



Community Collective Activities: National Solidarity Program in Afghanistan

Farid Ahmad Farzam Rahimi

Graduate School of Asia Pacific Studies is the Department, Graduate School of Asia Pacific Studies, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan

Abstract

This paper evaluates the National Solidarity Program (NSP) as a rural development program in Afghanistan. NSP was created by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in 2003, focusing on the capability of rural communities to identify, plan, manage, and monitor their own development projects. This paper addresses question of: How has NSP carried out its activities and what types of development projects implemented in Afghanistan? Geographically, the research has been focused on NSP activities across the country as a whole, but the fieldwork was focused on Herat province only. NSP has encouraged local communities to act in the form of Community Collective Activity; therefore, the Community Development Councils (CDCs) have been elected at the community level. As of December 21, 2014, a total number of 85,899 sub-projects - including transport, water supply and sanitation, irrigation, power, livelihood, and education - have been funded by NSP. The completed sub-projects are implemented with the direct involvement of the CDCs.

Keywords: Afghanistan; Community Development Councils; Community; National Solidarity Program; Rural Development; Sub-project

1. Introduction

The NSP is the most successful rural development program, which was created by Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) in 2003. NSP has been focusing on the capability of rural communities in Afghanistan to identify, plan, manage, and monitor their own different development projects. When the program was launched in 2003, former President, Hamid Karzai showed his full support. “The National Solidarity Program (NSP) will start throughout the country. The eradication of poverty and reconstruction of all villages is the responsibility of the Government. To implement NSP, it is necessary to elect legitimate community councils so that reconstruction is under the leadership of community leaders and councils.” The core objective of the NSP is to focus on good local governance, rural development, and reduction of the poverty across the Afghanistan. NSP activities have mainly mobilized and empowered communities and individuals in rural Afghanistan. Many success stories illustrate the commitment and support of rural communities toward local poverty alleviation and building infrastructure and development in rural Afghanistan.

NSP has been promoting good local governance, as well as communities’ collective activities in terms of participation in decision-making at all stages of development projects. Moreover, NSP is paying attention to the people and working with them in all rural areas in Afghanistan. NSP with the technical support of the Facilitating Partners (FPs) leads local communities to elect their representatives and leaders through a democratic process.

Election of Community Development Councils (CDCs) has been conducted through a democratic process, which all local community members were announced to participate in the election and candidate them for CDC or just to be as a voter. It was important for local community members talk with them openly and let them to be involved in decision-making as well as take responsibility for solving their development problems. The NSP is mainly acting as a community organizer to: (a) Train communities, (b) motivates communities, (c) supply funds, (d) discuss with local communities on issues, and (e) observe activities of CDCs. This paper describes the activities of the NSP as a rural development program in Afghanistan. This paper addresses the question of How has NSP carried out its activities and what types of development projects implemented in Afghanistan?

2. Literature Review

In the last 13 years, the Government of Afghanistan with the technical and financial support of international donors has been focused on community-based development approach. The key important issue was community empowerment. The concept of empowerment is mostly used for people capacity. The term is defined as the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (Aslop et al., 2006. p. 1). Community empowerment is defined as working collectively, which is about people and government, working together to make life better. Empowerment means real control by communities over resources, project/program design and selection, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) (Hans and Swaminathan, 2003. p. 10).

Afghanistan faces widespread poverty; limited fiscal resources which impede service delivery; insecurity arising from the activities of extremists, terrorists and criminals; weak governance and corruption; a poor environment for private sector investment; the corrosive effects of a large and growing narcotics industry; major human capacity limitations throughout both the public and private sectors (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2008. p. 2). The establishment of the Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA) in December 2001 brought hope to many within Afghanistan and the international community for the beginning of a new era in which the county and its people would rejoin the international community and would move toward internal peace and security (Nojumi et al., 2009. p. 1).

The majority of the Afghanistan population lives in rural areas and their main income sources are agriculture and animal husbandry. During the long time war, they suffered a lot from poverty and had lost many opportunities to improve their well-being. For example, utilization of local resources was crucial due to the lack of rural infrastructure and unexpected natural events. In the last 13 years, government funds have been channeled through highly centralized ministries, with many national programs and donor-funded projects working independently of each other (IMF, 2008. p. 89). For example, MRRD initiated many development programs, in particular, empowering local communities to be involved in decision-making to affect their well-being. Since 2003, the Government of Afghanistan has made a full-scale effort to invest in rural communities and began the adduce tasks of rebuilding clasp system institutions.

