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A Brief Overview of the Afghanistan Stabilisation Program

A National Program to Improve Security and Governance

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the coup in April of 1978 by People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the social, cultural, political, economic, governance and security fabrics of Afghanistan institutions have been destroyed by subsequent regimes of Mujahedin and Taleban. It is impossible to have enduring peace, stability and development in a country without strong political, social and economic institutions and foundations. Following 33 years of war and instability, in most cases, linkages between central, provincial, district and village governance are non-existent or very weak.

After the overthrow of the Taleban's regime in 2001, the government of Afghanistan and the donor community from the very outset recognised that the institutions of the government of Afghanistan had only weak skeletons of structure in place. The government of Afghanistan under the National Priority Programs (NPPs) launched the Afghanistan Stabilisation Program (ASP) in 2004 as one of NPP's efforts to strengthen local governance.¹ In 2002 and 2003, most of the district

headquarters in Afghanistan did not have proper buildings from which to run local administration. The main objectives of the ASP were to extend the reach of the government of Afghanistan in the districts and provinces of the country through building physical infrastructures and enhancing the capacity of local governance.² To achieve the above goals, it was important to build the hardware of government – physical infrastructure of provincial and district headquarters – and, as software, to build the capacity of local governance and link these efforts with Civil Service Reform.

2. ASP'S STRUCTURE AND ACHIEVEMENT

In order to implement ASP's program properly, the Afghan government established an inter-ministerial task force under the leadership of the interior minister. The Ministries of Finance, Communication, Urban Development and Housing, Rural Development and Rehabilitation (MRRD), and the Ministry of Economy were members of task force. Under the inter-ministerial task force, the Project Management Unit (PMU) was

¹ In 2002–03 the government of Afghanistan launched seven NPP programs: the Afghan National Army, National Police, National Emergency Employment Program (NEEP), Disarmament, Demobilisation and

Reintegration (DDR), Justice Sector Reform, National Solidarity Program (NSP), and Civil Service Reform.

² Ministry of the Interior's internal ASP project document. Documents not available to the public.

established in the Interior Ministry, and the donor community led by the British government contributed US\$36.6 million. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) additionally funded six pilot districts of Mohammad Agha in Logar province, Muqar in Ghazni province, Nahrin in Baghlan, Ghurband in Parwan, Sayed Karam in Paktia and Yakawolang district in Bamiyan province.³ Subsequently many other countries made pledges, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
ASP Donor Commitments and Pledges at the End of 2005

Donor	Commitments (Pledges) US dollars
DFID* (UK)	36,600,000
Netherlands	4,320,000
Japan	12,000,000
UNAMA	1,246,396
USAID**	14,200,000
Canada***	9,700,000
Total	78,066,396****
Source: Ministry of Finance. * Department for International Development. ** USAID didn't pay and withdrew their money later on. *** Canada withdrew its money from the project. **** Total pledge money.	

At the end of the Constitutional Loya Jirga (CLJ) in 2003, Afghan President Hamid Karzai promised US\$1 million in development money to each province through the Provincial Stability Fund (PSF). In order to spend this money, the provincial government was instructed, with counsel from elders, to identify key development projects to be funded from this program. The PSF program became another component of the ASP and through consultation between governors and elders implemented 294 projects in 14 provinces.⁴ The government of Japan pledged to fund this program from revenue they received supplying oil to coalition forces. Ultimately, the government of

Japan only contributed US\$6 million after the cancelation of the oil deal intended to fund their contribution. Other donors did not contribute to this program, and the promise of US\$1 million to each province made by President Karzai at the CLJ was not fulfilled due to lack of funding.

Under the ASP, by October 2005, the construction of one hundred district headquarters was contracted, but the actual work in some of those original districts had still not been completed after five years. President Karzai and Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali inaugurated the completion of the first district-headquarter building in Mohammad Agha in Logar province in June 2005.

3. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The ASP faced several challenges from the very outset:

1. In the beginning of the program, the Ministry of Interior planned to build in all the districts of Afghanistan in five different stages. Districts that border Pakistan, Iran and northern neighbours were to have headquarters built in the first three stages on a priority basis to secure the borders of Afghanistan from infiltration of insurgents and to provide better services to citizens in the remote areas. In the fourth stage, all the districts that are linked to highways were to receive a district office; in the fifth stage, the remaining districts would have headquarters built. Unfortunately, the president rejected this idea, and he selected the first six pilot districts in six different provinces without any specific criteria.
2. The Ministry of Interior suggested that in order to examine the impact of this program, all the districts of one province should be selected in order to build a model province that could be replicated in other provinces. The leadership of the government also rejected this idea; the president then instructed the ASP to randomly select three or four districts from each province so that all the provinces would have a fair share of development. Managing two or three districts in each of the 34 provinces was incredibly difficult and made it impossible to measure the impact of the program.
3. The ministerial task force was not able to recruit an effective management team from the very beginning. Due to the ineffective leadership of ASP, the project did not achieve the goals that were outlined in the project

³ ASP project documents.

