local communities, civil society organizations and government at local level, and in building the skills and capacities of local actors was highly relevant to the need to enhance the engagement of local communities with decision-making. The project also sought to strengthen social inclusion and build a sense of political efficacy at local level in a top-down political system, where informal power networks continue to prevail. More broadly, the project was highly relevant to UNDEF's priorities of enhanced political participation and strengthened democratic governance at local level.

The selection of districts in three provinces in NE Afghanistan reflects the geographic focus for ACTED's programming. The three provinces (Badakhshan, Baghlan and Takhar), are also among the poorest in the country, and those most in need of assistance.¹⁴ The grantee brought its strong local knowledge and presence to bear on the project. A key element of project strategy was the effort to ensure that there was broad-based understanding of, and support for, the project at provincial, district and community levels within the three target provinces. Project management was also able to assure government authorities that the initiative was consistent with priorities established both in local development plans and the Afghan National Development Strategy.

The selection of training topics was very much in-line with the knowledge needs of members of the educated class in the region, and the skills and knowledge to be provided were intended to enhance the capacity of community leaders and representatives, as well as civil society and government staff members, to contribute more effectively to working in participatory fashion in planning and leading development activities with local communities.

Project strategy for training was well-prepared, taking account of the needs and characteristics of potential trainees in the area. The training-of-trainers course, training curriculum and methodology, all designed by a contracted provider, OHRD, appear to have been well-done, and matched appropriately to trainee learning needs and capabilities. The main weakness in preparation was the failure of the project to translate learning materials from Dari to Pashto, and recruit a sufficient number of trainers capable of operating in the Pashto language. Similarly, the needs of female trainees would have been better-served had ACTED proved able to recruit at least a few female trainers; none was hired.

Beyond training, the project's effort to ensure that "the whole was greater than the sum of the parts" was disappointing. The provincial/district forums at the close of the project did not build effectively on the training, and, in any case, most trainees did not take

¹⁴ <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/home/tags/afghanistan> (IFAD)

part. The weakness of many training projects is the failure to reinforce through practice what is learned in courses and workshops, thus increasing the likelihood that what has been learned will be retained and applied. Whether or not such a weakness undermined the value of this project will be considered below.

Relevance to beneficiaries and their needs: The comments from project participants, trainers and managers with whom the National Consultant met, as well as a review of materials, confirmed the direct relevance of project activities and resource materials provided to the needs and interests of beneficiaries. All participants interviewed spoke favourably of the training, its relevance to them and the benefits obtained from it. In addition, many were able to offer examples of the way in which they had been able to apply the new knowledge and skills acquired.



Field Training in Village Needs Assessment, Badakhshan Province, July 2011

Risk: The principal risks to the project were those common to many projects in Afghanistan, especially those in the north of the country. Not only does the northern region suffer from heavy snowfall and extreme cold in the winter, which leads to the closing of mountain passes and major roads, it also has been the site of renewed activity by the Taliban and other armed groups in the past few years. While, the threat of insecurity was identified as a potential threat with “medium likelihood” of occurrence, extreme weather was not perceived as a threat

In the event, both proved problematic, with some events and activities postponed because of weather conditions. The steady deterioration of the security situation in one district led to a decision, approved by UNDEF, to replace the district with another in the same province. On other occasions, a security incident, or strong rumours of local activities by insurgents, led to the postponement of an event.

Other risks identified related to the attitude of local leaders, who might object to the focus of training on gender issues, and limited cooperation on the part of government at provincial and district level. Strong and effective preparatory work by the project and thorough advance consultations enabled the ACTED team to overcome these potential problems. It might be noted that early consultations included a meeting with other INGOs and donor agencies active in the region, to allow ACTED to brief its peers on the project and its contents, and to avoid duplication. This also reduced the risk to project effectiveness and impact. It must be concluded that, overall, the project managed risk well and that its risk mitigation strategy proved to be effective.

ii. Effectiveness

The Project's effectiveness was built on the grantee's experience of organization and building relationships with stakeholders in the region, as well as its local knowledge and expertise in community-level development. Its skills in obtaining the necessary level of support and ownership for the project with senior government officials were also apparent. Those consulted included provincial governors or their deputies, whose formal approval the project required, as well as representatives of eight government agencies. Further, the training strategy developed was, for the most part, effective in meeting the needs and adapting to the circumstances of participants and the communities from which they came. An exception, discussed below, concerns Gender-Sensitive Development, where the preparation of trainers seems to have been inadequate.

