COMMUNITY-BASED DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AFGHANISTAN

FIRST, ASSUME A COMMUNITY

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UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

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About the Report

With an eye to community-based approaches and effective subnational programming in Afghanistan, this report looks at key assumptions about rural Afghan populations that underpin many community-based projects, including the largest and most prominent of them, the National Solidarity Program and the recently launched follow-on Citizens' Charter National Priority Program. Derived from the author's field research and experience over the years, the report is integral to the United States Institute of Peace focus on democracy and governance and aligns with the Institute's long-standing and wide-ranging commitment to strengthening subnational governance in Afghanistan.

About the Author

David J. Katz served as a Foreign Service officer under the U.S. Department of State from 1984 to 2014. His involvement with Afghanistan, which dates from the mid-1970s when he conducted ethnographic research for his PhD in what is now Nuristan Province, continued through several diplomatic postings and Washington assignments. He thanks Frances Brown, Karen Finkenbinder, Paul Fishstein, Roy Herrmann, John Lister, Jennifer Murtazashvili, Sheila Peters, and anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and comments on earlier versions of this report. This author is not the author of the same name of the 2011 *Middle East Quarterly* article titled "Reforming the Village War: The Afghanistan Conflict."

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[The rural community has stood center stage for international efforts in Afghanistan to build a modern state.]

Summary

- Over the last fifteen years, projects and interventions have targeted tens of thousands of communities in rural Afghanistan with ambitious goals to catalyze economic development, bring security, deliver basic services, and build local governance capabilities. The beneficiaries are expected to participate, sharing both the effort and the welfare gains.

- The challenge of identifying prospective project sites is complex, however, because rural Afghans organize themselves in ways that community may be either not apparent or absent altogether and because the Afghan government has yet to officially recognize local units at a scale suitable for interventions.

- Often the cooperation and solidarity among rural Afghans assumed to be a community because they happen to live in the same place are at best limited.

- Many interventions appear to achieve some of their objectives, but do so in ways that fail to produce the desired effects on community solidarity and local governance capabilities—which are critical to postconflict reconstruction and state-building.

- The Afghan National Unity Government is moving ahead with an ambitious plan based on flawed assumptions. This plan—the Citizens' Charter National Priority Program—aims to transform the lives of rural Afghans and their relations with their government.

- Prospects for projects targeting local communities in rural Afghanistan depend on accurate appreciation of their social and political context and the economic and power relations within groups. Although the state of knowledge about rural Afghanistan leaves much to be desired, information is and has been available throughout the post-Taliban era that refutes these assumptions and supplies a more reliable picture.

- Focus is needed on strengthening existing administrative structures and using them to deliver services and for other purposes—the norm for many low-population density regions, including in developed countries.

Community and Participation

The rural community has stood center stage for international efforts in Afghanistan to build a modern state, one that can deliver services to its citizens, provide security, meet international obligations to control its territory, and prevent terrorists from again finding sanctuary there.[1] Programs across Afghanistan have had the active participation of rural community members as a core element of their design. Residents in target communities, the intended beneficiaries, are asked to cooperate in the project for their common good based on their shared identity and interests and their feelings of solidarity. In taking an active, decisive role in selecting their project and in contributing sweat equity and material, community members gain a sense of ownership of the outcome and strengthen their sense of community and capabilities to cooperate on other matters.[2]

Billions of dollars have been committed to Afghanistan in many sectors using these community-based participatory approaches, but are conditions really right for such projects, and how have they fared? The World Bank-supported National Solidarity Program (NSP)—by far Afghanistan's largest development project, which ran from 2003 to 2016 and carried a $2.5 billion price tag—adopted this approach. It has been celebrated as a "crowning achievement" and "one of the most successful development programs in Afghanistan."[3] It claims to have completed block grant projects in partnership with more than 92 percent of the country's rural communities.[4] The accolades heaped on it may account for the confidence that has spurred tens of smaller, less ambitious development projects to emulate aspects of the NSP, especially its community-based participatory model.

The focus on rural communities is being carried forward in the Afghan government's plans, first announced at the London Conference on Afghanistan 2014, to attain self-reliance through economic growth and to improve citizen well-being through better governance and efficient service delivery.[5] The Citizens' Charter National Priority Program—one of the eleven national priority programs in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, the ten-year development strategy unveiled at the October 2016 Brussels Conference on Afghanistan—commits to building the partnership between the Afghan state and its communities, both rural and urban. The first phase, called the Citizens' Charter Afghanistan Project, is budgeted at $628 million and slated to last four years. The rural component aims for the participation of 8.5 million Afghans residing in twelve thousand communities—about one-third of the country's rural communities—in all thirty-four provinces.[6]

The Citizens' Charter spells out the services that communities can expect from their government and commits to improving the mechanisms for delivering education, health, basic rural infrastructure, and agriculture services. It plans to accomplish this in part by building on the capabilities of community development councils (CDCs), the bodies established by the NSP to implement its projects in rural communities. These councils, which have between ten and thirty members from the local population, are to be repurposed as whole-of-government platforms and then strengthened so that they can support services and activities of the line ministries.[7] Entrusted with greater responsibilities than they had under the NSP, the CDCs are to serve as the entry point to communities for development activities and an ambitious range of administrative and governance functions for local residents.[8] President Ghani has said that the CDCs with their added responsibilities will be the "sole competent government bodies in villages."[9]

These plans are the most far-reaching administrative and government transformation at the local level in Afghanistan's history.[10] The NSP focused primarily on rural communities, but the government is now extending it to urban areas—the first time that Afghanistan's urban

and rural community development efforts have been brought together into one program, even though the urban and rural program designs differ markedly.[11]

The commitment to continue with and extend community-based efforts can be justified by what is seen as an impressive résumé of accomplishments for community-based projects, especially in comparison with the underwhelming achievements for many other types of interventions and development efforts attempted.[12] However, despite the enthusiasm for community-based approaches, they are in fact inappropriate for many places in rural Afghanistan, including where such projects have reported tremendous success. A key reason is that an essential element is often missing from the implementation of these efforts: the community.

In rural Afghanistan, practitioners assume that members of targeted groups share sentiments and have social solidarity strong enough to reach the desired outcomes. Often, however, communal bonds are absent, weak, or channeled in ways that keep members from cooperating as the projects intend, even if appearances suggest the contrary—leading intervention proponents and practitioners to assume the presence of communities that do not exist.

Reliance on assumptions at odds with reality can yield incorrect evaluations. Although the observable outcomes of interventions can indeed be commendable, misapprehensions about the processes by which they were reached risk reinforcing erroneous assumptions about the social organization and processes involved. Such reinforcement can mislead about the extent to which other important outcomes that cannot be directly observed and measured have been reached. Reliance on these flawed assumptions can boost confidence in the effectiveness of interventions that is not justified. This mischaracterization of what is accomplished can lead to continued faith in intervention approaches that, whatever their appearances, do not accomplish what is intended.

Immense Needs, Meager Capability

All of Afghanistan after the ouster of the Taliban was in a deplorable state, but rural dwellers were the worst off. Conditions throughout the hinterlands presented nearly insurmountable difficulties for the first attempts to deliver humanitarian assistance and basic services. Although rebuilt transportation and communications infrastructure, which decades of conflict and mismanagement had largely destroyed, have offset the difficulties to some extent, formidable obstacles remain. Concerns about security and lack of effective government control in many regions also have limited what could be accomplished, but even in rural areas where these have not impeded assistance activities, Afghan capabilities, whether of the government or otherwise, to deliver assistance have been meager.

Decades of conflict and misrule had rendered the Afghan government barely able to function, much less to make significant inroads in meeting the needs of its rural citizens. The Taliban left behind government ministries and offices in terrible shape, deficient in everything: staff, equipment, operational capabilities, and in many cases even physical facilities. Although the government has made great strides in building itself up, its capacity to absorb and disburse assistance, especially to its rural dwellers, has been slow to improve.

In part, this is due to the subnational administrative structure that connects the country's highly centralized government and the people. Surprisingly, this subnational structure managed to weather the decades of conflict. An assessment of the state of subnational administration conducted in 2002 and 2003 found that it "is more robust and functional than anyone had expected at the beginning of the study." Specifically, "the administrative and fiscal mechanisms, which had been standardized before the war, have continued in use throughout

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the country despite the lack of an ongoing relationship with Kabul. Indeed, old protocols are strictly followed, despite the difficulties presented by the very poor state of telecommunications."[13] Nevertheless, the subnational administrative structure and the rural outposts of central service-providing ministries lacked the means to channel top-down assistance and services at the scale and speed and with the accountability and control required by donors and development agencies. One reason is that the administrative structure has never reached down to the local level in rural regions.

With international backing, the Afghan government has been working at improving and modernizing its subnational administration. The two most important milestones of that effort were the 2007 transfer of civilian administrative responsibilities from the Interior Ministry to a new entity, the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, and the promulgation in 2010 of the Sub-national Governance Policy (SNGP), which set out an ambitious plan to reform the country's entire subnational administration that included extending it to the local level.[14]

Complementing the efforts to strengthen the central government, the international community directed resources and personnel to the provinces to build capabilities of the subnational administration. International donors and aid organizations were supporting the Afghan government in building its capabilities, but they also were keen to move quickly and not wait until the government was up to the job. These sponsors devised ways to get aid and services and exert influence directly on the country's rural population that did not depend on the government administrative structure. Most prominent have been the joint military-civilian provincial reconstruction teams, which were first established with an open-ended presence in most provinces, usually at bases near the provincial administrative headquarters. There they attempted, among other things, to support the strengthening of administrative capabilities. Some districts in regions critical to the military campaign also had district support teams charged with a similar mission at the district level. The provincial reconstruction teams and other military units operating in rural areas, in addition to their other operations, became involved in delivering aid directly to the people. And civilian aid organizations of all types operated either independently or as implementing organizations for governments and donors to address pressing humanitarian, assistance, or development needs.

Parallel with these efforts were those of foreign militaries, often together with their civilian counterpart agencies, which recognized the critical role of the rural people and sought to engage them directly in achieving military objectives. Winning this support for their government and the allied foreign militaries involved various methods that included providing humanitarian assistance and trying to improve their security and economic welfare. While in some instances the means were not dissimilar from what civilian agencies were doing, the purposes reflected military and political goals: strengthening the people's support and loyalty to their government and repudiating the insurgents.