⁴ PSF MOI internal document.

document. Lack of proper management reduced trust and the support of the donor community for the program. The confidence of the donor community was particularly reduced when the Ministry of the Interior leadership and ASP's management changed in mid July 2005. USAID withdrew US\$8 million, and the Government of Canada withdrew all its money from the ASP program due to lack of proper management. The DFID also withdrew approximately US\$10 million from the program, providing only US\$24.6 million rather than the promised US\$36.6 million.⁵

Table 2
To-Date Financial Expenses of the ASP

Expenditure per Year (in US dollars)	Infra-structure	Tools/ Equipment	Admini- strative Costs	Total Expenditure
2004	4,690,548	108,800	865,558	5,664,906
2005	12,037,842	231,647	1,367,683	13,637,172
2006	6,452,584	685,023	1,772,816	8,910,423
2007	4,126,846	3,665,870	1,558,481	9,351,197
2008	2,633,653	182,306	1,127,164	3,943,123
2009	1,893,140	1,835,049	1,070,781	4,798,970
2010	1,020,000	—	320,000	1,340,000
Total	32,854,613	6,708,695	8,082,483	47,645,791

Source: ASP report August 2010

4. CURRENT STATUS OF ASP

When the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) was established in 2007, the ASP became part of the IDLG, but due to changes in leadership and a lack of trust from the donor community, this program has still not achieved what was envisioned in the original plan. According to the August 2010 report of the ASP, since 2005 only the Asian Development Bank and the government of Afghanistan, using funds from the national budget, had contributed US\$16.5 million to the program.⁶ The ASP contracted an additional 59 infrastructure and 82 equipment projects, but according to the program manager of the ASP, Eng. Masoom Farhad, they do not have enough money to pay for all contracted projects once they are completed.⁷ The to-date financial expenses of the ASP are shown in Table 2.

According to the ASP's report in August 2010, the projected cost of the program until 2014 is US\$357,547,000; however, only US\$5,520,174 is committed, resulting in a shortfall of US\$352,026,826.

⁵ August 2010, ASP report.

⁶ US\$10 million of Asian Development Bank was spent on equipment, vehicles and some salaries for IDLG staff who were recruited outside of the regular governmental structure.

⁷ Discussion with the director of the ASP program on 15 August 2010.

5. CONCLUSION

In order to build institutions and strengthen linkages between central, provincial, district and village governance in Afghanistan, there is the need for implementation of sound, viable programs, not unrealistic projects, designed to cover every aspect of the governance process. I believe that the concept of the Afghanistan Stabilisation Program is still a valid one and the IDLG should create a clear plan of how to manage and implement this program.⁸ With some oversight of the ASP, it is possible to link security, governance and development through this program and to improve governance in Afghanistan. In order to avoid mistakes and save time and resources, the donor community should, before supporting any new government programs, examine the failures and successes of the old programs. It is far more effective to address the shortcomings of programs in which the international community and the Afghan government have already invested millions of dollars than to create new programs that will initially do little other than replicate the work already attempted by programs like the ASP.

The ASP has existed since 2004, but the government of Afghanistan and the donor

⁸ In 2005 and 2007, the DFID and IDLG assigned independent audits to review the ASP program. Auditors reported that with some recommended changes the ASP is a valid program and can contribute to the improvement of governance in Afghanistan.



President Karzai and Minister of Interior Ali Ahmad Jalali during the inauguration of Mohammad Agha district headquarters in Logar province. Photos by Shahmahmood Miakhel

community have still not decided whether this program should be ramped up or permanently shut down while still maintaining the overhead cost of staff and management required by the program. At the same time the government of Afghanistan and the donor community have initiated several other parallel programs such as the Governor Performance Fund, Afghan Local Governments Facility Development Program, and Afghanistan Social Outreach (ASOP), which essentially rename an old concept for funding purposes and introduce a similar set of programs as if they were new initiatives. There are numerous other examples of programs with different names that are all based on the same concept such as the Auxiliary Police, Arbaki, the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF), the Community Defence Initiative (CDI), the Village Defence Initiative (VDI), the Village Stability Operation (LSO), and the Afghan Local Police (ALP). It is this type of approach based on short-term goals that continues to undermine good governance in Afghanistan.

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Shahmahmood Miakhel is the Country Director in Afghanistan for the US Institute of Peace (USIP). Prior to that he was a governance advisor for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and, from 2003–05, a deputy minister of the interior in the government of Afghanistan. In 1994–95 he worked for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) in South and Southeastern Afghanistan helping to establish District Rehabilitation Shuras (DRS). He also worked as a reporter for the Pashto service of the Voice of America from 1985–90.

ABOUT THIS CHAPTER

This chapter is part of a larger volume called *Snapshots of an Intervention: The Unlearned Lessons of Afghanistan's Decade of Assistance (2001–2011)*, edited by Martine van Bijlert and Sari Kouvo. The volume is a collection of 26 short case studies by analysts and practitioners, each with long histories in the country, who were closely involved in the programmes they describe. The contributions present rare and detailed insights into the complexity of the intervention and, in many cases, the widely shared failure to learn necessary lessons and to adapt to realities as they were encountered.

The chapters and full document can be found on the AAN website (www.aan-afghanistan.org) under publications.

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