Staff recruited for the project all came from the NE region of Afghanistan and this assisted in building rapport with local communities, both in preliminary consultations and in the training program itself. More broadly, while project organization and staffing was mainly a positive factor in contributing to effectiveness, there were also a few less positive features. Firstly, despite the indication in the project Document

PORTRAIT OF A PROJECT MANAGER

Mr Daud Mosafer is a graduate in Engineering from Balkh University in Mazari Sharif in Balkh Province, northern Afghanistan. Initially employed by the government through the Ministry of Mines, after a frustrating experience he became a community mobilizer with an NGO, Child Fund Afghanistan (CFA), in 2006, and later became a trainer with the same organization. While with CFA, he was trained in gender issues, management and child psychology. Four years later he was recruited by ACTED as a trainer for the UNDEF Project.

He had been advised of the position by the initial Project Manager, Mr Dost Rokai, who had begun his assignment with ACTED in December 2009, and had been a colleague of Daud when both worked on the same team with CFA. Rokai explained that "although ACTED had a group of standby trainers from its work on the National Solidarity Program, I recommended Daud to be part of the team as he is very competent and I needed the right capacities to run this project." Daud was then contacted by ACTED, interviewed and recruited.

Ten months after project inception, Rokai was promoted to another position within ACTED Afghanistan, and Daud was appointed Project Manager. He explains that he had to continue with training, even after he became manager, since he was obliged to cover for those trainers who were made redundant. While recognizing that far more time and effort would be required to fully achieve the Project Objective, like Rokai (the two were interviewed together), Daud is pleased with the results that were achieved in reducing the gap between government and local communities and strengthening links between civil society, local councils and government.

that female trainers would be used there was an absence of female trainers¹⁵, and, secondly, in a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic region, many of the trainers who were recruited spoke only Dari. Consequently, in Baghlan Province, where there are significant numbers of Pashto-speakers, training was conducted only in Dari. Further, training materials provided by the project were only available in Dari.¹⁶

Training

The courses on Capacity Building, which had a practical focus, were aimed at “local interest groups” (Group 1), including village heads and local decision-makers with the educational background to enable them to benefit from the training offered. Training on Public Advocacy and Gender-Sensitive Development was aimed at a different audience (Group 2). Of the 25 participants in each workshop, typically, there were 8 officers of Community Development Councils or District Development Assemblies, While 8 were from district offices of government agencies (including Justice, Education, agriculture and the Disaster Response Committee); the remaining trainees included leaders from civil society, including religious leaders, village elders and teachers.¹⁷ The total numbers of trainees completing the training were 364 for Group 1 (the target set had been 360), and 325 (target 320) for Group 2.

Data provided by the project indicates that the project met or exceeded not only its overall target for overall numbers completing training, but also that for each of the component groups. However, although the project was able to ensure that it met its quota for categories of participants, it relied on representatives of government agencies and CDCs to recruit the trainees, and, in this, it may have had little alternative, since it needed the cooperation of the organizations concerned.

For the most part, this approach seemed to work. Yet, according to Project Managers (both the initial Project Manager and his successor were interviewed), a significant minority of participants, between 20 and 30 per cent, depending on the district, “were relatives or friends of the heads of the (nominating) organizations”, who “were interested in the workshop because they were given food and an incentive (money for travel costs).” This was a challenge the project had to learn to live with. The dependency of project management on nomination by local stakeholders may also have been one of the factors limiting female enrolment in training programs. However, this was primarily a consequence of the social conservatism of the local communities from which the trainees were drawn.

Overall, the project proved successful in equipping the participants with practical skills and the self-confidence to apply them. Based on feedback from the focus group discussions held during the field research, it appears that most of the trainers were well-prepared and able to utilize the participatory workshop methodology emphasized during the ToT course and deliver the training materials effectively.¹⁸ The opportunity

¹⁵ See: [Project Document](#) (p.5).

¹⁶ Late in the project, a decision was made to utilize surplus funds to provide books on topics related to the themes of the project for under-resourced local libraries in the target districts. While this was a worthwhile initiative, it was discovered that, as with the project’s training materials, all books provided were in Dari, with no materials in other languages included. Most of the books provided originated in Iran.

¹⁷ Source: [Final Report](#), Section 5.1. Data on participants in specific activities, provided in [Milestone Reports](#) (2 and 3) and accompanying documents, provided by ACTED, confirms that the enrolment strategy for engagement of specific target groups, was applied consistently.