All of these efforts, whether civilian or military, sought to deal directly with people and have had to contend with the lack of any official local organization or units. Because the Afghan administration—despite the approved but unimplemented 2010 SNGP—still divides rural regions on only two (rather than three) tiers, province and constituent districts, the district is the smallest administrative unit.[15] The Afghan government therefore is unable to supply detailed information on the local groups it plans to formally recognize concerning membership, organized decision-making structure and procedures, and physical boundaries. Initiatives intending to deliver a service or assistance directly are on their own in determining with whom they will deal.

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A further complication stems from the lack of the kind of reliable information about rural dwellers that planners need to design projects and for service delivery. Afghanistan has never completed a population census. One was begun in 1979 but deteriorating security after the 1978 Marxist coup prevented its being completed. Plans in 2008 were postponed in response to security and economic concerns.[16] Rescheduled for 2011, they were again postponed, this time indefinitely. Although different efforts have sought to supply better quantitative information about Afghanistan's rural population, domestic political concerns have intervened in ways that limit or block these efforts or restrict use of their findings. One pending large-scale effort, the Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey, a $74 million project launched in 2011, is being conducted by the Central Statistics Organization with the involvement of the UN Population Fund, and backed by the U.S. Agency for International Development, among others.[17] It has already been conducted in several provinces and is due to be completed for all provinces by 2018.[18] Detailed data are being collected, but the information presented will be reliable only to the district level.[19] Without more granular quantitative information, implementing organizations find it difficult to be confident that aid and services are distributed equitably.

Although the SNGP commits the government to delineating local units below the district level, this has yet to happen. Instead, the administration continues to deal with rural dwellers through long-standing arrangements whereby district administrators maintain lists of individuals who are their points of contact for populations in the district. These unpaid individuals— referred to as *maliks*, *arbabs*, or *qaryadars*—act as intermediaries between the state and the people.[20] The specific population associated with each malik is not formally enumerated. In some cases, more than one malik is associated with a particular population, perhaps due to tensions within the group that prevents a single malik from dealing with everyone within it.

The decisions taken and resources committed by donors, aid organizations, and the international military show the importance that they put on their assistance, programs, and operations reaching rural Afghans. Because the limited capabilities of the Afghan government have largely ruled out using conventional top-down efforts whereby a government receives resources from outside and then organizes programs that deliver to the rural beneficiaries in timely and acceptable ways, the international community has had to find ways to do this that do not rely on the Afghan government. And, if the planned activities are to operate on a scale smaller than the district, the planners have also had to figure out how to pick target local groups and how to engage them. In most cases, these interventions have decided to deal at the local level with rural settlements, what they refer to as villages and assume to be communities, and to use participatory delivery strategies that have been used elsewhere in fragile and postconflict situations. The targeted beneficiaries are expected to participate as a community by making collective decisions about the type of project and its implementation. Why have these units and these methods been selected?

Community Approaches and International Practice

The capabilities of the Afghan government and administration of rural areas affect the decisions about targets and intervention strategies, but so do the policies of sponsoring governments and donors. Thus, given the intention of promoting progress toward broader goals such as strengthening national unity, building popular support for the government, and promoting domestic peace and stability, certain groups are ruled out because they are based on attributes seen as inimical to progress toward those goals. Afghan groups based on identities that many outsiders regard as atavistic—such as tribal, sect, and ethnic affiliation—have been avoided

out of concern that interventions that select and engage groups based on such identities risk fomenting tensions and disunity.[21] Those groups are generally excluded regardless of whether they demonstrate attributes that may make them otherwise suitable for interventions. Project designs also, and for the same reasons, avoid groups such as those controlled by warlords or similar powerful individuals.

Donor governments and aid organizations seek groups whose attributes suggest that members participate in local governance through decision making and contributing their labor and material for the common good. If it is not apparent that a group's members are doing so, then indications must be strong that their involvement in the project can bring them to participate in the desired way. The potential for the equitable treatment of the marginalized—such as women, excluded minorities, and the poor—and their full participation in the planned intervention are concerns that weigh in group selection criteria for many projects.[22] Other interventions, such as those having goals tied to the military campaign, accord these less concern.

Intervention methods in Afghanistan mirror local-level projects underway elsewhere.[23] Over the last twenty years or so, funds devoted to community-based projects with conventional development goals have grown massively worldwide. The World Bank, for example, has in the last ten years allotted more than $85 billion to local participatory development efforts.[24] In 2012 alone, it was supporting approximately four hundred such projects in ninety-four countries valued at almost $30 billion.[25] Many multilateral development banks and bilateral development agencies, including those of the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, and Sweden, use these approaches.

Other community-based projects designed to accomplish reconstruction, stabilization, security, and counterinsurgency goals in conflict-affected and postconflict contexts, such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have also proliferated. These type of projects are suitable for difficult, insecure, and even dangerous conditions, what has characterized much of rural Afghanistan in recent years. When governments are not up to the task, perhaps because of state failure or a lack of will or capability to function, implementing organizations—often foreign development agencies or nongovernment organizations but also military or foreign government organizations—can come in, deploy their own resources, and deal directly with the intended beneficiaries without the host country government having an on-the-ground operational role.[26]

One virtue of community-based approaches is their capacity for what is termed *quick impact*. This is a selling point when a policy priority is to restore or build goodwill, legitimacy, and popular support for a government, even one too weak or incapable of doing much on its own. Results can be had long before a government—which may be rebuilding after a conflict—has its capabilities up and running. This makes these projects attractive for "hearts and minds" counterinsurgency strategies, such as has been attempted in Afghanistan.[27]

Proponents point to their potential to deliver multiple sought-after changes in a single intervention.[28] Justifications include their ability to improve social and economic well-being through better targeting and efficiency, a higher likelihood of sustainability derived from the recipients' sense of ownership in the project, greater social cohesion, and improved governance both at the local level and through stronger linkages between citizens and their state.[29] Local populations attain a new sense of empowerment in externally sourced matters that affect them.[30] The learning-by-doing opportunities allow them to gain experience and expertise as they collaborate with the outside organization—described as facilitating rather than as imple-

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menting because the projects are done by the community itself—in the deliberations and decisions affecting the project and its implementation.[31]

Strengthened local governance capabilities offer the prospect of equipping communities to better manage their affairs and dealings with the outside world, whether with their government, aid agencies, or other communities.[32] Planners view the strengthening of local governance as contributing to state-building strategies when a state structure is largely being built anew, such as in Afghanistan. This can have a positive long-term impact as an element in "a new local governance structure that is decentralized and participatory from the outset."[33] The inherent decentralized participatory decision making in this strategy is the essence of hierarchical governance based on the subsidiarity principle.[34] The principle posits that matters ought to be handled by the lowest competent governance body of those affected by them, and that more inclusive administrative bodies of the central authority have a subsidiary role, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level.

Support for such approaches in Afghanistan rests on broad agreement about their utility, effectiveness, and virtue. The coalition of support includes the governments and international organizations bankrolling them, the development agencies and foreign militaries implementing them, and the rural dwellers who benefit. For donors, their governments and political leaders, development organizations, academics, and advocacy groups, these projects reflect the state of the art: humane, effective, progressive ways to bring better development outcomes to needy people in the parlous conditions of rural Afghanistan using methods that, once refined and perfected, can be scaled up and replicated in communities throughout the country.[35] For civilian organizations and military units in the field, the projects offer the prospect of getting up and running quickly and dealing directly with target populations while avoiding the delays and aggravations of partnering with a government lacking the capabilities (and perhaps the will) to make a strong, positive contribution. Afghan government officials may see such projects as worthwhile because they alleviate pressure on the government to deliver development outcomes without having to deal with the complexities of implementation until they are capable of doing so, yet earn officials the gratitude of the people and the continued backing of international partners and sponsors.[36]

Donors and organizations weigh conditions, capabilities, and goals in selecting the ways they conduct their operations. They have in all of these efforts faced the same challenge—of selecting sites. In this, they have been largely on their own. Moreover, selection considerations involve more than finding groups of people at the appropriate scale. Prospective groups also must be able to act as a community at least for the intervention. For some interventions, the sponsors require that the manner of cooperation and participation conform to their values and principles, and that people normally excluded from deliberations and decision-making processes, such as women and the economically disenfranchised, are fully involved. For some interventions, the anticipated outcomes for the communities have involved bringing changes to the communities that would also permanently change how participants deal with one another, their government, and the outside world. Identifying communities and selecting them for these interventions has been a decisive factor in their success.

Identifying and Selecting Communities

Interventions that seek to engage rural Afghans at the local level for community participation have adopted different approaches to identifying and selecting their communities. Some have

proceeded in the expectation that they can identify existing groups of people who are organized as communities, while others have sought indications suggesting that the interventions can induce the populations to participate as communities. This section examines the ways that projects and activities in rural Afghanistan have gone about identifying and selecting populations for their participatory activities and how they differ from one another with respect to the assumptions that they make regarding community.

Regardless of objective or sector, the approaches have all identified and selected communities based partly on residence (spatial proximity). Other possible criteria—such as kinship, ethnicity, occupation, or class—have not been explicitly used, though in many places people who share those identities also live near one another.

Table 1 presents distinguishing features of these approaches: the attributes of the prospective communities, the processes by which the communities participate in the project, and the type of expected outcomes, particularly as they concern the extent of the transformations these bring to local populations and their state-building consequences.

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Table 1. Key Aspects of Communities for Participatory Interventions

	Village Communities	National Solidarity Program Communities	Service Delivery Communities
Attributes of prospective communities			
Spatial proximity	Villages defined by spatial proximity of residences. Spatial units serve as proxy for communities.	Important but not inviolable. The NSP combined separate small rural settlements or split large ones to make size-compliant communities.	Community members are residents in administratively determined service facility catchment areas.
Population size	Size of existing villages.	Had to meet program guidelines (more than twenty-five and less than three hundred families) or be changed to do so.	Service facility capacity determines catchment area size. May include several discrete settlements.
Common identity and interests, shared norms and values, solidarity and cohesion	Existing. Projects may strengthen or revive these. Local rivalries may hinder cooperation.	Existing or project participation would induce these in the newly formed communities.	Beneficiaries find their commonality and common interests through sharing the service facility.
Process			
Project decision-making arrangement	Use existing community councils or deliberative processes. *Shura* or *jirga*.	Introduced new entities, community development councils, that conform to program specifications, including gender-balance. Indigenous councils and deliberative processes had no role.	Service ministries set up new service-linked community councils following their models, and guidance (school management committees, health shuras).