The NSP is one such program in which brought communities together in the form of CDCs as local institutions to act collectively. NSP is in line with the Afghan National Development Strategy and its sectoral strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), 2008). The NSP I and II were mainly focused on livelihood development and local governance. Through establishing of one CDC in each community, the services have been delivered for the purpose of rural development. Beside the implementation of NSP sub-projects, the CDCs were able to facilitate the implementation of many other rural development projects (ARTF, 2008).

The NSP activities are followed on the basis of the Community Driven Development (CDD) project implementation. The key principles of the NSP were introduced to the local communities by FP, which the collection of at least 25 families was defined as a community (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), 2008). Local people must be active with the motivation, skills, and confidence to speak up for their communities and say what improvements are needed. The poor and the relatively powerless may become "empowerment" to participate more effectively in particular development projects and programs (Mayo and Craig, 1995. p. 6).

Kakar (2005) clearly described the CDD approach and NSP that: “CDD approach has been launched by NSP and its partners to empower communities and local governments with resources and the authority to use these flexibly in Afghanistan, thus taking control of their development. The NSP, one of the Afghan government’s National Priority Programs, has been touted as one of the most successful CDD Programs (CDDs) in the world to date.”

3. Research Method

This research was mainly conducted based on a qualitative style, and the strategy of inquiry is a case study. Two types of data, including primary and secondary, have been gathered for better understanding of the context. Primary data have been gathered through interviewing key informants, field observation, and group discussion. Secondary data have been gathered through reviewing existence literatures, policy papers, reports, and websites. Geographically, the research was focused on NSP activities across the country as a whole, but the fieldwork was focused on Herat province specifically. Herat province is located in the west part of Afghanistan. I select this province purposively because I have been living there for about almost all my life period and I was familiar with all remote areas and where to visit to interview key informants, observing the field, and conduct group discussion. Herat province consists of 15 districts in which NSP presence in all and covering all villages for implementing rural development sub-projects. The research was conducted during the August and September 2014 for 42 days. Key informants, including the head of the NSP Herat provincial unit, heads of 6 FPs, and the heads of 15 District Development Assemblies (DDAs) have been interviewed. The key limitation for collecting data was the security problem since it was impossible to go some villages to observe development activities done by CDCs.

4. Findings

Access to basic needs and utilities was a big problem for local communities in all around Afghanistan. In general, NSP funded a lot of basis utilities projects, including drinking water, electricity, health, education, transportation, irrigation, and livelihoods. Although large scales of rural development projects have been implemented, there is weak evidence to judge that NSP-funded projects, solve the problem of basic needs and change the local life entirely. The creation of CDCs is the most key impact of NSP on community participation in local governance. For instance, attending of village representatives in assembly meetings provides them stable chance to get information about development activities and share their desire with authority bodies. The entire scenario of NSP is described as follow.

4.1. NSP phases

From Table 1, the Rural communities in Afghanistan estimated about 40,900. NSP aims to establish approximately about 39,056 CDCs across the county by September 2015. According to the security problems and political instability, NSP Phase I (2003-2007) and Phase II (2007-2010) could not cover all villages across the county. Therefore, NSP has continued to carry out its funds in all rural areas through conducting Phase III (2010-2015). The NSP is aiming to expand its activities in all rural areas across the country to elect CDCs and strengthen them as responsive institutions for socioeconomic development and local governance as well. It is estimated that there are a total number of 40,900 rural communities in Afghanistan, which NSP has targeted to establish approximately 39,056 CDCs by September 2015. NSP is paying attention to provide the first round of block grant for all 39,056 communities, and about 12,000 of them will be benefited from the second round of block grants as well.