¹⁸ Thirty-five participants took part in three focus-group meetings with the National Consultant: one in Taloqan (9 participants, including 5 women); a second in Pul-i-Khumri (12 participants, 2 women); and, a third in Kishim (14 participants, all male). Among those interviewed, the largest group consisted of government officials (12, including 2 from the Directorate of Women’s Affairs). There were 8 representatives of civil society, including 4 from women’s associations), 4 CDC members and 4 were religious leaders or teachers; two others were teachers from public schools, one was a village elder and two were merchants.

for trainees to ask questions, discuss issues and engage during sessions was much appreciated.

Numbers of women enrolled seems to have varied greatly. In some districts and courses, women represented a significant percentage of those participating. In other cases, no women were involved.¹⁹ For example in the second round of training for Gender-Sensitive Development in Fayzabad, Badakhshan held in August 2010, of the 20 participants, 7 were female. By contrast, also in Badakhshan, but in Yawan District, in two groups (Group 1, 28 participants and Group 2, 25) trained in Vulnerability Assessment in July 2011, there was only one woman taking part, the head of a girls' school, who was a member of Group 1.²⁰ No statistics are provided in project reports on the total number or percentage of women trainees, but, overall, the project was unable to attract the anticipated number of women participants.

The Workshops on Vulnerability Assessment and Social Mapping were intended for Group 2 members, but, because the workshops introduced participants to Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and associated tools, including social mapping and interviewing techniques, there was keen interest, and the number of places in each session was increased to 40.²¹ Despite this, very few, if any, women took part in the sessions. The 2-day workshops included an opportunity to apply the techniques learned, including practice in undertaking a needs assessment in a village close to the training site. In observation of one such workshop in Yawan, Badakhshan, in July 2011, the reviewer commented that the capacity of participants to identify and address community needs was enhanced.²²

While many of the project's training workshops included both male and female trainees, it was apparent that local traditions, particularly the norm in rural communities that a woman who travels and/or takes part in a public event must be accompanied by a male relative, along with pervasive security concerns, made it difficult for women to participate. It was suggested in some focus groups in this very conservative region that, with separate sessions organized for women and female trainers for those activities, it would have been possible to increase the numbers of female participants.

While the feedback from workshop participants who were interviewed for the Evaluation was positive on the value of all three main programs delivered (capacity-building, public advocacy and gender-sensitive development), it is not apparent how far the trainees were able to advance in their understanding of gender-sensitive development. While "before" and "after" tests administered by the trainers suggest a high level of understanding (or, at least, information) was achieved on completion of the series of three workshops on the topic, further investigation raised some questions about how much was learned.

When asked about this in the focus groups, most respondents emphasized the basic understanding they now had of the importance of the role of women in the community. Several men indicated how important it was to them to learn that valuing women's contribution was consistent with the Koran. However, this insight seems to have been

¹⁹ In Section 4 of the Project Document (P.5), it is noted that the attendance of women at CDCs (an indicator of acceptance of women playing a public role) varies greatly across the districts in which project activities took place: while women are allowed to attend meetings at 48 % of CDCs in Badakhshan, this is only the case for 9 % of CDCs in Takhar Province.

²⁰ Source: Milestone 2 and 3 Reports and accompanying documentation provided by ACTED. Despite the assertion that the grantee had provided prior training to members of CDCs and others in the three provinces on social mapping and PRA, none of those who took part in project training seemed to have any prior knowledge of the subjects considered.

²¹ Source: As for Footnote 14.

²² Source: Milestone 3 Verification Report.

provided through interventions by religious leaders/scholars who were participating in the workshops, rather than by the trainers.

The training materials on gender-sensitive development were well-prepared and carefully thought-out, with the learning needs of workshop participants in mind. Yet, judging from interviews conducted with both trainers and trainees, the trainers did not seem comfortable in handling gender concepts, nor did they seem able to relate training content to the sharia: an important consideration in traditional communities in Afghanistan.²³ This aside, the local background of the project's trainers, and their understanding of traditional customs and perspectives, appears to have been a great asset in their approach to working with members of local communities.

It is apparent that some progress was made in building awareness among trainees of a different way of seeing the world and understanding some basic concepts of gender relations. It is less clear that the project achieved its first intended medium-term impact result: ***CDCs, Civil society groups and local authorities are equipped with knowledge on gender-responsive budgeting & development.*** It is not known whether the training was effective in conveying the required knowledge on gender mainstreaming, an essential foundation for appreciating the value and purpose of gender-responsive budgeting. Given the starting point of the trainees, to expect this might have been overly ambitious. Judging from interviews undertaken, it seems likely that the learning that took place fell well short of this goal.

