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STABILITY IN KEY AREAS – WEST

MID-TERM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

26 MARCH 2014

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Management Systems International.

STABILITY IN KEY AREAS – WEST

MID-TERM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION



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Contracted under AID-OAA-I-10-00002, Task Order No. AID-306-TO-12-00004

Measuring Impact of Stabilization Initiatives (MISTI) Project

DISCLAIMER

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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ACRONYMS AND OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| AECOM | Architecture, Engineering, Consulting, Operations and Maintenance |
| AGE | Anti-Government element |
| ANP | Afghan National Police |
| CDC | Community Development Council |
| COP | Chief of Party |
| COR | Contracting Officer’s Representative |
| DAIL | Director of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock |
| DCOP | Deputy Chief of Party |
| DDA | District Development Assembly |
| DDP | District Development Plan |
| DOWA | Department of Women’s Affairs |
| DPP | District Project Portfolio |
| DSC | District Stability Committee |
| FOG | Fixed Obligation Grant |
| GIRoA | Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (referred to as “the government” throughout the report) |
| IDLG | Independent Directorate for Local Governance |
| IL | Implementation Letter |
| IR | Intermediate Result |
| IP | Implementing Partner |
| ISAF | International Security Assistance Force |
| MAIL | Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock |
| MISTI | Measuring Impacts of Stabilization Initiatives |
| MRRD | Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development |
| NABDP | National Area Based Development Program (MRRD program) |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NSP | National Solidarity Program (MRRD program funded by the World Bank) |
| PMP | Performance Management Plan |
| PRRD | Provincial Rural Rehabilitation and Development |
| PRT | Provincial Reconstruction Team |
| SAM | Stability Analysis Mechanism |
| SIKA | Stability in Key Areas |
| SOI | Source of Instability |
| SPC | Service Providers Catalogue |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since January 2012, Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) West, implemented by Architecture, Engineering, Consulting, Operations and Maintenance International Development (AECOM), has programmed a multitude of district government confidence building initiatives, mitigation activities, and grants aimed at addressing community identified sources of instability in Badghis, Farah, Ghor, and Herat. Working closely with MRRD and IDLG, SIKA West aims to expand and improve the legitimacy of the Afghan Government to districts and unstable communities. Their strategy is to assist district entities to better understand their operating environment and the challenges to stability they face. SIKA West enables district governments to develop a localized methodology and to implement activities aimed at addressing local sources of instability. This mid-point in the program marks an opportunity to document SIKA West's successes and challenges and reflect on lessons learned that can be applied in the option period and for other stabilization programs, both in Afghanistan and other countries. This report describes the findings from the mid-term performance evaluation of SIKA West's activities and grants up to November 2013 in Badghis, Farah, and Herat provinces, in which SIKA West has ongoing programming in eight districts.

The evaluation scope of work required the team to address eleven key questions:

- Are the assumptions and logic built into SIKA-West's theory of change still valid and consistent with the evaluation findings?
- To what extent did program activities and grants address sources of instability?
- Was the approach to women's inclusion appropriate and effective in empowering women and increasing their participation in decision making in SIKA-West activities?
- How effectively did SIKA-West incorporate the Kandahar Model as defined in the latest modification to the contract?
- To what extent have SIKA activities been successfully presented as government activities, connecting people to resources (both government and non-government) for service delivery?
- How effectively did a bottom-up communications process link Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)-developed District Development Assemblies (DDAs) to the district and provincial development planning processes?
- How effective were capacity building initiatives aimed at teaching district entities how to plan, design, implement and monitor various types of development projects?
- What lessons learned from the SIKA-West program implementation can inform future USAID programming?
- What components of SIKA-West were most and least valued by district and provincial entities?
- Which activities undertaken by SIKA-West had the most or least contribution to stabilization objectives?
- How effectively did SIKA-West work through Afghan government structures and within Afghan government processes to empower the district governments in decision making and community engagements under existing district level interventions?