4.2. NSP core elements

NSP core elements are consisted of community mobilization; capacity building of CDC members; block grant allocation; institutional linkage of CDC to governmental organizations, non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and donors. These elements are briefly described as below:

Table 1: NSP phases

Phase	Duration	Coverage communities
I	May 2003-March 2007	17,223 communities for the first round of block grants
II	April 2007-September 2011	5,957 communities for the first round of block grants
III	October 2010-September 2015	15,876 communities for the first round of block grants and 12,000 for a second round of block grants

Source: Modified by author, NSP: National Solidarity Program

Table 2: NSP core elements and its functions

Elements	Functions	Taking place
Community Mobilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizing community and formation of representative institutions Contracting with FPs to be involved in facilitating Forming and election of CDCs with the support of FPs as community decision-making body CDCs and community consultation regarding the CDP to illustrate the priority needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than of three quarters of all communities have been mobilized NSP has contracted with 33 FPs to be facilitators More than 33,922 CDCs have been elected by the community and more than 33,808 CDPs have been completed
Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducting the required and useful training program to CDCs Build skills and experiences Gender inclusion and participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most CDCs members (both men and women) have gained skills and experiences in terms of management and accounting
Block Grant Fund Allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community has to be considered in terms of family Receiving fund from central government and appropriate program (NSP) Community contribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A community consists of at least 25 households Each community at most receives US\$ 60,000 for implementing sub-projects Community contributes at least 10% of the total project cost
Institutional Linkage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linking CDCs to local government, provincial offices, and central agencies Linking CDCs to donors and NGOs Community access to more required services and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDCs can easily access to government agencies Covered community access to provide services and are expected to utilize more resources by themselves

Source: Analyzed by author, NSP: National Solidarity Program, CDC: Community Development Councils, NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

The first element of the NSP is mobilization of local communities to take part in development activities through electing their responsive representatives. Election of the CDCs as local development institutions, helping them to identify their most priority needs, and preparation of their development plans are the key functions of this element. The second element of the NSP is capacity building of the CDCs members through participation of both male and female members in training programs. The third element of the NSP is the block grant allocation to financing the implementation of the sub-projects. The CDCs are responsible to utilize the allocated block grants transparently and successfully. And finally, the NSP tries to link the CDCs to government, NGOs, donors, and other service delivery institutions to improve the service delivery in rural areas.

4.3. NSP project cycle

From table 2 it can be seen that the NSP project cycle is comprised 5 phases including (1) community mobilization, (2) establishment of CDC, (3) preparation of CDP, (4) sub-project implementation by CDC, and (5) assessment of completed sub-projects by program partners. The figure below demonstrates the NSP project cycle.

4.3.1. Community mobilization

The first step of the NSP project cycle is mobilizing communities to identify their needs and problems in terms of economic and social development. Therefore, mobilizing the rural communities and involving them in all stages of projects is considerable. This step is preceded with the help of FPs focusing on the participation of the local residents, in particular, elders, and local governmental organizations. Despite security is the main challenge furthering this process, NSP is paying attention to community development through mobilizing communities and utilizing local resources.

4.3.2. Establishment of CDC

The second step of the NSP project cycle is election of communities' representatives which refer to establishment of CDCs as responsible institutions in rural Afghanistan. All community members, including men and women, are encouraged to participate in the election and are allowed to candidate them to be as CDCs members. Therefore, all community members by conducting transparent and democratic process (secret ballot) vote for their candidates. A number of the CDC members depend on the community, but this process has been followed by election of a chairperson, vice chairperson, treasurer, and secretariat among elected members.

4.3.3. Preparation of CDP

The most important step of the NSP project cycle is the preparation of the CDP. In this step, the CDC with the technical assistance of the FP and consultation with other members of the community, to identify and prioritize the community needs to be listed for the preparation of CDP. It is the authority of the CDC and other community members to discuss issues and problems related to their living areas and decide to prepare the sub-project proposal for getting block grants. A project proposal is formulated based on the consensus of CDC and other community members, which can be built or repairing of school, bridge construction, building community center, and so forth. Therefore, according to the prepared CDP, a standard proposal of the sub-project is submitted to the NSP provincial office. NSP reviews the submitted proposal and then after approval, allocate the maximum amount of US\$ 60,000 block grants to the CDC. Moreover, the technical staff of the NSP with the help of other relevant agencies, for instance, education department reviews the sub-project proposal appraisal at the provincial office. The sub-project proposal appraisal is undertaken for the purpose of determining the eligibility criteria such as number of families within the community. The communities are also encouraged to contribute their financial or labor forces at about a minimum of 10% of the sub-project total cost. After the completion of the sub-project proposal appraisal, NSP, FP, and CDC are responsible for carrying out their assigned tasks and activities on the basis of a tripartite agreement.