As was observed from the testimonies of interviewees, the courses on public advocacy and capacity building seem to have been successful in achieving their learning objectives. In both cases, the curriculum and teaching methodology appear to have been designed very effectively. Both courses seem to have answered unmet needs, vindicating the thoroughness of the initial needs assessment conducted by ACTED. There is little doubt, given the weakness of managerial and organizational skills reported by trainees, that the capacity development program was of real value in providing practical skills and enabling those trained to put the newly-acquired knowledge to good use. Mr Sharifi, a young man from Pul-I-Khumri, explained to the National Consultant, *"I worked in a local Radio station as admin officer. I didn't know how to manage my organization, but, after taking this workshop, now I know how to manage/control my organization in the right way"*.

Similarly, the public advocacy course has enabled trainees to understand and analyse issues more systematically, and has equipped them to organize and take action in addressing local issues, and in bringing their concerns to the attention of local authorities. Those who took part in the vulnerability assessment and social mapping workshops also reported on their ability to put the new knowledge to good use in their home communities (see text box below, *Using New Skills in Vulnerability Assessment and Social Mapping*).

It is probably the case that the project contributed in a general way to the overall objective of enhancing prospects for inclusive local governance. Beyond this, the specific claims set out in the Project Objective concerned establishing: ***enhanced mechanisms for inclusive local governance in Afghanistan by enabling synergies***

²³ There were exceptions to this pattern. Participants in the Evaluation focus group in Kishim District indicated that "the trainers explained each and everything by reciting verses of the Holy Quran (Koran) and Hadiths, which convinced us that women can play an important role in the society."

N.B. "Hadiths" are collected teachings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, but not found in the Koran. Written collections, based on these teachings, are referred to in Islamic law and history.

between communities and the government and promoting suitable linkages between sub-national government, CDCs and civil society groups proved overly ambitious.

While the project may have helped to encourage informal linkages across the three sets of stakeholders listed, there is little evidence of “enhanced mechanisms” or the ability of the project to “enable synergies”. Further, the activities designed to bring the stakeholders together after training was completed, the forums, seemed to add no significant value to the project, although, as suggested in the Final Report, they may have helped to build connections, and to bring new initiatives proposed at community and district levels to the attention of government officials.²⁴



Takhar Province, Khwaja Gar District Vulnerability Assessment

The project did, however, do an effective job in planning and implementing its training program, and positive results were accomplished. As discussed under Relevance, above, however, it did not succeed in building on the foundation established through training, and, in this sense, the project was incomplete.²⁵

iii. Efficiency

On first inspection, it appears that the grantee made effective use of the resources available in support of project objectives. The project benefited from the prior experience of ACTED in the region and from the presence of its network of offices. This, along with its expertise in organizing training programs, enabled it to allocate the

²⁴ See: [Final Report](#), Section 6, Outcomes.

²⁵ When questioned on this, the two Project Managers agreed, indicating that, in their view, two more phases of support would be required to achieve the Project Objective.

necessary resources for preparing and managing an extensive program of training workshops in 13 districts.

A more detailed examination of the budget, considered in relation to the activities undertaken, suggests that some limitations of project results derive, at least in part, from a somewhat imbalanced allocation of resources. In considering cost effectiveness, it might be noted that, although an extensive list of activities was completed, by comparison with other training projects organized by international and Afghan NGOs in the country, and known to the consultants, overall input costs seem high. Taken together, staff salaries and administrative costs, including support staff costs and “overhead” for the regional HQ (Delhi) and international HQ (Paris), account for 52.6 per cent of the planned budget, while program costs amounted to 44 per cent (equipment and supplies account for the remainder).