The evaluation team consisted of one expatriate and two Afghan evaluators, based in Kabul, and one interviewer in each of the three provinces who could travel in the project districts. A female interviewer visited districts in Farah where all of the completed projects and most female-specific programming occurred. In total, 243 interviews were conducted with stakeholders, including USAID and SIKa West staff, Afghan government officials, CDC and DDA members, community elders, project beneficiaries, and other members of the community in three of the four provinces in which SIKa West works. The Kabul-based team reviewed project documents and conducted interviews with key USAID, SIKa West, and Afghan government officials. Local interviewers travelled to six out of ten SIKa West districts to view select projects and interview beneficiaries. The evaluation team began fieldwork in December 2013 and concluded in late January 2014.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Based on the data, the evaluation team identified the following key findings and recommendations:

- The SIKa West Performance Management Plan (PMP) is limited to measuring indicators and outputs. There is no focus on outcomes as SIKa West relies heavily on MISTI survey data to understand the impact of its programming. The lack of a theory of change or any other casual model hinders effective internal M&E and does not provide USAID with lessons learned on how to contribute effectively to the stabilization process.
- SIKa West is not a stabilization program per se, but a local governance program with a stabilization component. Based on their contract and associated documents, the program is designed to improve local governance through district and provincial entity capacity building and mentoring which then results in small scale stabilization projects. Improving local governance has a stabilizing effect which is measured by MISTI's separate impact evaluations of SIKa West. This program design makes fixed obligation grants implemented to address sources of instability secondary to improving local governance.
- Infrastructure development mitigation activities in Farah and Herat by and large met the stabilization objectives. Support for the government increased due to the projects, many beneficiaries reported that employment opportunities reduced support for AGEs, and any kind of infrastructure development tied to agriculture or transportation (the types of projects sampled) have beneficial effects on society as they improve agricultural potential and connect villages to one another.
- SIKa West has been successful at including women and ensuring their participation in the DSC process. Within the cultural norms of Afghanistan this is a considerable achievement of SIKa West's gender unit. Given that most female oriented mitigation activities have been vocational trainings (which are set to end in the option period), MISTI recommends continuing female engagement with more direct implementation through the DoWA. Whereas FOGs are CDC-specific, direct implementation through the DoWA affects the entire district and has the potential to reach more women.
- Mitigating against Sources of Instability (SOIs) may require more than just small grants and at times poorly conceived and executed vocational trainings for individuals, particularly when there is little or no demand for the acquired skills. Adequately addressing SOIs works best if more communities are involved rather than individual Community Development Councils (CDCs). This is stability in key areas, not stability for key people.

- Overall, SIKa West activities have been presented as government-led activities and major efforts have been made to work through government structures in order to provide service delivery. SIKa West has encouraged project selection through regular DSC meetings held with government officials at the district center. All mitigation activities are funded through CDC-linked bank accounts and some monitoring is conducted by government officials, although this has been sporadic.
- The monthly District Stability Committee (DSC) meetings were effective at attracting the community to the district center, increasing the authority and exposure of district entities to their constituents. While many DSC participants come in anticipation of receiving projects, the DSCs have built very positive momentum that should be exploited.
- There appears to be an effective bottom-up communication process for DDAs, linking them to the district and provincial planning process. This is a result of the DSC meetings. SIKa West should consider ensuring this bottom-up communication process continues once grants cease through a continuation of its communication capacity building trainings for district entities.
- Capacity building initiatives specific to project management cycle trainings were weak and ineffective at the district level. Most trainings were a few hours long and resulted in little retention of information. SIKa West was also non-responsive to some district entity requests for trainings.
- Other capacity building initiatives such as communication trainings and the use of embedded SIKa West local staff at the district centers were effective at improving district entity capacity.
- SIKa West's PMP should be revised to include outcome indicators at the IR-level that measure whether programs had an effect rather than simply measuring number of meetings held or percentage increases in activity participation. Some may be linked to the MISTI impact evaluation and survey data. The current outcomes are in reality mislabeled outputs.
- If SIKa West will continue to program vocational trainings to address the unemployment SOI, it should first conduct a market access and demand study to determine whether the vocational training has merit. Furthermore, in some trainings, unqualified trainers were selected. In districts where it is not, SIKa West should hire qualified trainers in coordination with the relevant line department, as they tend to know who in the district has the requisite qualifications.
- Monitoring and evaluation systems should conduct impact studies after an intervention is completed to extract lessons learned on how to contribute effectively to the stabilization process. SIKa West's M&E unit should conduct these as regularly as possible within the confines of their insecure environment and budget.
- Under the Kandahar Model, SIKa West needs to be a quick delivery program. This can be realistically accomplished when bureaucratic impediments are resolved expeditiously. The USAID Vetting Unit has been the cause of most delays. Furthermore, FOGs under \$9,999 should be approved by the COP without USAID as outlined in the Grants Manual. This will expedite the grants process, assure quicker delivery, and conform to USAID-approved SIKa West documents. The current COR does an expeditious job of approving FOGs, but this may not be the case when CORs change.
- The Kandahar Model is only partially relevant to SIKa West. USAID should change the requirement that it follow the model in its entirety. SIKa West should focus on community contracting in line with the National Area Based Development Program (NABDP) methodology and with monitoring of

projects. Quick delivery, although important, should not be the sole focus. SIKA West is focused on the most tangible aspect of stabilization programming – improving local governance – and that is not explicitly proscribed in the Kandahar Model. Furthermore, while the Kandahar Model is only described in a general six-page brochure, the NABDP approach is codified in a lengthy, detailed manual available from the MRRD.