4.3.4. Implementation of sub-project by CDC

Implementation of the sub-projects is the most active stage of the NSP project life cycle, which the CDC after receiving block grant is able to implement the proposed and approved sub-project. It is the responsibility of the CDC to be involved in all stages of the project implementation actively and disburse the allocated block grants transparently. The main activities of the CDC during the implementation process are management, procurement, and monitoring. For better action, the CDC assigns different sub-committees to be responsible for specific tasks such as purchase of materials, providing services,

and equipment. Moreover, the CDC and other community members have a big responsibility for maintenance of the implemented sub-projects.

Above figure present that as of December 21, 2014, NSP has funded a total of 85,899 sub-projects, which are included of transport, water supply and sanitation, irrigation, power, livelihood, education and so forth. NSP checks all implemented sub-projects and issues a completion certificate which ensures that the NSP funds have been disbursed. In case if the allocated fund is remained, NSP may decide whether to approve it for the maintenance of the implemented sub-project or to be disbursed for the future sub-projects.

4.3.5. Assessment of completed sub-project by program partners

The last stage of the NSP project cycle is the quality assessment of completed sub-project by program partners. For example, International Development Association (IDA) as the main donor of the NSP, requests report on completion of sub-project at the end of project life cycle. The report must present the key indicators of the completed sub-project. Therefore, the program partners access to update information and can realize the economic and social changes of the communities in rural Afghanistan.

4.4. NSP donors

NSP mainly relies on funding from a variety of financial sources, including the World Bank/IDA (WB/IDA), Japanese Social Development Fund, bilateral funding, and funding from various donors to NSP through the ARTF. Table 3 shows the funding sources of NSP.

WB/IDA is the largest donor of NSP. The WB/IDA has given more than US\$ 400 million concessional loan to NSP during the last 13 years.

4.5. NSP FPs

NSP with the support of FPs conducted it step by step activities at the local level. A total number of 33 FPs including UN-Habitat comprising of about more than 4,000 staff have been supporting the implementation of the program. The main activities of FPs are including the educating communities, holding open election of CDCs, provision of technical assistance in order to help CDCs in preparing their CDP and sub-project proposals, providing assistance during the project implementation, and providing capacity training for CDC members in management skills. Table 3 shows the FPs of NSP.

4.6. NSP management structure

NSP operates under the executive of the MRRD and its Project Implementation Unit (PIU) is comprised one headquarter, 6 regional coordination and 34 provincial management units (PMU). Headquarter includes an executive as well as an operations directorate which is all counts of 9 departments. A total of 282 headquarter staff with 3 senior management staff, and 656 field staffs are employed by the PIU.

Table 3: NSP funding sources by organization

Donor	Amount received (US\$)	Percentage
IDA	437.84	19.95
ARTF	1,569.48	71.50
JSDF	41.81	1.90
FPCRTF	7.92	0.36
Bilateral funds	138.02	6.29
Total	2,195.07	100.00

Source: Modified by author, NSP: National Solidarity Program, IDA: International Development Association, ARTF: Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, JSDF: Japanese Social Development Fund

In addition, an international consultancy firm as the Financial Management Agent is contracted to manage the financial operations and bank account of the NSP. Moreover, technical assistance in variety key areas has provided by four individual international consultants as well. All the NSP activities which directly focus on local communities are interrelated for running the program at different levels.

4.7. Institutional arrangement

The CDD operations by NSP have promoted the service delivery through the capable local institutions in rural Afghanistan, which has also improved the access to basic services, including safe drinking water, power, education, transport, health, irrigation, and livelihood. Moreover, the CDD operations lead communities to be empowered to gain more achievements responding to community needs.