Public Advocacy Skills at Work in Community Daily Life

- In Kishim, Abdul Wali reflected on his experience. “Allah says I will help you, and you must help your brother. There was [the case of] a man in the Afghan military, [who divorced] his wife. Soon after he divorced her, his parents kicked her out of her home, without repaying her dowry. The woman’s father pleaded for my help, and I started to [advocate on her behalf], using the techniques I had learned here. [I was successful] and finally, the woman got her dowry back from her ex-husband, so now she is content.”
- In Pul-I-Khumri, Ghulum Ali, a journalist, recounted his story of putting advocacy skills to work in addressing a community problem: “There was a football ground where the youngsters played football. It was [seized] by a warlord. We tried to take the ground back - but we failed, as we [lacked sufficient] advocacy and lobbying skills. After participating in training sessions on Advocacy, I realized that we [had] not followed the necessary steps. After participating in the training workshops here, I learned the skills I needed. Now, we are [using] advocacy [to deal with] a similar problem, using the material provided at the training workshops. Someone from Andarab is trying to steal land [which is used as a children’s playground] to build shops. I [have] stepped in and am leading the effort to [halt] the construction work. First, I went and talked with the Mullah Imam, as well as a local representative and other stakeholders. I then informed the [authorities] and filed a complaint on the issue. By using the right techniques and methods, we have been able to terminate [the construction]. The case is still in court, and we are waiting to hear the final decisions.
- Two participants in Taloqan also recounted their stories in using newly-acquired advocacy skills: Aziza, a teacher at a girls’ high school explained that she was now better able to mediate effectively between her students and their families, in cases where parents are reluctant to permit their daughters to continue to attend school. She also spoke of a broader issue facing the school. She explained that the school had a problem with police, caused by the location of a security checkpoint very close to the school, as it could come under attack by insurgents, and could, therefore, cause harm to the students.” I led the advocacy effort to resolve the issue after discussions with parents and the school authorities. I [also] met the Provincial governor and discussed the issue with him, and I am [still] following [up on] this case”.
- Mohammad Zaman tells of a serious situation which arose in his community. “A few days ago one person in our neighborhood, who is a teenager and worked in a bakery, was arrested, on [the basis of] a false allegation of murder by the police. The teenager was present [at] the murder of a local commander. Another witness who was present at the scene pointed the finger at him, [accusing him of killing] the commander. The police arrested him; [he was tried by the] Primary Court, [which found him guilty and sentenced him to be hanged] . His parents informed me about the case and begged me to help them. I [intervened] in this case, [using] the techniques learned through the training , [and succeeded in securing his] release from prison. The training provided proved to be [of great value]”.

This distribution of resources seems somewhat out of balance.²⁶

At a more detailed level, the project recruited 8 community organizers, full-time for 8 months, to conduct initial consultations and undertake preliminary needs assessments in the 13 selected districts. Particularly given that ACTED was already active in the three target provinces, had staff on the ground, and had already delivered training projects in the region, to hire so many dedicated staff for a total of 64-72 person-months would seem to have been unnecessary.

There is some suggestion, judging from the comments of participants interviewed, that training activities were under-budgeted. Project Managers also indicated that, in the latter half of the project, there were adjustments in project plans, and that “we downsized the project staff because of budget and allocation problem and according to the project work plan requirements.”²⁷ There were complaints from participants about the poor quality of food provided, as well as of the printing and paper used for training materials. In addition, trainees commented on the inadequacy of travel allowances provided.

Such efforts at economizing on the part of ACTED may have stemmed from the need to deliver training through a small-group format, resulting in a significant increase in the number of training workshops held. At the same time, given the centrality of training to the project, it also draws attention to the overall pattern in the allocation of the budget, referred to above.

Another structural problem, referred to from a different angle in the discussion of Effectiveness, above, concerns the allocation of project resources to efforts to build on and go beyond the training component of the project, in working towards achievement of the overall project objective. The end-of-project forums added little value, and resources devoted to this set of activities were not deployed well. Essentially, the project plan and the resource allocation decisions which accompanied it did not give adequate thought to moving beyond training and providing opportunities for trainees from the different groups involved to gain more practical experience in working together. While the training provided was well-delivered and well-received, it would have been more appropriate to focus the training on smaller numbers of trainees in fewer districts, while providing both human and financial resources for follow-up activities.

The project seems to have been well-managed at the activity level, but there is no sign of higher-level direction, which would have given the project the opportunity to review experience and make adjustments along the way. In this respect, it is worth noting that the grantee had agreed with UNDEF to undertake monitoring of project activities and results through its dedicated Kabul HQ unit, and this was built into the project budget (two officers at 6 months each). In practice, no monitoring took place.

Project managers reported periodically to the HQ in Kabul, but such reports do not replace external monitoring. Regular reports on monitoring visits, along with an HQ management interest in project progress, might have given the project the overall leadership it lacked.