(Table continues on next page)

Table 1. Key Aspects of Communities for Participatory Interventions (continued)

	Village Communities	National Solidarity Program Communities	Service Delivery Communities
Role for project decision-making entities	Limited to project but local decision-making bodies may also have nonproject roles and responsibilities.	Project-specific role. CDC was expected to persist after the NSP project and take on other responsibilities for their communities.	Limited to service-related matters.
Selection process for decision makers	Left to communities.	NSP guidelines called for community-wide, universal suffrage, secret-ballot elections; designated female positions.	Sources suggest that council members have integrity, service orientation, and motivation.
Anticipated governance or participation outcomes			
Community-level transformational outcomes	Limited. Project experience may build community governance capabilities and social cohesion. No intention to reorganize communities, their structures or processes. Projects offer voice, ownership, and participatory experience to beneficiaries.	New community entities and processes formed. Learning by doing may lead the CDCs to take on other responsibilities. Under Citizens' Charter National Priority Program CDCs become whole-of-government platforms for local governance and service delivery. Greater equality and active women's participation.	Goal is permanent local participation in service delivery. These new communities cooperate on matters related to a specific public service. Existing institutional structures, processes and local boundaries remain unchanged.
State-building outcomes	Indirect. Popular gratitude for projects and benefits fosters goodwill, loyalty, and support for government. Participation has intrinsic value.	Plans called for CDCs to become formal institutions; the sole competent government body in a community. CDCs are democratic, humane, and nonexploitative.	Participatory service delivery offers beneficiaries voice, ownership, and influence over public services. They reciprocate with their loyalty and support.

Source: Author's compilation

Villages

Foreigners and English-speaking Afghans alike refer to the rural locales mainly populated by agriculturalists who live near one another as villages. Projects in many sectors treat these populations as communities, sometimes described as communities of place. As such, the solidarity, common identity, shared values and norms, and common interests, which are thought to be tied to their spatial proximity, are assumed to lead the residents to cooperate as a community. These Afghan village communities are assumed to have local institutions and processes, often described as *shura* or *jirga*, by which the residents jointly deliberate, make decisions, and manage their common affairs. Project staff engage these communities through these local governance arrangements.

Projects have selected village communities for development in many sectors—such as forest and other natural resource management, irrigation rehabilitation, dispute resolution, or local savings programs. The coalition military and partner civilian organizations have focused on engaging village communities to achieve stabilization and counterinsurgency goals.[37] The U.S. Agency for International Development's flagship stabilization program Local Governance and Community Development, which operated from 2006 to 2011, and its Community Development Program, which ran from 2009 to 2013, used this approach.[38] These programs organized activities such as cash-for-work schemes and small rural infrastructure improvement projects such as road, bridge, or well building. They sought the active participation of the rural communities in order to improve residents' economic welfare and to build their goodwill and support for the state.

The U.S. military focused on village communities with its Afghan Local Police (ALP) program, launched in 2010. The ALP was initially linked to the Village Stability Operations program, which was described as a "village-centric approach [that] matches traditional Afghan governance and social structures."[39] These interventions, at least initially, used this same community approach. The program consisted of three pillars: establishing and maintaining security, developing or reinvigorating traditional governance structures, and providing the basis and opportunities for economic development.[40] Community mobilization for the purpose of local participation was accomplished with the support of and facilitation by the village shura.[41] Although the teams, initially consisting of U.S. special forces, arranged and funded small-scale economic development projects for the villages, the crux of the program was the creation of local anti-Taliban forces made up of village residents, nominally screened and vetted by the village shura.

These projects have approached physical villages as proxies for communities and proceeded from there. The focus is on dealing with what the intervenors assume exists rather than creating something new. Interventions largely focus on achieving the proposed outcomes, whether building a small infrastructure project, bringing arrangements to manage natural resources to ensure their sustainability, or setting up a local unit to defend the village. Other justifications have included the increased capabilities for village communities to cooperate on other matters and the appreciation and support for the Afghan state for providing assistance.

National Solidarity Program Communities

Unlike village community projects, the NSP explicitly set out to deal with rural dwellers through governance institutions and processes it would create in the community. The result would be something of a hybrid community with the virtuous attributes of communities—their solidarity, common identity, cooperation for the common good using structures—and processes acceptable to the sponsors because they are democratic, inclusive, and representative and therefore likely to produce acceptable outcomes. The NSP sought the development *of* communities through its development activities *in* communities.

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The NSP had been forthright about this goal: "The key objective of NSP is to build, strengthen and maintain CDCs as effective institutions for local governance and social-economic development."[42] The NSP has been praised for its achievements in disbursing block grants for tens of thousands of small subprojects in rural communities throughout Afghanistan. The longevity of CDCs appeared ensured after President Ghani declared that the NSP "will sustainably continue" in the Citizens' Charter program and that CDCs would become self-governance and administrative organizations at the local level.[43] Throughout their exis-

tence, though, the role and responsibilities of CDCs beyond NSP projects have been a persistent matter of contention within the Afghan government.[44]

Like village community projects, the NSP initially approached rural populations as being organized as communities of place. The NSP, however, was ready to alter the boundaries and membership of these communities if necessary to conform to its programmatic size requirements, at least twenty-five families, but no more than three hundred. Operationally, the NSP appeared to discount the importance of the social solidarity and identity seen as binding the residents of small rural settlements together. For such small settlements to qualify for the NSP, they had to agree to merge with other settlements. Many opted to do so.[45]

For large rural settlements, on the other hand, the NSP declared its opposition to compromising community solidarity—except under limited conditions—even though this prevented residents from obtaining maximum benefit from the program. The NSP determined the size of its community block grants based on the number of families in a community, about $200 allocated for every family up to a maximum of $60,000, even for those communities having more than three hundred families. Large communities tried to split into smaller ones in order to secure more grants. The NSP permitted this only if the community could show that subgroups within it already had separate shuras in place for several years, or had been listed as separate entities in the nomination of representatives for the Loya Jirga.[46]

The NSP expected that CDCs would be established in most of the country's accessible communities by the project's termination date.[47] By that point, the program aimed to provide at least one subproject block grant to every community with a CDC.

Beyond NSP actions that identified and as needed created size-conforming communities, each community had to establish a new leadership structure. The NSP also required a new deliberative arrangement, at least with respect to subproject implementation, regardless how effective and accepted its indigenous decision-making practices were. The NSP designed CDCs and member selection to be democratic, representative, and structured to prevent elite control, unequal participation by community members, and the exclusion of entire segments of the population, especially women.[48] Staff from facilitating partners—the nongovernmental organizations and other entities contracted to carry out the NSP—organized elections for selecting CDC members. Universal suffrage secret-ballot elections were to be used, but not always were.[49]

Because the NSP—rather than dealing with populations as it found them—essentially steamrolled rural populations, some combining to meet its size requirements and others splitting up to do so, field researchers have suggested that the NSP may have created new divisions and thereby altered "the pre-existing principles of social organization" in rural Afghanistan.[50] That, however, was an NSP intention with respect to fabricating new size-compliant communities and to its imposition of the new decision-making process and structure.

Service Delivery Communities

Donors and international organizations have backed another participatory approach that aims for greater local involvement in government provision of basic public services. Although these initiatives do not conform to the bottom-up development model, they reflect similar values and aspirations with respect to local participation and use the term *community* to describe local involvement.[51]

Communities for these services are the residents in the catchment areas for government service facilities, such as public schools or health clinics. Line ministries designate catchment

areas according to national service standards. Rural catchment areas often include residents of separate settlements. Site selection criteria for government schools, for example, specify that primary public schools must be at least six kilometers apart. In many places, this means that students attending a school live in different settlements.[52]

Health care and primary education have adopted this community participation in service delivery.[53] The Public Health Ministry's Basic Package of Health Services describes community-based health care as providing "the context for the most comprehensive interaction between the health system and the communities it serves. Its success depends upon community participation and a partnership between community and health staff." The Basic Package of Health Services specifies the standards for health-care facilities and calls for every health facility to have an associated health council (*shura-i-sehi*) of representatives from the catchment area population.[54] The Public Health Ministry reported that 9,536 health posts—which are the smallest, most localized health facilities delivering basic services to a catchment area population of one to one and a half thousand—were operating as of 2012 and that each had an affiliated community health council.[55]

For public education, each Education Ministry public school is to have a school shura, also called a school management committee (SMC), each having from seven to thirteen local members in addition to school staff. The duties and responsibilities of the SMCs include community mobilization, ensuring quality education, and overseeing the school's proper maintenance and operation.[56] As of 2013, "social mobilization activities" promoting local participation in education had been conducted in 11,087 communities and as many SMCs reportedly had been set up.[57] Other schools referred to as community-based schools have been established under a separate community-based education program.[58] These are for small rural settlements where the children are unable to attend formal public schools because of insecurity, distance, or other constraints.[59]

The operating assumption appears to be that when a desired public service is offered and the prospective beneficiaries are asked to participate, they will do so in line with the expectations (and support and guidance) of the service-providing ministry, setting aside whatever differences and divisions they may have, at least insofar as they do not thwart cooperation for the common benefit. Communitarian sentiments apparently are expected to motivate residents to emulate what has been called the ideal type of community participation, branded facetiously by two researchers as the hippy model, where participants enter into the process selflessly and agree on their common interests without rifts or differences within their community.[60] The Public Health Ministry's *Health Shura Guidelines* invoke Islam as motivating the people's participation in and support for health shuras.[61]

The uses of community for these interventions differ in the extent to which they aim to bring enduring organizational and process transformations to their target populations. Projects that deal with what they regard as existing village communities and indigenous institutions and processes may see the interventions as strengthening the community's cooperative capabilities and solidarity. Although this, in turn, can improve the community's readiness to take on other participatory activities, these projects focus mainly on specific outcomes. They are less concerned about changing inequities and power relationships that may contribute to uneven distribution of project benefits or alter the size or character of the community.

In contrast, NSP and the service delivery ministry programs both seek to bring welfare gains and fundamental societal changes. They do so by introducing new governance bodies and new deliberative processes, in some cases creating entirely new communities: the NSP with

The assumption appears to be that when a desired public service is offered and beneficiaries are asked to participate, they will do so in line with expectations.

its CDCs and related communities and the service delivery ministry with clients receiving services from the school or health facility.