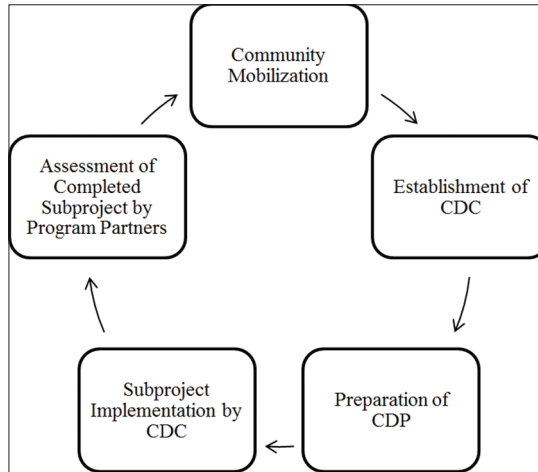
A total of approximately 750 staff members, including national and international are directly working with NSP at the provincial, regional and central levels. The local communities are highly encouraged to elect their confident and responsive CDC. The CDCs have to identify the most local needs and priorities them based on their interest and clarification. Then, the project implementation has continued with the technical assistance of the 33 FPs and with procurement activities of the contractors. The NSP activities brought remarkable effect on rural people, which increased their awareness and role in taking part in activities change their well-being. In addition, this program has emphasized on community participation and active local institutions (Social Development Department (SDD), 2006). Table 4 demonstrates the NSP institutional arrangement which consists of the NSP executive, local communities, CDCs, FPs, and suppliers and contractors (Figure 3).

Table 4: Institutional arrangement

Responsibilities	Relationship between NSP, FPs and suppliers	Relationship between FPs, CDCs and community
Community mobilization	NSP mobilizes the community with the help of contracted FPs	FPs help community in election of CDCs
Identification of priority needs	Basic infrastructure services are defined as priority community's needs through analyzing the situation by NSP	FPs supports the CDCs to consultant with community to list their priority projects
Training and capacity building	NSP provides appropriate training programs to be conducted by FPs or private sectors	Giving skills in terms of management, accounting, and operation and maintenance (O&M)
Finance assistance	Block grant fund receiving from the NSP which is allocated based on families in the community.	Community has to contribute at least 10% of project cost
Approval of fund transferring	NSP transfers block grant fund directly to CDC account	CDCs with the help of FPs submit the typical proposal for approval to NSP
Project design and implementation	Contracted FPs technically design the project and NSP provincial office controls implementation process	FPs and CDCs are involved in the project's design and implementation processes
Operations and maintenance	NSP and FPs are responsible for service delivering	CDCs and FPs are responsible in contracting with private sectors to procure the materials; CDCs and community are responsible to pay attention on maintenance of the completed projects

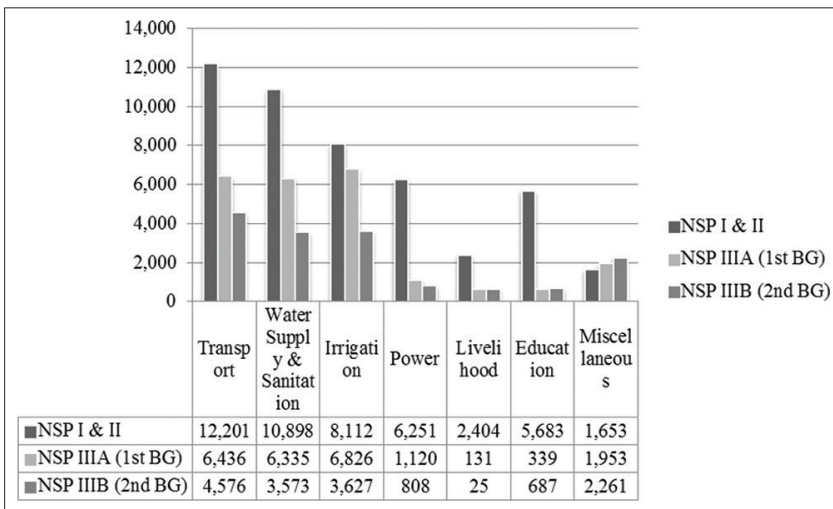
NSP: National Solidarity Program, CDC: Community Development Councils, FPs: Facilitating Partners

Figure 1: National solidarity program project cycle



Source: Author

Figure 2: National solidarity program main achievements



Source: Analyzed by author

4.8. NSP M&E

The NSP Department of M&E is playing a significant role for collection and reporting of required data to NSP stakeholders. This department is responsible for coordinating the overall M&E tasks in accordance to collect and report data related to the indicators which are defined in the NSP III results framework. The data are consolidated quarterly and updated continuously to the task team of the WB. The M&E department is acting at the regional and provincial level through its assigned staff and FPs support this department at the province and district level as well. To improve the M&E department, NSP has initiated discussions with the WB and other stakeholders to support this department to respond best in collecting and reporting required data in the future. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Department plays a significant role in monitoring NSP interventions

and assessing the performance, progress and achievements toward its objectives (Monitoring & Evaluation, 2010).