²⁶ It should be noted that, when questioned on budget issues, Program Managers referred questions of finance to Head Office in Kabul. The difficulty this presented for the Evaluation is that the corporate memory for the project is in NE Afghanistan, and not in Kabul!

²⁷ Repeated efforts by the Evaluation Team to obtain further information from ACTED Kabul on these matters were unsuccessful. Similarly, the Evaluators were unable to obtain a detailed breakdown of final expenditures from the grantee.

While delegation of responsibility to the field is usually a positive step, something was lacking in this case. Paradoxically, while “local knowledge” was a source of strength of the project overall, initial delays in recruitment and in moving forward with implementation suggest that those who designed the project were working with a generic design, and that they were not as well-informed about conditions on the ground in the target districts as they should have been. For their part, the Project Managers seemed to have had no role to play in decision-making on changes to the implementation plan, or budgetary reallocations.

In terms of the administration of operations, project management was perfectly competent, and the two Project Managers seem to have been dedicated to their work, but lacked the inspiration, characteristic of the best UNDEF projects. This is, perhaps, not surprising since they had no part in project design, and were hired to implement a project designed by others.

Using New Skills in Vulnerability Assessment and Social Mapping:

Mr Khallilullah, a member of his local Community Development Council, who took part in the focus group in Pul-I-Khumri, Badakhshan Province, described how he was able to combine his new skills in advocacy and vulnerability assessment. As he explained:

“I work at the District Council. As you know, there are always lots of problems in the villages. Before attending this training I didn’t know how to identify and prioritize problems and how to do advocacy for the problems, or to look for solution for ones which are vital. For example we had some money in the pot for our village, and there were lots of problems concerning people. However, we did an assessment and priority map, and all the members concluded that we are most vulnerable to floods, as they destroyed our fields and crops. We agreed: let’s spend the money to build a wall to stop the floods. We built a wall and the problem has been solved”.

iv. Impact

The institutional impact of the project at district or provincial level is difficult to judge, but unlikely to be significant. However, at community level, it may well be that the enhancement of organizational/managerial and advocacy skills will have made a difference to the energy and effectiveness of governance processes. The experience of participating together in the workshops may also have resulted in new possibilities for cooperation across stakeholder groups. The opening of the eyes of participants to a more positive appreciation of the role of women may also have made some difference. Further, the training on vulnerability assessment also seems to have enabled local leaders, civil society organizations and community groups to use consultative methods in determining local priorities and allocating scarce resources. The district-level social maps based on vulnerability assessments will be of use and may set a precedent for future approaches to planning and priority-setting. Over time, if reinforced by further practical experience and on-going technical support to local institutions and social groups, as well as further practical training for individuals, these developments could also have a broader impact.

At individual level, those trained through the project reported on the value of the skills and knowledge acquired. They were also able to demonstrate their capacity to apply what they had learned in daily life and in the public sphere.

There is no evidence to suggest that the project had a catalytic effect. However, the project was certainly worthwhile, and the encouraging results obtained through training may help to make the case for further funding for initiatives building on the UNDEF-supported project.

v. Sustainability

There is no tradition in Afghanistan of public financial support of NGOs. As discussed above, the modern civil society sector is dominated by INGOs and Afghan NGOs entirely dependent on international funding. For reasons discussed above, in Development Context, there is minimal likelihood of state funding for such activities. Essentially, without on-going international donor support, there is little prospect of sustainability of most of the development work currently underway, since what is required is a very long-term engagement to build the necessary domestic capacities. For efforts to support democratic development and an active and dynamic civil society, prospects of sustainability are yet more limited. With further financial and technical support and sound planning and preparation, much more can be done to move forward on this front.

In the short term, it seems likely that ACTED, if it chooses, will be able to secure the funding required to build on the work of the UNDEF project in NE Afghanistan. Beyond the short term (2015 and beyond), there is only uncertainty, because of the prospect of the curtailment of development assistance by many major donors, as the ISAF/NATO Mission withdraws from the country.



Provincial Forum in Badakhshan

There was enthusiasm among trainees interviewed for the Evaluation for further training. However, given the project objective and the rather limited success of ACTED in achieving it, a different approach will be required if the organization seeks to undertake further work to build for sustainability in the sense of ownership by not only trainees, but also local organizations and institutions. This will require linking project work with the planning and decision-making agendas of governance institutions initially at local and district levels, and, if initiatives there prove successful, ultimately at the provincial level.

vi. UNDEF Added Value

In a challenging environment, where conflict and insecurity is never far away, there were some benefits to the project from its association with the UN. Beyond this, it is important for UNDEF to show its willingness to support democratic development projects in Afghanistan, despite the many problems faced in working in this sector. By its presence, UNDEF demonstrates its confidence in the ability and will of Afghan citizens to work toward a more democratic and inclusive society.