The ministries' service delivery programs do not intend for the new facility-based communities and councils to replace existing communities or their governance structures or processes. Instead, they simply add a new layer of community, together with new narrowly focused deliberative structures and processes. In this way they differ from the NSP and the follow-on Citizens' Charter program, which aim for the CDCs to either replace entirely or marginalize the local informal indigenous deliberative and decision-making institutions and practices. Although government service ministries describe these as communities, they are more concretely limited, closely regulated interest-based arrangements that offer no indication that cooperation will be extended to other matters. The planners' decision to portray these services as reflecting and engaging communities speaks to the acceptability and appeal of this characterization to donors, perhaps also to beneficiaries.

These three types of local participatory interventions all count on the targeted populations to either be organized into communities or, if not, have enough social cohesion, common identity, and interests to enable project facilitators to entice, educate, or convince them to see the benefits and advantages in participation and cooperation.

How warranted are these expectations? What gives project sponsors and planners confidence to commit to these efforts throughout rural Afghanistan? What is their evidence that these communities are present or, if they are not, that the groups that they select for the projects will behave accordingly? Last, how do these projects find and choose their intended communities?

Finding Communities

Afghans and non-Afghans share the view that rural Afghans live together in communities of people with whom they are related through kinship, ethnicity, or sect. David Kilcullen, the counterinsurgency theoretician noted for his strong grounding in the social sciences, illustrates this view of Afghan society. He first points to the familiar distinction between traditional and individualistic societies. He goes on to suggest that, in conditions of conflict and insecurity (which characterize much of rural Afghanistan), this primary group takes on an even greater importance:

> Population groups in traditional society exercise choices collectively, not individually—unlike Western societies, which tend to be relatively atomized and in which individuals exercise a relatively greater degree of personal choice independent of their social groups. In traditional societies, choices tend to reflect group consensus based on what military sociologists and anthropologists call "primary group cohesion." This tendency is even more pronounced in tribal societies under the stress of insurgency, when an individual decision to go against the group consensus could prove fatal.[62]

Kilcullen's portrayal aligns with Western depictions of preindustrial societies in general and Afghanistan in particular. It is the community that addresses matters that exceed the capabilities of its members to handle, either as individuals or constituent units. It does so through cooperation, which is the result of solidarity sentiments tied to shared identity, interests, experience, norms, and values. These sentiments are sometimes referred to as social capital.[63]

Afghans, whether rural or urban, hold such views about their society both as it exists today and during the antebellum past, before the disruptions of the last four tumultuous decades. As direct memories from that earlier era continue to fade, sentiments likely will grow even stronger that rural Afghans of that time—what many describe as their nation's Golden Age—were

poor and ignorant of the outside world but enjoyed peace, managed their hardscrabble lives through sharing and cooperation, and were honest, trusting, and respectful of one another.

Afghans put much of the blame for the suffering and the upset that they have endured on alien ideas, foreign weapons, money, and the foreigners who accompanied them. They believe that these all contributed to the destruction of the peaceful life where rural Afghans cooperated with one another and managed their affairs with little involvement from the outside and certainly not from their government. As long as the people supplied military conscripts, paid their taxes, did not challenge the authority of Kabul, and kept their quarrels from disrupting commerce or bothering persons who were not direct parties, the government left them alone and did not get involved in local affairs, leaving that to the people themselves.

Islam, with its long presence in Afghanistan, further strengthens Afghan views about the importance of cooperation and harmonious living. Their faith emphasizes community and social cohesion for the *ummah*, the universal community of Muslims.[64] Sharing beliefs, values, and practices, Muslims are to treat one another in line with communitarian precepts regardless of differences tied to language, race, custom, or national identity.[65]

The ummah is vast and the communitarian sentiments and solidarity tied to it apply to all Muslims. These tenets can therefore be invoked to challenge groups within the ummah that claim an identity and interests separate from other Muslims. When Muslims believe that a group of co-religionists seeks to exclude them and deny them the rights and privileges to which they as Muslims are entitled—because they lack credentials such as kin ties or ancestral links to a place—they may appeal to Islamic communitarian principles and argue that such exclusionary barriers are invidious and un-Islamic. Islamists calling for the reinstatement of the unitary Caliphate make such arguments to justify their demands to abolish Muslim nation states.

Beliefs about Islam and the ummah can be used to contest boundaries and exclusionary rules of local Muslim groups, but the values and norms of their faith have greater salience for rural Afghans in reinforcing communal sentiments at the local level. Although the empirical evidence offers a more nuanced and complicated picture, at least in principle, rural Afghans broadly share these values and norms.

Foreigners and Afghans share this view that communitarian identities, norms, and values are essential elements of Afghan rural life. In this, Afghanistan is not unique. The belief is widespread even for postindustrial societies. Contemporary American social philosophers such as Robert D. Putnam (*Bowling Alone in America*) and Amatai Etzioni (*The Spirit of Community*) bemoan the excessive individualism in Western societies and have called for strengthening connections between individuals and their communities there. Afghanistan's recent history may reinforce further the nostalgic appeal at the heart of Afghan culture and society.

Not surprisingly, foreign development practitioners have adopted this framing. Because they have limited opportunities to experience rural Afghan life firsthand, they necessarily rely on indirect understanding. One important source is Afghans. When asked, Afghans of all stripes, rural or urban, illiterate or holding advanced degrees, describe their social constructs with rural Afghans organized into groups of various sorts, whether called tribes, villages, or another term. Afghans regard these as the preeminent local social units larger than the family, household, or other domestic unit.

Ferreting out discrepancies between what Afghans and other presumably reliable sources express with confidence as existing, and what the empirical evidence can reveal is not a priority in project design and planning. Projects that intend to have local participation presumably seek

Their faith emphasizes community and social cohesion for the ummah, the universal community of Muslims.

target populations where community participation is either observed or circumstances suggest it can be induced. Rural residents' saying that their practices, norms, and values align with project site desiderata is not unexpected. In all likelihood, their responses reflect their sincere beliefs and understanding about their society.

Moreover, for many projects, concerns ranging from contractual obligations and overly optimistic implementation timelines to national policy goals can lend priority on driving forward. Given the apparently credible information—from educated, articulate senior professionals and officials to rural farmers—that matches conventional wisdom, reasons are scant to probe further for evidence to challenge the suitability of a particular population to participate in a project.

The extensive and apparently successful use of these approaches for more than a decade suggests that rural Afghanistan is indeed abundantly endowed with venues for such projects. An examination of the circumstances affecting how sites have been selected can reveal the suitability of these approaches.

Operational Definitions

Project planners intent on engaging communities in rural Afghanistan must first find them. They cannot rely on maps, government information, or even high-resolution satellite imagery.[66] They need to come up with their own tools to map the society in a way that identifies the populations suitable for their planned interventions. To do so, they need to define the community concept to specify precise objective markers that can then be used in the field to identify groups suitable for the intervention.

Instruments should be customized for both the region and the distribution of the population across it and the project's particular goals, assistance strategy, and capabilities. Thus, projects aiming to bring lasting transformation so that a population will cooperate as a community will define the target population differently from those that limit their intervention to improving material welfare through existing institutions and processes.

Finding communities for government service delivery programs is relatively straightforward. Although lack of reliable data may present problems in delineating catchment areas, the responsibility for doing so lies with the implementing line ministry though local actors usually try to influence the decision. Ministry field staff then engage the population to induce their cooperation. These interventions seek cooperation from those who may have not previously participated in joint efforts, but the limited scope and an expectation of continued ministry involvement in the service delivery make a successful outcome more likely.

For interventions that target village communities, the process appears similarly straightforward: locate a settlement that looks like a village or what persons familiar with the region call a village and then deal with the community associated with it. This simplicity is presumably why most community-based projects adopt the approach. Recent research has tried to improve outcomes by identifying the characteristics that might help account for village behavior and explain how they link to potential or actual public goods delivery outcomes.[67] These interventions are typically narrow in scope—to achieve specific welfare gains for residents by using the decision-making and managerial processes that village residents already use—and do not explicitly aim to bring about local-level social and governance transformations.

Although English-language documents and discussions often treat community and village as synonyms, in Afghanistan matters are not so straightforward.

Although English-language documents and discussions often treat *community* and *village* as synonyms, in Afghanistan matters are not so straightforward.[68] Not surprisingly, given the country's linguistic and geographic diversity, Afghans use many words for permanent rural liv-

ing arrangements. The Pashto *kelay*, the Dari *deh* and *qarya*, and the Turkic *kishlak* are among the most common. Foreigners and English-speaking Afghans indiscriminately translate all of these into English as *village*.[69]

The meaning of these Afghan words and the manner in which Afghans use them is difficult to pin down, in large measure because of the different ways that Afghans think about local space. For Afghans, "there is not one single 'concept of village,' but a multitude of local notions for spatial and settlement belonging." Rural Afghans often do not identify with a territorially fixed place with a particular name attached to it. This creates confusion for outsiders "because they are very much used to thinking along 'village' lines" in the sense of there being a single group attached to a territory with which individuals identify and share a sense of belonging.[70]

Although settlements may have names, the territory and populations that local residents associate with a particular name may be vaguely defined. The people may give different names to the same settlement and the names may vary over time. Names for places also can differ depending on the context in which they are discussed and different groups in a region may each have their own names for places. For example, researchers investigating local perceptions of space and social organization in Sufi-Qarayatim and Asqalan regions of irrigated farmland in Kunduz province that is home to several thousand families describe this. They found that "it is hard to identify clear-cut 'villages,' both in physical terms and in the perception of the people."[71]

As discussed, villages do not yet have any official existence, though the 2004 Afghan constitution mentions villages in Article 140.[72] Various government agencies have compiled lists of local settlements but these are internally inconsistent and often do not coincide with the names the people use.[73] The 2010 SNGP, which committed to extend its administration to the local level affirmed that villages—which the SNGP at points also refers to as village communities—are to be officially recognized rural units, the fourth and lowest administrative tier of government. The SNGP committed to "identification of the geographic space and households within it as a village" and then mapping its boundaries but acknowledged the lack of an agreed definition for identifying villages and left implementation to the people: "Local communities by consensus will define their village boundaries."[74]

The SNGP plan to map villages has stalled with no indication of when, if ever, it will proceed. Project planners therefore cannot pick their sites based on an official designation. Also, field research suggests that many rural Afghans do not consider their social space as divided into discrete villages each having a fixed territory, a specific name, and a particular population united by solidarity, common interests, and an identity that separates them from other people. *Village* is nonetheless the term both foreigners and Afghans use to describe rural settlements and the unit used to engage the residents for many types of interventions, including those in which residents of a location are expected to cooperate as a community.