The M&E department is responsible to collect; update and record data from the field which reflect the progress of the program and transfer the collected data to the NSP headquarter for comprehensive analyzing. The key findings of the M&E are shared with the NSP key stakeholders to ensure them on real progress of the program. The data are mainly updated weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly for different purposes, for example, the WB team as the supervisor of the program need to get quarterly updated data to consolidate the future progress of the program. The M&E reports must cover the progress of the sub-projects in terms of financial and physical as well as the participation of the women and transparency of the sub-project progress.

The M&E staff members at the regional and provincial level as well as FPs, all together, support the M&E department. There are many FPs working with the NSP in different provinces and might also many FPs are facilitating sub-projects in one province. Therefore, FPs must aggregate the quarterly report and submit it to the NSP provincial unit. The quarterly progress report at the national level is prepared on the basis of aggregation of the provincial quarterly reports. The entire progresses of the NSP sub-projects have been monitored by different components, including Implementation Monitoring (IM), Post IM (PIM), and Community Participatory Monitoring (CPM).

4.8.1. IM

IM refers to the implementation stage of the sub-projects and aims to assess the process and performance of the delivered services during the project life cycle (Figure 1). It is the responsibility of the provincial IM officers (including one male and one female at each province) to do their best time by time. They (IM officers) must monitor the ongoing sub-projects using the prepared forms (A and B) and interviewing the CDCs and community members. The monitoring team must use the stratified random sampling method on the basis of the geographical area, types of implemented sub-projects, and contracted FPs.

4.8.2. PIM

PIM aims to monitor the utilization of the NSP allocated block grant. PIM members are mainly employed at headquarter and conduct the monitoring task based on a monthly plan. This monitoring is conducted on the basis of field observation and focus group discussion using the PIM forms. Both CDCs and community members, including male and female, are encouraged to take part in group discussions.

4.8.3. CPM

CPM aims to demonstrate a clear picture about the goal and achievements of the NSP in terms of real changes in rural Afghanistan. For the first time, the M&E has started the CPM monitoring in 2008, to assess the impacts and results of the completed sub-projects. The CPM team must also use the M&E prepared checklists or forms for gathering the required data.

NSP is responsive to makes up the main channel of the central government's reconstruction policies to reduce poverty and to lead rural residents to participate in local governance through elected CDCs. In addition, the NSP enhanced the capacity building of the CDCs member through conducting trainings in a variety area, including education, financial management, technical skills, procurement, transparency, and livelihood both for male and female members of the CDCs in rural areas. Through the CDCs, the Afghan people are hoping to have secure live and sustainable development.

4.9. NSP activities in herat province

Herat province is located in the western part of Afghanistan and consists of 15 districts. Since the beginning (Table 5), the NSP PMU of Herat province is conducting the NSP activities in across of

Table 5: NSP key indicators in Herat province

District	Number of CDC covered	Population	Number of family	FP	Number of ongoing projects first BG	Number of completed projects first BG	Total projects first BG	Total budget first BG (USD)
Enjil	221	382,498	80,384	UN-Habitat	8	481	489	473,310,000
Guzarah	225	292,150	59,628		3	426	429	468,700,000
Zandajan	72	74,542	13,336		0	165	165	109,350,000
Karokh	150	115,844	26,296		15	276	291	241,690,000
Koshk e Robat Sangi	159	172,901	32,634	DACAAR	0	326	326	299,050,000
Pashiton Zarqon	154	146,192	28,391		0	329	329	274,050,000
Obeh	136	116,047	24,971		0	269	269	247,060,000
Shindand	401	502,855	100,554	CHA	58	510	568	947,060,000
Farsi	76	55,002	12,411		60	85	145	123,630,000
Kohsan	56	99,403	18,129		4	99	103	158,340,000
Gulran	246	228,448	49,177	IRC	147	97	244	398,200,000
Guryan	235	307,935	64,215		149	285	434	621,400,000
Koshk e Kohna	96	69,324	15,188	NPO/RRAA	0	172	172	151,660,000
Adraskan	261	213,808	47,228		226	230	456	468,960,000
Chesht e Sharif	75	55,095	11,372	BDN	33	77	110	112,770,000
Total	2,563	2,832,044	583,914		703	3,827	4,530	5,095,230,000