V. Conclusions

All conclusions are derived from the findings of the Evaluation, presented above.

i. Enhancing the Capacity for Inclusive Local Governance through Synergies and Sustainable Linkages between Communities and Government in North Afghanistan was largely successful as a training project, which delivered significant benefits to trainees. However, the potential for it to be more than this was not realized.

ii. The project was relevant to UNDF priorities through its effort to build the capacity of local leaders, at community and district level, along with members of civil society organizations and government officials, to participate more effectively in local governance.

iii. One of the strengths of the project was its investment in comprehensive and broad-based consultations as a means to building stakeholder support and ownership prior to beginning core activities.

iv. Local recruitment of trainers and community mobilizers was a positive factor in project effectiveness in that it enabled the project team to build rapport with local stakeholders and trainees. To set against this was the failure of the project to recruit any female trainers, or a sufficient number of Pashto-speakers to conduct training in those districts where Pashto was the language of a significant proportion of the local population.

v. In deference to local authorities, the project accepted trainees nominated by others. While most participants reflected the criteria communicated to nominators by project management, a significant minority of trainees was not motivated to learn, but rather to take advantage of other benefits offered (food and travel costs).

vi. Despite this, in the view of the participants interviewed for the Evaluation, all training workshops were successful in meeting their learning objectives and endowing them with new knowledge and skills, relevant to their own priorities, and which they were able to apply.

vii. While the project did attract some female trainees, in some cases, no women were included. This reflected local conservatism and perceived security threats. The failure of the project to recruit women trainers also had an impact on this state of affairs.

viii. In terms of efficiency, there is an apparent imbalance in the deployment of project resources, with more than 52 per cent of the budget allocated to staffing, administration and overheads, and leaving only 44 per cent for program costs. Further,

it is apparent that there was a shortage of program funds in the latter part of the project, and economies were introduced.

ix. Project management was administratively competent, but its overall effectiveness was undermined by the failure of ACTED Afghanistan's HQ in Kabul to include Project Managers in the field in major decisions on work planning and re-profiling the budget. The project lacked the overall guidance and direction, at both planning and implementation stages, which might have enabled it to do better in achieving its objectives.

x. While it is probable that the project contributed in a general way to the overall objective of enhancing prospects for inclusive local governance, the specific elements of the project objective: building ***enhanced mechanisms for inclusive local governance in Afghanistan by enabling synergies between communities and the government*** proved to be beyond its reach.

VI. Recommendations

In order to strengthen efforts by ACTED to work towards enhancing its work in northern Afghanistan, ***It is recommended that:***

i. ACTED ensures that project design and implementation planning takes full account of local conditions and that the project management team in the field is included in decisions on project work planning and budgeting.

ii. Given the difficulties it has experienced in recruiting both women trainers and trainees in NE Afghanistan, It is recommended that ACTED develops a guide for project design on how best, under admittedly difficult conditions, to mainstream gender equality into project results frameworks.

iii. Given the generally positive character of cooperation between ACTED and OHRD in training of trainers and the preparation of training materials, the two organizations review the experience of the UNDEF project with a view to ensuring that all trainers are well-prepared to plan and deliver courses to male, female or mixed training groups on gender equality topics.

iv. ACTED takes greater care in the future in ensuring that its training team includes those with the linguistic capabilities to match the linguistic profile of trainees, and that OHRD ensures that training materials are prepared in both Dari and Pashto.

v. ACTED gives careful attention to ensuring a reasonable balance between programming and staff costs.

vi. More careful consideration is given to the crafting of project objectives and to ensuring that project activities are planned in such a way as to facilitate the achievement of intended results.

VII. Overall assessment and closing thoughts

Enhancing the Capacity for Inclusive Local Governance in Northern Afghanistan was generally effective as a training project, but its overall design was not well-aligned with the overall objectives specified. The project made a difference for the trainees who benefited from the course provided, but did not contribute much to the institutional results linked to enhancing inclusive local governance.