- The NABDP currently pays DDAs administrative costs equivalent to 1.5% - 3.5% of the FOG. These are used for planning, meetings, implementation, and monitoring. In order to ensure alignment with MRRD processes and to ensure that DDA members are adequately compensated for project management, this administrative cost should be included in the FOGs if allowable under USAID regulations.
- Capacity building initiatives must align with Afghan Government processes in order to satisfy the demands of SIKA West’s contract with USAID and to be sustainable. While IDLG processes, strategies, and guidelines do not exist for every type of capacity building initiative, SIKA West should coordinate with the IDLG to ensure they are aligned with the directorate’s strategy, as available. The same applies for NABDP guidelines, specifically if the Kandahar Model requirement is revised. USAID should assist with the alignment process as was requested by IDLG and MRRD at several high level meetings.
- There is a flat structure in Afghanistan when it comes to governance. There is still no clear line of authority of which ministry is responsible for what aspect of SIKA West’s programming and what the associated responsibilities are. USAID should revise the implementation letter with the MRRD to clearly outline what ministry (and specifically what department within the ministry) is responsible for overseeing programming, and what are the particular responsibilities, deliverables, communication channels, and necessary coordination activities as well as methods for addressing grievances by either SIKA West or the ministry.
- Most SIKA West district residents have not experienced such a community-driven analytical resource development process and few residents have historically been consulted (and continuously re-consulted) by their government when it came to stabilization or development programming. This has drawn many beneficiaries closer to their district governments, exposing them to a government that listens to concerns, implements mitigation activities, and improves district service delivery, albeit with considerable help from SIKA West district staff.

Conclusion

The findings of this evaluation suggest that SIKA West is not a stabilization program, but a local governance program with a stabilization component. The focus on programming is on improving local governance, service delivery, and linkages of communities to district and provincial entities. While this is done through a DSC process that has shown success at strengthening community cohesion, the programming does not appear to match IDLG nor MRRD expectations for alignment and sustainability on communication and capacity building (required for improved local governance). The inherent issue with SIKA West’s programming is its lack of a properly articulated theory of change which would explain to management and stakeholders what the results of implemented activities should be. This lack of a defined theory of change results in sub-optimal implementation and assessment of the four IRs- and without outcomes measurement in its PMP, SIKA West performance measurement is likely to result in fewer lessons-learned (both positive and negative) that can tie directly back to improving the performance of implemented activities.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of SIKa West is to promote stabilization in key areas by supporting the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (the government) to implement community led development and governance initiatives that respond to the population's needs and concerns. SIKa West helps district entities to identify and respond to challenges to stability with an aim to build confidence in local government and increase the provision of basic services. SIKa West's work focuses on key districts prioritized by the United States Government Regional Platform-West (RP-W) and is aligned with other district priorities as determined by the provincial governments.

SIKa West seeks to increase confidence in the district level government of the western provinces of Afghanistan, leading to greater legitimacy and the expansion of provincial and district governing structures in those areas. SIKa West assists district governments to understand sources of instability (SOIs), increase coordination with line departments, and to improve communication with, and provide better basic services to constituents. SIKa West complements other USAID stabilization efforts, such as SIKa North, SIKa East, SIKa South, the Community Cohesion Initiative (CCI), and the Afghanistan Civilian Assistance Program II (ACAP II), among other stabilization and development programs. SIKa West is a three-year project that began in January 2012. Except for preliminary planning and coordination meetings and preparation for programming rollout, actual implementation of program activities did not begin until September 2012 when the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and the Independent Directorate for Local Government (IDLG) signed an implementation letter (IL) with USAID covering the SIKa programs.

Background Context

USAID overseas a number of stability programs throughout Afghanistan aimed at improving security and extending the reach and legitimacy of the government to poorly serviced communities in insecure areas. These programs are designed to mitigate against SOIs and establish an environment for sustained social and economic development. The goal is engagement of government officials in communities in key districts, the implementation of projects aimed at extending the reach of the government to unstable areas, provision of social and economic assistance and income generating opportunities, the building of trust between local citizens and their government, and encouragement of local populations to play an active role in their own development.