The NSP differed from the village community interventions in part because of its explicit social engineering of new institutions and processes and creation of new communities in line with its specifications. Its project documents offer precise details with respect to the scale at which it intended to operate, the processes that it sought to create, and the scope of what it planned to accomplish. The NSP defined community as the social unit with which it would deal in terms of its allowable size:

> A community (in NSP) must have at least 25 families to be eligible for a block grant. NSP does not allow establishment of CDCs in rural settlements/villages with less than 25 families. No exaggeration in numbers to reach the minimum number is allowed either.

Small villages with less than 25 families are encouraged to join with neighboring villages to benefit of [*sic*] the NSP.[75]

This definition sidesteps consideration of matters such as the type of social or political institutions and practices present, whether residents share an identity, solidarity, or common interests, the boundaries that separate them from others, and the nature of relationships within the population and to outsiders. Relying on a definition for community with size as the sole criterion suggests that the NSP regarded the values, identities, readiness to cooperate, and other attributes of community as being either intrinsic to populations or qualities that could be induced by the intervention. Because small villages were encouraged to merge to participate, even spatial proximity is apparently not a decisive factor. The NSP definition for this key concept raises questions as to what criteria, if any, its field staff used to identify the tens of thousands of communities or suitable populations for its program.

Both the definition and the uncertainty concerning villages point to the challenges for projects in rural Afghanistan where social arrangements—specifically, populations at specific sizes who either cooperate or can be induced to cooperate—are sought for interventions but the people may not themselves be organized that way. For efficiency, equity, and accountability, projects need definable communities for it to be clear who are included in the project and entitled to participate in its activities and benefits and who are excluded.[76]

The problems of coming up with reliable ways to define villages or communities in rural Afghanistan may account for the hesitation that the government has shown in demarcating its territorial local rural administrative units that are acceptable to the local people. It similarly raises concerns about the NSP CDCs, which are to be accorded a vastly expanded role and set of responsibilities in the Citizens' Charter program. The expectation may be that the new roles and responsibilities and greater involvement with the government will ensure community cooperation.

Despite the difficulties these community-based projects face in identifying communities, projects in many sectors are managing to do so. Are they identifying and engaging communities even if it is not clear how they are? What communities are there and how can they be appropriately defined?

Evidence

The tendency by outsiders, whether Afghan or otherwise, to view those living near one another in rural areas as bounded communities with social, economic, and political significance rests on shaky grounds. Evidence suggests that many such residents do not identify exclusively with a single local group or territory, but instead adopt and shed different identities and affiliations to deal with their different circumstances. This variability and the lack of fixed bounded groups point to why operational definitions for local-level social units for interventions are so vexing.

Spatial proximity is one factor, but it may not always be what leads people to feel a sense of solidarity and to cooperate. And though it may supply reasons and opportunities for cooperation and common benefit, it may also lead people to do the opposite, to compete and seek to gain at the expense of their neighbors.

Security Threats and Local Cooperation

Because the Afghan state has historically been largely absent at the local level, the people have been left on their own—including having to make their own arrangements for protection and

defense. In such circumstances, security concerns can be a forceful driver of cooperation. This has not been the case in many places across rural Afghanistan, however.

Over the centuries, armies have marched across, occupied, and fought in what today is Afghanistan but have not had much of an effect on how the rural people in many regions cooperated with one another. Armies and rulers had little interest in most rural Afghans; especially subsistence-based agriculturalists who barely managed to feed themselves, much less produce enough to make plundering them worthwhile.[77] More significantly, rural dwellers could not resist organized armies even if they wanted to do so. Their options were either to flee or to keep their heads down and let the forces pass unimpeded. Regional urban and trading centers were a different matter in terms of their attractiveness as targets, as were well-watered areas with large-scale irrigation systems. Those who controlled these locations organized defenses that often included guard forces, walls, and other costly fortifications.

The most worrisome security concerns and threats for rural Afghans are small localized conflicts, often involving known individuals or even their kin.[78] Collective security is not a decisive consideration in siting a residence. Walls are indeed common in rural Afghanistan but enclose residential compounds rather than settlements. Walls are for privacy and personal security, not for common defense.[79] In the absence of an imminent threat, rural Afghans have little reason to organize among themselves for defense and security. When a conflict with a risk of violence does arise, the circumstances of the dispute and the particulars of the parties determine in large measure who will side with whom and the kind of support they will offer one another. On occasion, larger conflicts involve the entire population of a location. Although these can drive cooperation, they are disruptive and often prompt quick interventions to resolve them or at least control the risks of violence.

The ALP program—an initiative that had few indigenous precedents—has been criticized for attempting to build a local organization for self-defense from scratch. Residents of villages participating in the ALP are to set up local self-defense forces at the behest of the government and its foreign backers. The enemy is similarly motivated and backed largely by interests external to the circumstances of the local population. The ALP program is "the culmination of a series of attempts to tap into and rejuvenate what were presented as enduring rural traditions of self-protection." But these assumptions about local arrangements are groundless. The ALP therefore is "based upon an idealized and reified vision of the past" concerning villages, the threats they faced, and their response to them.[80]

Security threats to rural populations do not necessarily lead to local cooperation for defense until a threat is tangible and immediate, but common property resources vulnerable to damage must nonetheless be safeguarded. The threats, some of which are transitory and seasonal, may require organized arrangements to protect the assets. Responsibility for resource protection rests with owners because state institutions such as the police are ineffective, absent, or even themselves a threat.

Examples of such collective efforts involve protecting rangeland against unauthorized grazing, guarding forests at risk from unapproved logging, monitoring irrigation systems threatened by clandestine diversion, or preventing theft of high-value harvests such as pine nuts, walnuts, and pistachios. Resource owners in Paktia and Khost provinces organize local communal constabularies called *arbakai* to protect their common forests, agricultural land, and pastures.[81] Similar communal constabulary arrangements have been described in Nuristan.[82]

These protective activities may involve preventing outsiders from damaging or clandestinely using the resources.[83] Community members collectively establish regulations and mechanisms

Rural Afghans have little reason to organize among themselves for defense and security.

that safeguard their resources from outsiders. They also may enforce regulations and practices for themselves, including sanctions for their own irresponsible or improper actions.

Managing the Commons

Common property is often described as community owned, but arrangements for owners and rights-holders vary.[84] Categorizing property and resources as either private or communal fails to make clear the variation within these two categories. One territory may have different common property resource communities, each with a different set of owners, some of whom may live elsewhere.

In many regions of Afghanistan, production-related natural resources essential for agriculture, herding, and extractive activities, such as logging or artisanal mining, are thinly and unevenly distributed. Even with current available technology and knowledge, many rural lands cannot support more intense production or increased population. One consequence is that those who cooperate as individual production units may either choose or be forced to diversify their productive activities because they cannot produce enough at one location or all the needed factors for production are not available in a single location.

As a result, productive units' activities and resources may be spread across a noncontiguous area beyond the land near their homes. Farmers may also disperse their fields to cultivate different crops, to benefit from variations in soil quality, water availability, or climate, and to reduce risks arising from localized damage. Many herd-owners also need access to rangeland in different ecological zones to sustain their animals throughout the year. Long-range pastoral nomads (often referred to as *kuchis*) or pastoralists who move their herds over smaller distances between winter and summer pastures at different altitudes may still need several days to shift their animals.

Beyond these production strategies, people may also become owners of resources scattered in different places because they were compensation in a dispute settlement or were purchased. Occasionally when the Afghan government becomes involved in settling land disputes, it will deed government lands in reclamation projects in another province. The government also awards lands in such projects to some officials in recognition of their government service.

Regardless of why assets are dispersed, wherever one owns or has rights to land or other resources, some cooperation with nearby owners is necessary. Other local residents who do not have a direct material interest in a particular common property generally are not involved. For effective management, resource owners need to be familiar and knowledgeable about the particular resource. They also need to be knowledgeable about their fellow owners, their willingness to cooperate, their ability to participate in collective management, and their other interests and resources that may affect common ownership and management behavior. Because the owners or rights-holders themselves suffer the consequences of mismanagement or misuse of their resources, they have strong incentives to cooperate in their management and prudent use.

In many parts of rural Afghanistan, *manteqa* are well-known arrangements wherein shareholders of common property resources live across a broad region. The shareholders identify with one another based on that commonality.[85] Manteqa typically are associated with natural terrain features such as a valley or drainage basin. Residents live in separate hamlets or villages usually near their irrigated fields. Some manteqa natural resources—such as pastures, rangeland, or forests—may be common property: the entire manteqa population uses, manages, and protects them. Like other rural social arrangements, manteqa currently have no legal or

administrative formal recognition. Unlike villages, the Afghan government has expressed no intention to accord manteqa an official status.

Manteqa residents can be connected by ties and mutual obligations beyond those of their common property resources. Some field researchers have suggested that these linkages and interactions are evidence that the manteqa, and not its constituent settlements, is the appropriate grassroots level unit in many regions where they are found. They consider that it is the manteqa that "reflects the underlying social structure of rural Afghanistan."[86] Alessandro Monsutti agrees, based on his research in Jaghori district, Ghazni province, which has more than twenty manteqa. He contends that the Afghan government has erred by designating communities of the size sanctioned by the NSP as the basic rural units because they are smaller than manteqa and that for manteqa residents this is "an incentive to division" and does not contribute to strengthening solidarity, a key NSP goal.[87] Other field investigators take a different position concerning the significance of manteqa. They do not see the manteqa as having such importance because it "has not been institutionalized in any form as a unit of action or administration, but 'merely' serves as a reference point in people's worldviews." These researchers further contend that in some places manteqa do not supply a basis for solidarity and cooperation except as a naturally bounded system of joint resource use by a group of people.[88]

Such different perspectives point to the complexities that make it difficult to identify local communities for community-based interventions or for the government and its plans to establish local administrative units. These efforts by outsiders, whether the Afghan government or development organizations, to recognize the residents in contiguous territories as distinct, bounded groups—either in smaller villages or in larger manteqa—overlook the many important relationships, interests, and commonalities of residents that extend beyond their particular territorial unit. Nor do such designations attend to divisions and rivalries within these units that may limit solidarity and thwart cooperation on many matters. If the government or other outsiders try to identify communities and then move to strengthen them so that they cooperate for a particular project, the affected people may regard the action as illegitimate, unwanted, and unneeded interference in their cooperative arrangements and relations. They may, however, agree to cooperate as sought, particularly if the incentives are attractive, but have no interest in expanding it to other matters.