Source: (Sohail, personal communication, Aug 26, 2014), NSP: National Solidarity Program, CDC: Community Development Councils

all 15 districts. The NSP activities have been followed with the technical assistance of 6 contracted FPs, including United Nations Human Settlement Program (UN-Habitat), Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees, Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, International Rescue Committee, Norwegian Project Office/Rural Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan, and Bakhtar Development Network.

There are unsuccessful and successful projects implemented by CDCs in districts of Herat province. For example, projects like building public baths are unsuccessful in many villages, but there are many successful projects or let's say income generating projects, such as water supply and electricity projects (Yusufy, personal communication, Aug 31, 2014). Implementation of NSP sub-projects helped our community with lots of achievements (Tables 5 and 6). It was an invaluable chance for us to implement different projects, including irrigation, bridges, community center, and road construction (Head of Adraskan DDA, personal communication, Sept 17, 2014).

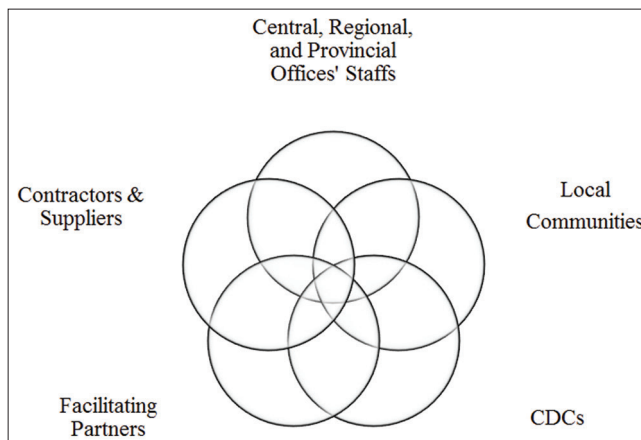
Implementations of NSP sub-projects were very effective in the most secure place in Herat province. In the secure areas, we even could save money from first planned projects and transfer and reimburse it for the second projects. Unfortunately, we could not implement the NSP sub-project in a timely manner in insecure areas and evaluated it as well (Muhammad Khan, personal communication, Sept 7, 2014). People of Adraskan were drinking water from streams and rivers for a long time. Many

Table 6: Impact of NSP projects on local communities in Herat province

Output	Impact on local communities
Local governance	Accountability transparency
Access to irrigation through streams, water storages and canals	Increase in agricultural products
Capacity building	Community awareness on their priorities project planning project implementation project evaluation
Gender equality	Women participation
Access to safe-drinking water	Decrease of diseases do not waste the time to collecting water
Access to health services	Decrease of death rate
Access to education	Decrease of illiteracy rate

Source: Author, NSP: National Solidarity Program

Figure 3: Institutional arrangement



Source: Analyzed by author

family members faced diseases from drinking such kind of water. NSP has brought changes for all community members. For example, construction of water supply network provided safe drinking water for beneficiaries (Ishaq Sediqi, personal communication, Sept 8, 2014).

5. Theoretical and Practitioner Implications

The NSP is the government's flagship rural development program. It is the most successful program focusing on poverty reduction in rural Afghanistan. NSP is building on a national network of self-government community across the country. Communities whose have the freedom to choose their representatives and freedom to choose how best to deal with their collective needs. The NSP is not just the development program. To the promotion of participatory government, NSP is shaping communities based on security, justice, transparency, unity, and solidarity. NSP is helping to restore the social fabric that was ripped through years of war and strives. It snatches new ways of decision-making for communities. NSP's goal is to attempt to cover 100% of rural communities in Afghanistan. It still needs to facilitate the election of many new CDCs in remaining districts of the country.