Traditionally, Afghans look to their district entities to solve local grievances rather than to their provincial or central government. However, district entities have often been overlooked by donors. A particular need exists to involve district entities in the planning process for defining district level issues, overseeing solutions with mitigation activities, and playing a central role in monitoring these activities. Putting district entities in the lead aligns with the IDLG's Sub-National Governance Policy. A lack of district level focus threatens to erode the legitimacy of provincial governments and hinders their ability to expand authority and deliver basic services throughout their provinces.

The focus of the SIKa programs is therefore to address two particular weaknesses at the district level: (1) lack of development, and (2) lack of good governance. SIKa was designed to deliver community developed and implemented projects in close partnership with the government in order to build confidence in the government and increase stability by addressing these two main weaknesses at the district level. SIKa West cooperates closely with the MRRD and IDLG in this effort.

The MRRD's approach to stabilization is to empower people, build unity within communities, and instill grassroots level participation in decision making while maintaining the ultimate goal of building the population's confidence towards Afghan institutions. These approaches to stability have been used by the

MRRD since 2002 through the National Area Based Development Program (NABDP) and, since 2003, through the National Solidarity Program (NSP). NABDP is MRRD's primary stabilization initiative at the district level. Its goals are the sustainable reduction of poverty and an improvement in the livelihoods in rural Afghanistan. NABDP uses District Development Assemblies (DDAs)¹ to create District Development Plans (DDPs) which link community priorities to the government's agricultural and rural development strategy. It also strengthens the DDAs as the primary conduit for stabilization initiatives as well as social and economic development planning at the district level.

NSP was created to help local communities identify, plan, manage, and monitor their own development projects largely through the formation of Community Development Councils (CDCs), which serve as the focal points for all village-level rural development in Afghanistan. NSP and NABDP complement each other to provide a stabilizing influence at the district level².

However, MRRD realized that the lack of rural development was due mainly to insecurity and that without development, security would not improve. To improve development through successful project implementation in insecure areas, MRRD developed the Kandahar Model which decentralized the procurement and financial procedures essential to community contracting. The model also provided a platform for direct community participation in project planning, budgeting and decision-making through established CDCs and DDAs, thereby increasing the population's confidence in their district level government entities.

Since 2001, various stakeholders established and/or supported sub-national governance as this became a key focus for civilian and military personnel, specifically Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), which assisted in extending the authority of the government. While PRTs relied on quick impact projects to garner favor with the communities and often attempted capacity building of local officials, these efforts were not often coordinated effectively with the provincial or central government. Given the varied NATO-country representation at each PRT, local governance and stability programming were as diverse as the countries running the PRTs. While there has been some coordination with provincial government, these initiatives have tended to replace government capacity rather than build it, create unsustainable infrastructure, and undermine strategic planning and prioritization by the government³.

The government has also had a hand in institutional disorganization and developing overlapping structures that hinder the functioning of district entities. Some obstacles like factional influence, disparity in capacity and mandate, absence of perceived legitimacy, lack of capacity and basic equipment, and problems with communication, access, and security plague the effectiveness of district entities. Overcoming these contextual obstacles is a key mandate of SIKAWest's local governance and stabilization programming.

Working closely with the MRRD and IDLG, SIKAWest's strategic objective is for Afghans to have increased confidence in their district government, leading to the expansion of authority and legitimacy of Afghan provincial government to the districts and to unstable communities. Since the government has been unable to meet the challenges of addressing its population's various needs, SIKAWest's strategy is to assist district entities to better understand their operating environment and the challenges to stability they face. SIKAWest enables them to develop a localized methodology aimed at addressing SOI and to implement activities that address these SOI.

¹ DDAs are comprised of elected representatives of clustered CDCs.

² NABDP and NSP programming under the MRRD were designed to implement a bottom-up approach to improve confidence in local government and capacity of community development bodies to participate in their own development and reach the most deprived areas. The bottom-up approach emphasizes local and flexible problem solving rather than centralized blanket programming.