Manteqa residents have common interests and identities; they cooperate and, for some matters at least, act as communities on a scale larger than the geographically proximate villages typically selected for community-based projects. As some field investigators have argued, the cooperation among manteqa residents challenges the assumptions that projects use to identify communities smaller and less inclusive than manteqa. If the selection is based on identifying a group that behaves as a community, then selecting smaller units may be sowing divisions and divisiveness within populations that consider themselves unified on matters important to them.

Proximity and Tension

The manteqa calls into question the suitability of reliance of community-based projects on the village unit. The association is further complicated by the fact that rural Afghans living near one another may have no interest in cooperating beyond what they consider essential, sometimes simply because they do not like each other. Residential mobility is low in part because residential compounds, which are built to last for decades, are costly to build. Many rural Afghans spend their entire lives in one location, where their parents and ancestors lived.

Physical proximity by itself cannot be taken as evidence of cooperation and solidarity.

Should relations among neighbors sour, relocating is seldom a practical option. As a result, relations among neighbors can range from warm and close to cool and even hostile.

Physical proximity by itself cannot be taken as evidence of cooperation and solidarity, though such arrangements offer obvious reasons and opportunities for cooperation—but these also occur among those not living in such proximity. At the same time, proximity can also create conditions under which neighbors are unwilling to cooperate and feel little sense of solidarity.

Certainly, kinship is an important basis for strong and enduring social relations and solidarity, but it can also be tainted by conflict and tension. Monsutti recognizes what is obvious yet often overlooked in depictions of rural Afghans that highlight group-level attributes: "relations that involve the most compelling duties are also those that lead to the most serious conflicts."[89]

The pattern of enmity for ethnic Pashtuns between close kin, *tarburwali*, offers a dramatic example. The term denotes both the state of being fraternal cousins and the bitter animus that can poison relations between such close relatives.[90] Enmity, or even the possibility of it, among individuals within groups may lead persons to reach out and build relationships with more distant kin and others who are not kin. Although such relations may be limited by local practice in the type of support they can offer, these individuals still can be important allies in part because they have more liberty to offer support than closer kin who may be neutralized by their relations to all disputants in conflicts involving close relatives. Although enmity, competition, and jealousy seldom become so disruptive that they erupt into open conflict, they need to be recognized both for the effect they have on local cooperation and as an important and long-standing incentive driving individuals to form relationships with others at greater social distances.

Cooperation and competition are neither discrete attributes of relationships between individuals or groups nor mutually exclusive. Rural Afghans may find themselves both cooperating and competing with one another. Because attributions of *us* and *them* are situational and shifting, treating relations between particular individuals or groups as one of *us against them* may in another circumstance be that of *us against us*. The boundaries separating allies from opponents are not identical to those that divide insiders from outsiders. Whatever their basis for solidarity, individuals may find themselves cooperating for some reasons yet refusing to do so for others. This can have an effect on the range of situations that bring a group to cooperate. As much as individuals may compete for power or economic advantage, they may be equally keen to cooperate on other matters.

"Far from being a space of solidarity, local and territorial groups of rural Afghanistan—whether vaguely called 'communities' or 'villages'—must be conceived as political arenas in which people compete as much as they cooperate for scarce resources: water, land, migration connections, and, last but not least, aid money."[91]

Reaching Out

Local conditions may be a push factor to reach out, and opportunities and needs that cannot be met locally can be a pull to form ties elsewhere. Those intent on building relations as individuals with people unrelated to them have several familiar ways to do so. Not only are they not relegated to dealing only with those in their family, village, or solidarity group, they also already have access to the ummah, which can facilitate their quest for new relations given that its communitarian sensibility engenders positive expectations about social and economic interaction between Muslims generally. Though by no means ensuring a successful outcome, the shared identity, sentiments, and beliefs supply a rationale for cooperation and the norms and values

to inform it. As a community of faith that nearly all people rural Afghans are likely to come into contact with universally accept, the ummah offers at least an incipient basis for otherwise unrelated Afghans to cooperate if they see it in their interests to do so.

Marriage is also an important way to create new ties or strengthen existing ones. Some rural Afghans prefer marriages between close kin to reinforce solidarity within their group by encumbering existing ties with new ones. This approach also succeeds in reducing ties to persons outside the group. Other Afghans, however, arrange marriages for themselves or their children to diversify or strengthen connections outside their group. Through marriage, they forge potentially beneficial relations for themselves and future generations, relations that are not simply between individuals but that also create common identities and interests among members of the groups united through the marriage.

Other ways to make new connections include arranging fictive kin ties, such as blood brothers, and developing bonds not expressed in kinship terms. In that regard, friendship ties are important yet often overlooked. Individuals can use friendships to form alliances based on "bonds of trust and cooperation, solidarity and protection that transcend the limits of social groups and state frontiers."[92]

Cooperation and trust do not emerge from a given social tie automatically, and it is useful to have long-term relationships with people outside of one's solidarity group. In the context of uncertainty, the most successful social actors are those who prove capable of diversifying their political alliances and their economic assets.[93]

Individuals build these relationships, which can become parts of expansive networks not limited to their villages. For example, the study of social organization in Kunduz province mentioned earlier found that residents do not think and act in terms of clear-cut territorially delimited places in their interactions. Instead, their socioeconomic space is their network of face-to-face relationships that extends over noncontiguous territory.[94] Rather than looking to their neighbors for cooperation, these residents looked to those persons in their networks living elsewhere. Nothing about Kunduz suggests that the pattern found there is peculiar to that location.

Whether through marriage, fictive kin ties, friendship, co-ownership of property resources or other interests, these personal ties can straddle rural group boundaries effectively blurring them and making it difficult for either the people themselves or others—including the government and foreign development organizations—to identify local boundaries and their significance.[95] People invoke or ignore these boundaries when it is in their interest to do so. They take their network of personal ties into consideration along with their group affiliations, interests, and identities as they decide whether, how, and with whom they should cooperate or compete.

Staying Connected and Involved

The interests leading rural Afghans to seek ties with people elsewhere are scarcely new. What is new, however, and bringing dramatic changes, is accessible communications technology.

Afghan communities consist of fluid networks not necessarily limited to a single territorialized locus. Moreover, due to labor migration and refugee movements, as well as the wide use of modern media technologies (mobile phones, the internet, and so on), these networks even expanded over the last three decades.[96]

Although most rural Afghans seldom move their place of residence, throughout history some have traveled—often vast distances—for work, education, sanctuary from conflict, or a multitude of other reasons. This trend may be accelerating, but the important change, as Conrad

Schetter notes, is that today's cheap, efficient, and accessible telecommunications allow Afghans anywhere in the world to easily continue their real-time participation with their native settlements unconstrained by distance. This technology eliminates the arduous, time-consuming travel and unreliable, expensive communications that made it difficult, but not impossible, in the past for Afghans to stay actively involved—though many did despite those hardships.

Today, many rural populations have influential members living in Kabul, or a regional urban center, or even farther afield in the Gulf, Europe, Australia, or North America. They look to these individuals for protection, political guidance, and intervention on their behalf with the national government and other powerful interests. These connections may count as among the most important ones a population has. Whatever the distance, these individuals are treated as active participants in local affairs so much so that many important local decisions are not taken without their involvement.

Given uncertainties in their new situations, Afghans who find themselves living far from their villages may have no intention or interest in forsaking their homes. Similarly, those who remain behind are often eager to keep their far-flung relatives actively involved and to preserve vibrant connections with them. In this way, they can benefit from the worldliness, wealth, influence, knowledge, and expertise of others. This is especially true for those in powerful positions with the central government. One directly relevant consequence is the possibly unrealistic expectation that, on their own, rural Afghans in their village can deliberate and decide on important matters. Participation by those who are elsewhere, whether permanently or temporarily, may be both sought and seen as their right to have a say in important decisions. These individuals, regardless of their location, remain members of their communities. Decisions taken without their participation can have serious repercussions in that those who are excluded may be upset that they—their voice and expertise—are ignored and may show their anger by blocking the decision or otherwise disrupting it.

Beyond Assumptions

Proximity, then, is not the exclusive nor even necessarily a relevant basis for rural dwellers to cooperate. Social and economic relations and the physical and human environments all affect how they organize themselves socially and politically. Projects that treat spatially contiguous groups as communities of people who participate and work together need to weigh the possibility that these populations could be unsuited—even with generous outside guidance and inducements—to participate in ways that conform to the intent of the projects.

Groups of rural Afghans who do not live near one another can share strong bonds and interests that endure through time and lead them to cooperate on matters important to them. The ties that form such groups can stretch far beyond what outsiders may perceive as isolated, self-contained, inward-looking villages. These ties to people elsewhere are vital linkages in a larger web that rural dwellers recognize and value. Outsiders may see evidence of dramatic changes that have affected rural Afghans over recent decades and conclude that these linkages and groups that span distances and population clusters are new and reflect the way that the people's environment has changed. The material presented in the previous section described enduring aspects of their environment that have long led rural Afghans to create and maintain links to others at greater physical and social distances and also factors that may incline rural neighbors to limit their cooperation.

Assumptions about rural Afghan settlements as villages organized as solidary, homogeneous, unified, harmonious communities need to be scrutinized. So too do the assumptions

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that this is how the people want to be organized or that they can even be convinced to be. Cooperation offers benefits, but also entails costs. People may find that cooperation with one group is less attractive than with another, perhaps one smaller and more exclusive or larger that offers cooperation with more energetic and better connected people. Or they may have no interest to be organized into any kind of group. These obvious possibilities should lead to investigation of the sites considered for community-based projects to determine the character of local relations, social organization, the political structure, and other attributes directly relevant to the planned intervention.

That this scrutiny has not been undertaken for many projects in Afghanistan is not a surprise. However, in light of the past and continuing commitment to working at the grassroots level, an assessment of the reasons for the confidence in and reliance on assumptions about communities could be useful. It may point to methods for obtaining better project-relevant information and to specific programmatic recommendations.

More than forty years ago, Louis Dupree pointed to the discrepancy between popular depictions of Afghans and what he had learned from his decades of intimate dealings with them, including during Afghanistan's so-called Golden Age. "Contrary to popular belief, [Afghan] villagers are fundamentally non-cooperative creatures outside their kin group, and not communally oriented," he wrote.[97] Although Dupree's magisterial introduction, *Afghanistan*, remains essential reading for those seeking to learn about the country, this point has not left much of an impression. Nor, for that matter, has evidence from ethnographers and other field investigators who followed Dupree. As argued here, popular belief about the communal character of rural Afghanistan comfortably fits the interests and beliefs of many Afghans and foreigners, which has fostered an empirical laxness when it comes to studying and thinking about community in rural Afghanistan.