The grantee was a well-known international NGO. This was a strength in some ways, but may have been a weakness in others. The project design had a “generic” quality to it, suggesting a lack of attention to the specific needs in the project sites that were addressed. Further, the lack of engagement with the project by ACTED Kabul at a management level, along with the absence of decentralization of decision-making to the local level, undermined project effectiveness.

VIII. ANNEXES

Annex 1: Evaluation questions

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? · Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? · Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse?
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? · To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? · Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? · What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this?
Efficiency	To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? · Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? · Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives?
Impact	To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? · Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? · To what extent has the project caused changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? · Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples?
Sustainability	To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? · Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)?
UNDEF value added	To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · What was UNDEF able to accomplish through the project that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc.). · Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues?

Annex 2: Documents Reviewed

Counterpart International, Afghanistan Civil Society Assessment 2011: Kabul, December 2011

IFAD Rural Poverty Portal: <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/home/tags/afghanistan>

Saltmarshe, Douglas and Abhilash Medhi, Local governance in Afghanistan: A View from the Ground (Synthesis Report). Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2011

Their, J. Alexander, Ed., The Future of Afghanistan. Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace (USIP), 2009.

UNDP, HDI Profile of Afghanistan 2011.

UN Statistical Office: Afghanistan Country Profile, 2013.

Winter, Elizabeth, Civil Society Development in Afghanistan: London School of Economics and Political Science, Centre for Civil Society and ESRC Non-Governmental Public Action Programme, June 2010.

Annex 3: Persons Interviewed and Field Mission Schedule

January 29, Tuesday
Initial meeting with ACTED's Kabul Reporting Officer Shah Jahan Rahimi
January 30, Wednesday
Initial Meeting with Assadullah Ehsas Organization of Human Resource Development (OHRD) Manager and trainer
February 1, Friday
Travel by road to Pule-i-Khumri
Initial meeting Project Managers Dawod Musesfer and Dost Mohammad Rokai
February 2 , Saturday
Detailed meeting with Project Managers Dawod Musesfer and Dost Mohammad Rokai
Focus group meeting with the representatives of the Women's Association, the CDC/DDC, the Civil Society, the Directorate of Irrigation and Agriculture, the Directorate of Social Work Affairs and the Media: Ms. Fahima, Ms. Huma, Mr. Khalilullah, Mr. Juma Gul, Dr. Amanullah, Mr. Allah Rahem, Mr. Abdul Shukoor, Mr. Mohammad Nasim, Mr. Enyatullah, Mr. Sayed Jamaluddin, Mr. Ghulam Ali (Alemi), Mr. Khalid Sharifi
Departure to Taloqan, Takhar
February 3, Sunday
Meeting with project trainers Mr. Abdul Raheem and Faqeer Mohammad Faqeri
Focus group meeting with the representatives of the Directorate of Social Work, Martyrs and Disabled persons, the Directorate of the Ministry Women Affairs, Local High School, the Authors Association of Takkhar, the NSP, and the CDCs: r. Nasrullah, Ms. Fazila Karimi, Ms. Seddiqa, Ms. Nasima, Ms. Shekiba, Ms. Aziza, Mr. Abdullahi, Mr. Mohammad Zaman, Mr. Haji Said Naqibullah
Checked the documents of the project at ACTED office in Taloqan
February 4, Monday
Travel by road to Kishim, Badakhshan
Focus group meeting with the representatives of Madrasas, Religious Institutions, the Directorate of Agriculture, the Directorate of Social Affairs, the Directorate of Justice, the Directorate of Counter Narcotics, the Directorate of Forestry, local schools, the CSOS and the CDCs: Mulvi. Abdul Ahad, Mulvi. Mutawekil, Mr. Abdul Basir, Mulvi. Abdul Wadood, Mulvi. Fahim, Mulvi. Sarfiraz, Mr. Abdul Hamid, MR. Abdul Samad, Mulvi. Imamuddin, Mr. Abdullah, Mr. Abdul Mosaver, Haji Mohammad Nabi, Mr. Sayed Alam , Mulvi. Abdul Qahar
Travel by road back to Taloqan
February 5, Tuesday
Visited the Libraries at the Directorate of Women's Affairs, and the libraries of the Directorate of Cultural Affairs
Audited more documents at ACTED's office in Taloqan

Annex 4: Acronyms

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
CDC	Community Development Council
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DDA	District Development Assembly
EQ	Evaluation question
GE	Gender Equality
HDI	Human Development Index
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental organization
NSP	National Solidarity Program
OHRD	Organization for Human Resource Development
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
UN	United Nations
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Program