³ NABDP Beneficiary Assessment – Fieldwork Synthesis October 2012, p 10

USAID has identified four intermediate results (IRs) required to achieve the strategic objective:

1. Provincial and district entities increasingly address sources of instability and take measures to respond to the population's development and governance concerns (Stability Analysis Mechanism training, monthly District Stability Committee meetings, identification of SOI mitigation activities);
2. Provincial and district entities understand what organizations and line departments work within their geographic areas, what kind of services they provide, and how the population can access those services (Service Providers Catalogue);
3. Provincial authorities improve their ability to communicate with district entities to help them better understand their population's needs and prioritize basic service delivery interventions (systems development and mentoring, capacity building of district entities);
4. District entities authorities improve basic service delivery by using the government, Community Development Councils (CDCs), District Development Assemblies (DDAs), Afghanistan Social Outreach Program District Community Councils (DCCs) to plan, design, implement and monitor projects and focus on labor-intensive projects or productive infrastructure (grants under contract for small community projects that are available through other mechanisms).

USAID designed SIKa West to function as an Afghan led and government owned program that works within the structures already set up by the government. As such, SIKa West works with the MRRD and IDLG at the provincial and district levels to enhance the capacity of the government to plan and implement stabilization programming, and to improve governance and service delivery in strategic districts by working within the existing framework of NABDP and the Kandahar Model.

SIKa West's stabilization programming is meant to serve as a quick delivery program where projects identified by the community through the localized Stability Analysis Mechanism (SAM) process are initiated quickly, but achieve long-term results. The SAM process is used to identify local sources of instability and their systemic and root causes in order to produce useful programming information about the district and community-level environments. CDCs, with input from members of the government, analyze these SOIs to select mitigation activities. These activities are implemented by the community, achieving a level of local ownership required for stabilization.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The objective of this mid-term performance evaluation is to assess the performance, relevance, and success of the SIKa West program within the context of stabilization programming to inform management decisions. Specifically, this evaluation is being undertaken to provide information to the senior management of the Stabilization Unit and USAID Mission management on whether stabilization activities implemented by SIKa West are achieving their desired results by examining the performance of SIKa West according to its approved program objectives. The secondary objective includes assessing the stabilization impact of the program's interventions to the extent possible given available data.

This mid-term performance evaluation documents accomplishments, areas for performance improvement, and lessons learned from January 2012 to November 2013 for the use of USAID management, SIKa West staff, the Implementing Partner (AECOM), and the MRRD and IDLG. The Stability Analysis Mechanism component of SIKa West's Intermediate Result 1 (IR1) has already been evaluated by MISTI in October 2013 and key results are incorporated in this evaluation as well as the results of MISTI's stability trends analyses. With these data sources incorporated, this evaluation will serve as a vehicle for

extracting key lessons from SIKA West’s experience to date and providing evidence to inform performance management decision making including SIKA West strategy and implementation adaptation.

Key Evaluation Questions

The following evaluation questions were examined through the evaluation:

1. Are the assumptions and logic built into SIKA West’s theory of change still valid and consistent with the evaluation findings?
2. To what extent did program activities and grants address sources of instability?
3. Was the approach to women inclusion appropriate and effective in empowering women and increasing their participation in decision making in SIKA West activities?
4. How effectively did SIKA West incorporate the Kandahar Model as defined in the latest modification to the contract?
5. To what extent have SIKA activities been successfully presented as government activities, connecting people to resources (both government and non-government) for service delivery?
6. How effectively did a bottom-up communications process link the MRRD-developed DDAs to the district and provincial development planning processes?
7. How effective were capacity building initiatives aimed at teaching district entities how to plan, design, implement and monitor various types of development projects?
8. What lessons learned from the SIKA West program implementation can inform future USAID programming?
9. What components of SIKA West were most and least valued by district and provincial entities?
10. Which activities undertaken by SIKA West had the most or least contribution to stabilization objectives?
11. How effectively did SIKA West work through Afghan government structures and within Afghan government processes to empower the district governments in decision making and community engagements under existing district level interventions?

Methodology

This performance evaluation used qualitative methods, including observation, interviews, and a desk review of project documents to evaluate SIKA West performance up to November 31, 2013. The Kabul-based evaluation team consisted of one expatriate and two Afghan evaluators who conducted interviews with SIKA West staff, USAID staff, MRRD staff, IDLG staff, and project stakeholders to understand processes, challenges, and lessons learned of the program. The expatriate evaluator traveled to SIKA West’s offices in Herat twice to conduct interviews with expatriate and Afghan managers, office staff, the IDLG coordinator for SIKA West, and with the Provincial Rural Rehabilitation and Development (PRRD) leadership in Herat. The Afghan evaluators traveled to Herat City, Pashtun Zarghun, Shindand, Kushki Rabat-e-Sangi, Farah City and Bala Boluk for interviews. They also managed a team of field interviewers who traveled to project sites. An additional Afghan interviewer conducted field work in Qadis.