The communitarian conviction about rural Afghan life was as widely accepted when Dupree wrote as it is today. So was the gap between assumptions about rural life and reality. For many, the socially constructed order was—and is—regarded as real. Its resilience and inertia immunizes it against evidence that challenges its accuracy.

Rural Afghanistan is not the only venue where this connection between community and place is a concern. In studying communities in cities, sociologists and urban planners decades ago came to see the limits to conventional concepts of community and their key tenet that community members live together in a single location such as an urban neighborhood. In 1963, Melvin Webber, an urban planner, coined the term *community without propinquity* to describe groups whose common identity and interests are not tied to a place but are expressed in the networks and linkages that bind members together.[98] Looking at the changes affecting communities of place in urban settings, the sociologist Barry Wellman argued in 1979 that structural and technological developments have "liberated" communities from the confines of place and dispersed the ties that individuals had from all-embracing to more narrow communities.[99] More recently, the growth of the internet and the connections emerging as people share their interests has spurred research into virtual communities.[100]

Much of the thinking about community dissociated from place has grown out of observations of changes in modern, urban settings. Field research in the 1970s revealed the same pattern in response to local incentives and conditions in Nuristani villages nestled high in the Hindu Kush range far from any hint of modern technology. Even then, the factors driving the phenomenon appeared inherent to the population's physical, economic, and political circumstances. Their interest in forging strong ties far beyond their small, isolated villages was

evident in many practices, one of the most notable being a traditional marriage prohibition that forbade people from marrying anyone with whom they shared a common ancestor, either paternal or maternal, closer than seven generations.

Whitney Azoy, an ethnographer who studied northern Afghanistan in the 1970s and has revisited it more recently describes how at that time he did not find communities: "my 1970s fieldwork search for...supra-familial units drew a blank." This he attributed to a society in which individual men relate "to each other in transient patterns of cooperation and competition." Instead of the bounded enduring communities that are important for a wide range of their members lives, Azoy observed a society where "fragile groups combine and collapse under the weight of changing circumstances. And thus every man is left to fend for himself with his ambitions, his wits, his material wealth, his immediate family, and most of all, his reputation."[101]

Of course, both then and now rural Afghans cooperate in many ways. They find commonalities and shared interests and express feelings of solidarity with one another, but this cooperation and these feelings often are not limited to members of a single group, whether defined geographically or based on other shared identities and interests.

That the communitarian character of rural Afghan society can be questioned is not meant to suggest that Afghans live individualistic lives, the type of lives seen as common in Western, urbanized, postindustrial societies. Quite the contrary. Instead, this questioning underscores the value of a perspective that puts more focus on Afghans as individuals, as the social agents who exercise personal choice and control, and do not necessarily act based on having a single identity and community affiliation.

Noah Coburn, who produced the first serious ethnography based on extensive field research in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban, describes how residents of Istalif, a town in northern Kabul province, famed for its pottery, draw on "multiple, shifting forms of identification." In analyzing their circumstances, Coburn found that these identities serve the people as "a successful social adaptation to the political conditions in Afghanistan."[102] Coburn's description matches what was observed during ethnographic fieldwork in the mid-1970s and is what others such as Schetter and his fellow contributors describe in a recent collection of papers dealing with Afghan local politics.[103]

Christian Bleuer, a researcher versed in Afghan studies, suggests that efforts to gain an accurate appreciation of Afghanistan social phenomena are hindered by the tendency to focus at the group level and to sideline, if not entirely ignore, individuals in much of what has been written and consumed about Afghanistan in the years after 2001:

> Is there really no room for individual motivations for Afghans? Is there no autonomous self in Afghanistan (aside from the powerful elite)? If anybody cared to have an in-depth discussion with an Afghan, one could discern a variety of motivations and identities that conflict with and contend with each other. The individual in Afghanistan certainly faces more restrictions tha[n] his/her counterpart in the West. The Afghan[s] in question may be dirt-poor and realize the limitations to actions outside the security of their family or community unit, but they do not defer indefinitely to the "will" of the group....Of course I do not wish to do away with group analysis, I would just like to see some balance.[104]

The point here is that the flawed assumptions about community that have been and continue to be used need to be scrutinized. One way to do so is to widen the inquiry based on a recognition that key aspects of the context for these projects cannot be understood by limiting consideration, as Bleuer suggests has been done, to group-level phenomena—whether communities, villages, manteqa, tribes, sects, ethnic groups, or any other—that is real or socially constructed. When attention is limited this way it obscures individuals, their personal relationships, and alliances distinct from any group with which they identify or belong. Based on his

research, Azoy similarly considers that "the operative unit of social analysis is the individual himself."[105] What Bleuer and Azoy propose is in line with the research practices sociologists and anthropologists have been using in recent years to study social organization.

Although personal relationships and networks have received less attention than social and political groups in rural settings, their importance is seen as necessary for making sense of Afghan politics at the national level. Few foreign observers fail to be intrigued by the drama of personal rivalries and political jostling among the Afghan elite as they vie for national leadership and power.

Many of Afghanistan's national figures celebrate their strong ties to rural villages where their kin live and are supposedly steeped in a communitarian ethos. Yet, in observing these personalities, it is apparent that their communitarian sentiments do not keep them from acting as consummate individuals. They form alliances—sometimes with people who yesterday had been their sworn enemies—to compete with rivals, often with little apparent regard for group affiliation or identity.

Rural Afghans decide and act in ways not unlike those of their prominent kin on the national stage. When Afghans deal with one another, whether in a local or national arena, they do so by reaching out to allies and supporters they have cultivated through personal relationships and by seeking to mobilize groups to which they belong. Their rivals can be members of groups with which they share an identity—possibly even individuals they consider close kin—or persons with whom they recognize no shared identity or common group affiliation. An essential perspective, therefore, in looking at local social and political activity not only considers the group and what it does, but also situates group-based activity in a broader context where individuals act, make self-interested decisions, and nurture their alliances and networks, the same way that Afghan politicians do at the national level.

When local complexity and variability is recognized, the need for more and better context-specific information of all types becomes even more persuasive. This includes basic demographic information that is largely lacking for the rural population, typically gathered through large-scale efforts such as a national census.[106] Although no census has been completed, contemporary technical means using remote sensing and other modern technology could partially fill the void.[107] Efficient, equitable resource allocation for service delivery and local-level interventions depend on such information. Powerful interests, however, continue to block use of it because their goal is to prevent fair allocation.

As noted, excellent field research in Afghanistan's rural areas has been conducted since the fall of the Taliban, but opportunities to do more have become fewer in recent years for a variety of reasons, the most significant of which are security concerns. Given the expected trends over the near and midterm, conditions are not likely to improve enough to allow extensive fieldwork in many parts of the country. Nevertheless, several researchers have published findings on rural social and political organization that should be factored more than they have been into project planning and design. So should the large body of material from the 1960s and 1970s produced in the course of a period of unprecedented scientific exploration in Afghanistan's rural areas. The anthropological works from that time still supply valuable information on rural structures.[108] The available material in total leaves much to be desired, but is still a vast improvement over reliance on flawed assumptions.

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Consequences and Recommendations

Moving from assumptions to information-based perspectives enables a balanced critique of Afghan government programs—among them the recently inaugurated Citizens' Charter National Priority Program and its first phase, the Citizens' Charter Afghanistan Project. This initiative, directed in part at the rural groups the NSP referred to as communities, aims to institutionalize the CDCs, turning them into whole-of-government platforms charged with many new responsibilities. These include identifying, planning, managing, and monitoring development activities and holding the government accountable for the quality of the services it provides to communities.[109]

This program continues many aspects of the NSP. It also rests on the same flawed assumptions about rural social organization, local cooperation, and communal effort that characterized the NSP. Unless these are recognized and brought in line with rural realities, the ambitions for the program will not be realized.

The government plan for its current program is that the NSP groups and their CDCs will be involved in more wide-ranging matters and act as a community cooperating for the common good. During the NSP, the CDCs implemented one or two subprojects under the tutelage of field staff from their facilitating partners, the development organizations charged with supporting program implementation. Research demonstrates that this experience predicts little about these groups and their inclination to cooperate on other matters, including those in the government's plan. Results from four recent rigorous evaluations of the NSP and similar programs worldwide, for example, found that in both conflict and nonconflict settings they have "generally been unsuccessful in generating durable and transferable increases in collective action."[110] In sum, these groups and institutions are not likely to want to do more, certainly not as much as the new program wants them to do.

Uncertain too are the prospects that the NSP-legacy CDCs can perform as planned under the program and beyond. CDC members serve voluntarily for three-year terms and their service is additional to their work and responsibilities inherent in their lives and livelihood. If the NSP practice is continued, CDC members will receive no payment for their service.[111] CDC members also bear certain social and political burdens, which include being subjected to their neighbors' scrutiny, criticism, and suspicions about their performance, decisions, and motivations. One study found that "the pressures placed on CDC leaders are neither realistic nor sustainable."[112] Given their far broader responsibilities, the pressures of the current programs on CDC members will likely be even greater.

Responsibilities tied to the whole-of-government mandate mean that CDC members will need more training than previously.[113] Line ministries will therefore need either to involve CDC members in their programs directly or to familiarize them with their activities so that the CDCs can monitor them effectively. Accordingly, the ministries will also need to commit more related resources and personnel for this purpose which increases their administrative and overhead costs and adds complexity to their programs and services.

For this reason and others, ministries will likely resist CDC involvement in their programs and services, just as they did during the NSP. Objections also can be expected from the residents, who are likely to see even more authority concentrated in their CDC than before and to be sidelined from deliberations over matters consequential for them. While they may still be able to attend and participate in CDC meetings, the decision-making and the management authority is vested in the CDC rather than in the consensual deliberations and decision-making processes to which the residents are accustomed and consider entitled.

These issues raise questions about the prospects for these micro-level populations and their councils performing as intended. Even if the councils can fulfill their responsibilities, it is not apparent how to reconcile such a plan with the long-term interests of the government or the government's declared commitment for its national priority programs that they "should be technically sound and follow rules on incorporating accurate forward cost estimates."[114] Under its current structure, the Afghan government is on track to depend for years on foreign aid for more than half of its operating costs. Not only would the vastly expanded subnational structure needed to administer thirty-six thousand more units be far more expensive, but the problems of the subnational administration are also so deep-seated that a recent evaluation of local governance in Afghanistan concluded that for the subnational administration to deal with so many more local units "represents an impossible task."[115]

Because the Afghan government is going forward with the Citizens' Charter program, alternatives and modifications more grounded in local realities merit consideration.