To do this, NSP will require continued support from donors, the Government of Afghanistan, and the Afghan people. What has been accomplished in the past 13 years through NSP is just the beginning of the journey to vast economic growth and poverty reduction. The government is committed to take this journey with its people. NSP has been designed for just its purpose to give the poor a head start and struggle to overcome poverty and become prosperous. The NSP is building on success and giving the Afghan people hope for the future. Today with support for the international community NSP is key successful program of Government of Afghanistan. NSP empower people to work together, electing local community development councils (CDCs) to make decisions about the needs and priorities of their own communities. NSP provides these councils with the block grants to provide common services and facilities including education, health, irrigation, infrastructure, and other basic needs.

The NSP impacts and outcomes can be divided into three important areas such as local governance, gender, and political attitudes. In terms of local governance, functional councils have been created at the village level, women access to participate in local governance, participation of the community members in local governance has been increased, the volumes of the production increased gradually, access to some public services including infrastructure, creation of the long-term and short-term job opportunities, and so forth. In terms of gender, there is evidence that the women are involved in economic activities, they (women) are accepted in local governance, and their responsibilities for women's needs have been increased. In terms of political attitudes, villages are connected with provincial and central government, central government pays more attention to rural areas, the gap between local communities and government has been reduced, and rural-urban migration has been decreased.

NSP through the promotion of local governance works for the people to improve their livelihoods and able them to make decisions. Empowered communities work collectively to increase human security. NSP is a comprehensive program in which helping all poor and vulnerable villages in rural Afghanistan. NSP has been trying to provide such ways for rural communities to take important decisions at all stages of development projects by elected their representatives as transparent and accountable institutions.

Since the program started 13 years ago, over 33,922 communities have elected their CDCs. Today there are elected councils functioning in almost all districts across every province of the country. CDCs were formally recognized in 2006 through the passage of CDC by law by the former President of Afghanistan. NSP means the people's program. NSP has brought unity and it has helped express the view of people that is to overcome moral and material problems. From the material point of view, communities are now enabled to construct their roads. From a moral point of view, communities can now solve disputed within the village. Every community can receive up to US\$ 60,000 as a block grant which can be used only for projects that have been prioritized in CDPs and benefit the entire community.

The NSP projects have giving more than 6 million peoples in rural Afghanistan access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Around 3 million people now have access to electricity many for the first time in history. NSP has increased the yield of cereals and vegetables for over on 1,000 farming families through small-scale irrigation projects and then NSP has provided thousands kilo meter of rural roads to the more than of 40% of the villages which do not have here round road access. It is remarkable that none of the previous aid projects have been as good as this. Since 2003, more than 1,500 million dollars has been giving to the NSP. The NSP reduced the gap between communities and the government. Empowering Afghanistan poorest and most vulnerable citizens and giving them a chance to have a real stake in their own future and real hope for the future of the country. It is notable that the rural communities need more attention to be paid for solving their problems.

6. Conclusion

As of December 21, 2014, the NSP has established 33,922 CDCs across the county. Among these, 26,690 CDCs have utilized their block grants successfully. In addition, the elected CDCs have been able to maintain their sustainability as well as raised funds for development schemes of communities from other donors following the completion of NSP funded projects. NSP not only supports villages but also functions as an educational institution that train people to reconstruct their communities by themselves. From the beginning to the projects' completion, the NSP has functioned as an educational institute. The capacity of the CDCs, villagers, and labor that were involved in the NSP projects' implementation has been dramatically enhanced. It is believed that CDCs while managing projects funded by NSP have gained the capacity that allows them to act as the gateway for development activities at their village level.

Many other governments and NGOs have started channeling their activities through these institutions (CDCs). For example, many other ministries are also conducting poverty reduction projects through working with CDCs that have expressed satisfactory results for all stakeholders. After the successful implementation of poverty reduction projects which were financed by the other ministries and organizations though the CDCs in many provinces, the M&E group has been dispatched to different districts in many provinces to assess the result of channeling the activities through the CDCs. It is quite important to other governmental organizations to consult with the CDCs while implementing development projects in the rural areas. The existence of such councils in the villages is very useful, essential and efficient.

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