To gain a deeper understanding of how the program performed in the field, the evaluation selected 16 completed projects and 14 ongoing but almost completed projects under the period of performance (all of the completed projects and a cross section of ongoing projects by type) for closer study. SIKa West project data was examined to understand how projects varied in terms of type, value, beneficiaries, and location. Further project analysis involved examining DPPs for project relation to identified SOIs, as well as length of time between DPP approval and actual project implementation. Survey data from the MISTI Stability Survey was used to characterize project districts in terms of variables such as overall stability and perceptions of local security. Together this information allowed the team to select study projects that were relatively representative of the universe of SIKa West programming. The map (Figure 1) shows all SIKa West districts, with those visited in green and project sites visited by the evaluation team marked in blue (soft project) and black (hard project). A complete list of projects visited appears in Annex A.

Security conditions in many project areas prohibited the Kabul-based Afghan evaluators from visiting each site. Instead, the team recruited and trained three male interviewers from each province and one female interviewer from Farah to visit the selected project sites and interview direct and indirect beneficiaries and project stakeholders such as CDC and DDA members who were involved in project implementation and oversight. The interviewers conducted at least five interviews for each project site visited. The Afghan and local interviewers documented perceptions of project selection, implementation, monitoring, effects on stability, and how valued they were by the community in which they were implemented. They also evaluated the degree to which communities recognized Afghan government involvement. The evaluation team did not hire engineers to inspect project quality or accountants to review records. The evaluation was designed to examine community perceptions of processes, outputs, and some limited outcomes. Measuring program impact was not an objective of the performance evaluation since that will be measured through MISTI's on-going impact evaluations.

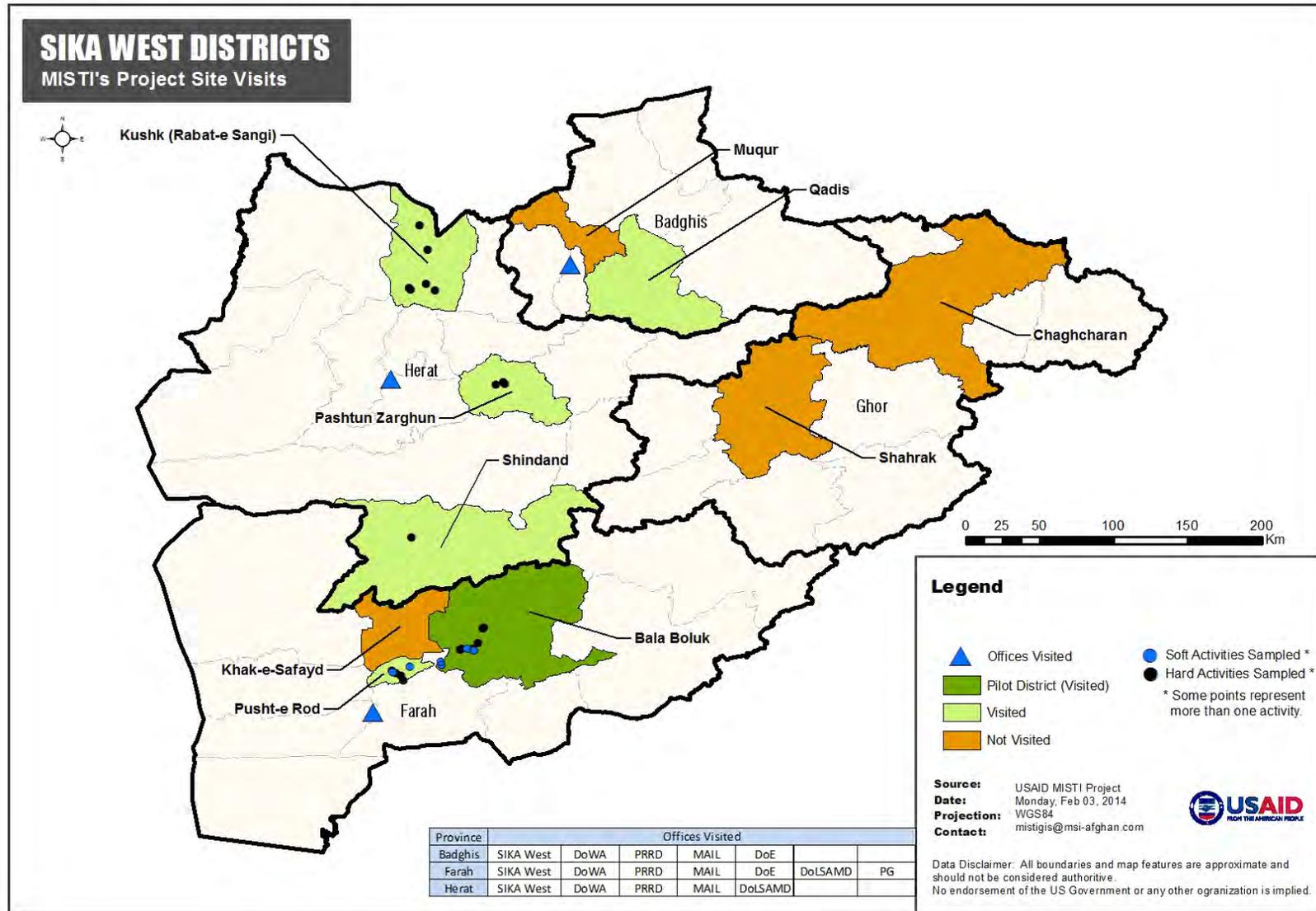
While the SOW called for evaluating program performance in at least two districts, the evaluation team visited six districts in three provinces. In total, the evaluation team conducted 243 interviews: 5 with USAID staff, 28 with SIKa West staff, 6 with National-level Afghan officials, 63 with provincial and district level Afghan government officials, 23 with women, 146 with community members (DDA members, CDC members, elders, laborers, and other community members), and 10 with other stakeholders and early SIKa design US officials. A table with interviews by category appears as Annex B.