One option involves following the approach that health care and public education are using in involving local populations in service delivery. By limiting the scope of cooperation and ensuring that the process conforms to government rules and guidelines, the entire matter is more focused and more transparent. If these are carefully managed, they are more likely to be isolated from circumstances that thwart cooperation or lead to conflicts among the population.

These more narrowly focused approaches avoid imparting whole-of-government capabilities on CDCs and the problems arising because different public services and projects target different populations and catchment areas that do not align with the population of NSP-legacy communities and their CDCs.[116]

Another approach with modest and attainable objectives that avoids the costly, unprecedented local-level social engineering of tens of thousands of CDCs and their constituent communities focuses on existing subnational government and administration capabilities. This would direct efforts at improving the efficiency and performance of provincial and district administrative structures and procedures, continuing an effort that has been under way for years and has met with mixed success.

This approach has obvious virtues. First, rural Afghans are familiar with the subnational administration and how it is supposed to operate even if it seldom does so. This option is also vastly less complicated than creating something entirely new that would require detailed laws, regulations, procedures, and administrative organizations to support them, not to mention the information campaign directed at the people to gain their acceptance. Moreover, even if the Citizens' Charter program proceeds as planned, the existing subnational administrative structures and those of the service delivery ministries will have to be reformed regardless in order to manage and support the new local tier.

This option avoids entirely the need to define and delimit and then build local-level CDC capabilities if CDCs are to assume their vastly expanded new roles and responsibilities. Strengthening existing, more inclusive administrative structures and then using them to deliver services and for other purposes is the norm for many low-population density regions, including in developed countries. In the United States, for example, law enforcement, education, health care, justice, and infrastructure are provided to unincorporated areas by county or state authorities. Rural Afghans could still organize on their own in line with their local interests and concerns. Service delivery managed by more inclusive administrative tiers can bring greater efficiencies and avoid having to manage many small, inefficient local units.

Following this approach, the government avoids officially recognizing tens of thousands of new local units, each one with distinct interests, separate identities, and boundaries that would need to be demarcated. The conflicts and problems that would result from the government setting these boundaries are likely to resemble the often intractable disputes over provincial and district boundaries. The main difference would be that rather than thirty-four provinces or 398 districts, the number of local units is in the range of thirty-six thousand (if existing CDCs are used as the basis). This approach also aligns with the government commitment made in its new national peace and development framework to rebuild a sense of national identity as a counternarrative to "the localism that breeds and perpetuates conflict."[117]

This option does not prevent the government from introducing administrative and governance roles and activities at the local level in the future. Ideally, it would be done when conditions were more favorable, when national identity is less contested, with better security, when the subnational administration and service delivery capabilities have been strengthened, and when detailed demographic information is available, and in collaboration with the people.

Notes

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3. Andrew Beath, Fotini Christia, and Ruben Enikolopov, "The National Solidarity Programme: Assessing the Effects of Community-Driven Development in Afghanistan," *International Peacekeeping* 22, no. 4 (2015): 302; Viola Gienger, "Afghan Rural Minister Appeals for U.S. Support of Successful Program," *The Olive Branch* (blog), U.S. Institute of Peace, March 1, 2013, www.usip.org/olivebranch/afghan-rural-minister-appeals-us-support-of-successful-program.

4. National Solidarity Programme (NSP), "The Fifth National CDC Consultative Conference: The Greatest Achievements of the MRRD," December 22, 2015, www.nspafghanistan.org/default.aspx?sel=156. The NSP estimated about forty-one thousand villages in rural Afghanistan. Recent World Bank planning documents put the number at about thirty-six thousand. The Bank offers no explanation or evidence for this downward revision.

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7. IRA, "Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) 2017–2021" (Kabul: Office of the Deputy Minister for Policy, 2016), 26, http://policymof.gov.af/afghanistan-national-development-framework/.

8. World Bank, "Afghanistan Government Inaugurates Citizens' Charter to Target Reform and Accountability," October 10, 2016, www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/10/10/government-inaugurates-citizens-charter-to-target-reform-and-accountability. The ambitious broader mandate that CDCs are to have for this program is detailed in paragraph 14, page 64, of the World Bank's 2016 project appraisal report no. PAD2019.

9. World Bank, "Afghanistan Government Inaugurates Citizens' Charter."

10. Ibid.

11. Government of Afghanistan, "Citizens' Charter National Priority Program," Fact Sheet, October 4, 2016, http://policymof.gov.af/bca/npps/citizens-charter-national-priority-program/; IRA, "Citizens Charter's

Elements Project Facilitating Partners (FPs) for the CCEP," Project ID no. 155497 (Kabul: Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development [MRRD], July 5, 2016), http://mrrd.gov.af/en/tender/citizens -charters-elements-project-facilitating-partners-fps-for-the-ccep; see also UN-Habitat, "Citizens Charter in Cities," *Future of Afghan Cities*, Discussion Paper no. 8, series 2, April 2016, www.fukuoka.unhabitat.org /projects/afghanistan/pdf/DP8_English.pdf.

12. The term *development* refers to a wide variety of programming and interventions and is not specific as to the commissioning agency, implementing organization, or type of outcome. The interventions share an orientation toward local-level community participation that follow the various community-based approaches that the World Bank and other development agencies have refined and sponsored. Sheree Bennett and Alyoscia D'Onofrio, "Beyond Critique: Revised Approaches to Community-Driven Development" (New York: International Rescue Committee, 2015), 5, www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/567/community drivenlowresfinalshereeandalyoscia0.pdf.

13. World Bank, "Afghanistan Subnational Administration in Afghanistan, vol. 1: Assessment and Recommendations for Action," Report no. 28435–AF (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit [AREU], 2004), 7, http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01061/WEB/IMAGES/AFCIVILS.PDF.

14. IRA, "Sub-national Governance Policy" (Kabul: Independent Directorate of Local Governance, Spring 2010). The term *local* (محلی) in this organization name pertains to territorial divisions within the unitary government. Article 136 of the 2004 Afghan Constitution states that "The local administrative unit shall be a province." Except for those instances where it refers to the Afghan government meaning, the word *local* is used here to describe the circumstances where persons are in such spatial proximity that they have opportunities and occasions for frequent, direct face-to-face interaction.

15. During the twentieth century, certain districts were at times divided into subdistricts called *alaqadaris*. Subdistrict administrators answered to the district administrator. Similarly, a few provinces were administratively divided into subprovinces called *loy woluwalis* (large districts), an intermediate tier between province and district. The present administrative subnational structure has only three tiers: the province, district, and village. As of early 2017, the district remains the lowest formally recognized administrative level. This is due to delays in delineating villages per the plan set out in the SNGP (IRA, "Sub-national Governance Policy," 68). Urban areas and the sites of provincial administrative centers are designated as municipalities. The SNGP defines a municipality as "a distinct legal and administrative entity with a well-defined geographical or territorial boundary." In the administrative and governance hierarchy, municipalities rank on the same tier (second level) as districts. Municipal districts (*nahias*) make up a municipality just as villages make up a rural district (26).

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20. Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 19.

21. One controversial scheme emanating from the military to engage groups based on their purported tribal identity sparked some interest but was also soundly rebutted and did not gain official support. See Jim Gant, "One Tribe at a Time: A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan," December 2009, https://gdziewojsko.files .wordpress.com/2011/05/one_tribe_at_a_time.pdf. For a detailed discussion of matters concerning this approach, see "Tribal Engagement Workshop," *Small War Journal*, March 24–25, 2010, http://smallwars journal.com/content/tribal-engagement-workshop.

22. USAID, "Community-Based Development in Conflict-Affected Areas" (Washington, DC: U.S. Agency for International Development, 2007), 5, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadj132.pdf.

23. Elisabeth King, "A Critical Review of Community-Driven Development Programmes in Conflict-Affected Areas" (London: DFID/International Rescue Committee, 2013); Ghazala Mansuri and Vijayendra Rao, "Localizing Development: Does Participation Work?" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2013); Susan Wong, "What Have Been the Impacts of World Bank Community-Driven Development Programs?" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012), http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/967431468161087566 /pdf/695410WP0SW0CD00Box370017B00PUBLIC0.pdf.

24. Mansuri and Rao, "Localizing Development," 1.

25. Wong, "What Have Been the Impacts," iv.

26. King, "A Critical Review," 7.

27. Andrew Beath, Fotini Christia, and Ruben Enikolopov, "Winning Hearts and Minds through Development: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan," Research Paper no. 2011-14 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

28. King, "A Critical Review," 31.

29. Bennett and D'Onofrio, "Beyond Critique," 6.

30. USAID, "Community-Based Development," 6.

31. King, "A Critical Review," 15.

32. Ibid., 8–9; Mansuri and Rao, "Localizing Development," 15–20.

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89. Alessandro Monsutti, "Anthropologizing Afghanistan: Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 160.

90. "My Cousin's Enemy Is My Friend: A Study of Pashtun 'Tribes' in Afghanistan," (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army, TRADOC G1 Human Terrain System, September 2009), 9, http://smallwarsjournal.com /documents/cousinsenemy.pdf; Barfield, "Weapons of the Not So Weak," 103.

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95. In discussing tribally organized Afghans, Olivier Roy notes that "There is nowhere such a thing as a tribe's territory. In fact, in tribal areas as anywhere in Afghanistan, we should speak of 'networks' more than of territories" ("The Taliban Movement: From the Tribe to the Ummah," unpublished manuscript, 2007). Roy credits Roussel and Caley with recognizing the value of examining solidarity from the perspective of social networks rather than territory in rural Afghanistan (Frédéric Roussel and Marie-Pierre Caley, *Les 'manteqas': Le puzzle souterrain de l'Afghanistan*, unpublished manuscript, Peshawar, ACTED, 1993).

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Community-based interventions in rural Afghanistan since 2003 have sought to achieve ambitious economic development, better governance and service delivery, stabilization, and other outcomes. Evidence suggests, however, that intervention assumptions do not match Afghan realities. At the same time, these assumptions undergird the government's ambitious large-scale plans to transform how it delivers services in rural regions, implements programs there, and administers the country more generally. This report identifies the flaws in these assumptions and why they have been relied upon. With an eye to effective subnational programming, it suggests steps to take to better understand rural Afghanistan.

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