MISTI's semiannual survey has begun to ascertain the impact of SIKa West's projects quantitatively in terms of changes in stability, perceptions of government, and perceptions of service delivery. The MISTI survey collected a baseline for all SIKa West districts in Fall 2012 and is scheduled to finish the third wave survey fieldwork in February 2014. As many SIKa West projects did not begin until after the time of the survey's second wave (May through September 2013), MISTI has only begun to conduct an impact evaluation on SIKa West activities. Wave 3 of the survey should include enough completed activities for MISTI to complete SIKa West's first impact evaluation. The results of that impact evaluation should be available in late May 2014.

TABLE I. DATA-COLLECTION SCHEDULE

| Area | Dates Data Collected |
|--|--|
| Kabul – USAID, MRRD, IDLG, external interviews | December 2013 and January 2014 |
| Herat City – SIKA West HQ, PRRD, DoWA, Provincial Governor and all District Governors through the IDLG | December 8 – 18, 2013 January 20 – 21, 2014 |
| Farah Province (Bala Boluk, Pusht-e-Rod, and Farah City) | December 16, 2013 – January 19, 2014 |
| Herat Province (Pashtun Zarghun, Kushki Rabat-e-Sangi, Shindand) | December 8, 2013 – January 22, 2014 |
| Badghis (Qadis) | December 12, 2013 – January 4, 2014 |

FIGURE I. MAP OF SIKA WEST DISTRICTS AND EVALUATION SITE VISITS



Limitations

The evaluation design had many strengths including the collection of data from triple the number of requested districts and multiple project sites. The hiring of a female interviewer in Farah added depth to the gender portion of the evaluation as access to females by male interviewers is almost impossible in rural areas of western Afghanistan. In addition, the evaluation team has previous experience evaluating USAID stabilization programs in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, some limitations should be noted. Since only one to two local interviewers were hired in each province, the depth of information differed, so results should not be compared exclusively by province. In addition, all the interviewers in Herat and Badghis were male. Therefore, owing to cultural constraints, women in the villages were not interviewed as the team had access only to female Afghan government officials in these provinces.

The evaluation team projected visiting more project sites in Shindand, but was unable to in January 2013 due to security limitations. Ghor activity was not evaluated due to most programming there occurring after the period of performance ending in November 2013. Lastly, triangulation of information received from the Pusht-e-Rod District Governor was compromised when SIKA West staff intervened, likely causing the District Governor to quickly change the story he told the evaluation team twice⁴. This information is not reflected in the report.

FINDINGS

Are the Assumptions and Logic Built into SIKA West’s Theory of Change Still Valid and Consistent with the Evaluation Findings?

SIKA West does not have a defined theory of change articulated in its contract, approved PMP, or work plan.

A theory of change is a specific and measurable description of a social (behavior) change program that forms the basis for planning, decision making, and evaluation of a program’s outcomes according to USAID ADS 201. Theories of change require programs to:

1. Demonstrate a causal pathway from the start of programming to a determined endpoint, showing what specifically is needed for objectives to be achieved (*e.g. After SIKA West creates a Service Providers Catalogue in Farah Province, distributes it to the people, and explains how to use it, Farah Province residents will understand what government services are available to them.*)
2. Articulate a hypothesis about why SIKA activities will cause individual outcomes with justifications that these outcomes were achieved because of SIKA activities – “if we do this, then that will happen”; “this can only succeed if...” (*e.g. If SIKA West creates a Farah Province Service Providers Catalogue then Farah residents will better understand what services are available in their district thereby improving their perceptions of government service delivery.*)

⁴ A letter of support from the Pusht-e-Rod district governor solicited by SIKA West in response to criticism by the Herat provincial governor was given to the evaluation team. The team then asked the district governor for more details concerning the content of the letter. The district governor was surprised to hear of the letter at first, stating he did not write it or authorize the content. This was confirmed an hour later when the district governor called the evaluation team to demand who wrote the unauthorized letter with his signature. MISTI attempted to triangulate the discrepancy with SIKA West expatriate staff the same day. The following morning, the district governor called to say he did indeed authorize the letter and its content.

3. Change management thinking away from what is being done to what needs to be achieved (e.g. *Away from outputs, e.g., ‘number of people using the Service Providers Catalogue’ and ‘number of training workshops held in Service Providers Catalogue usage’, to outcomes, e.g., ‘the population now understands how to access services using the Service Providers Catalogue’*).

A clearly defined theory of change is a practical and essential part of a successful social transformation program. In order for SIKa West to more properly manage its results based framework and adequately understand whether stabilization programming is having the intended long-term sustained outcomes, a theory of change (or another appropriate outcome-focused causal model) is necessary. This way, the program will be better able to test intermediate results (IRs 1 through 4) through a district-specific and measurable causal model.

Although USAID does not generally use theories of change, instead preferring to use development hypothesis/results frameworks as the appropriate performance management tools, it would benefit SIKa West if they had more clearly defined outcomes that accurately measure results based on program interventions. Currently, for example in IR2, SIKa West measures number of SPC trainings, number of DPP activities that districts implemented using the SPC, and number of training workshops held in SPC usage. None of these program indicators actually measures a project outcome or impact, e.g., if the creation of the SPC resulted in improved perceptions of government service delivery and what effect that had on stabilization⁵. Measuring impact is the task of the MISTI project, and the SIKa West PMP should include appropriate indicators from the Stabilization Unit PMP managed through MISTI.

Currently, SIKa West’s M&E unit relies on MISTI to provide it with an understanding of the causal relation between programming and impact. While MISTI conducts impact evaluations of USAID’s stabilization programming, these evaluations cannot with certainty indicate if specific SIKa West programming had the measured effect. For example, an observed increase in confidence in the district government may not be directly attributable to a specific indicator and/or activity under IR3 using MISTI data. The responsibility to measure outcomes linked to these impacts based on a specific causal relation is SIKa West’s. Furthermore, SIKa West’s PMP clearly outlines that performing impact studies after an intervention is completed to extract lessons learned on how to contribute effectively to the stabilization process is a core requirement of the M&E unit⁶. Under the period of performance no impact studies were conducted on any intervention to include the impact of DSC, SAM, IR2, IR3, or mitigation activities under IR4.

To What Extent did Program Activities and Grants Address Sources of Instability?

Overall, it is too early to effectively evaluate if SIKa West activities and grants had a measurable long term stabilizing impact⁷. Preliminary results of the MISTI survey indicate a decrease in the overall stability index scores and a decrease in confidence in local government in all SIKa West districts sampled (Annex C). These results are based on two survey waves that occurred in Fall 2012, when SIKa West started most of the DSCs, and Summer 2013, when mitigation activity programming was just starting. A drop in the key indicators may correspond to community fatigue with meetings and/or with greater exposure to district governments resulting in greater expectations for service delivery. MISTI’s

⁵ There is also mislabeling in the performance indicators as none of the indicators are outcome indicators. Some output indicators are mislabeled as outcomes. For example, indicator 3.1 under IR3 “Percent increase in the number of regular meetings held between provincial authorities and district entities” is labeled as an outcome. This indicator measures an increase in meetings (output), but does not correlate it to SIKa West activity. Hence, no realistic attribution can be made to justify the output as an effect of SIKa programming.

⁶ SIKa West PMP p21, “Responsibilities of the M&E Unit”

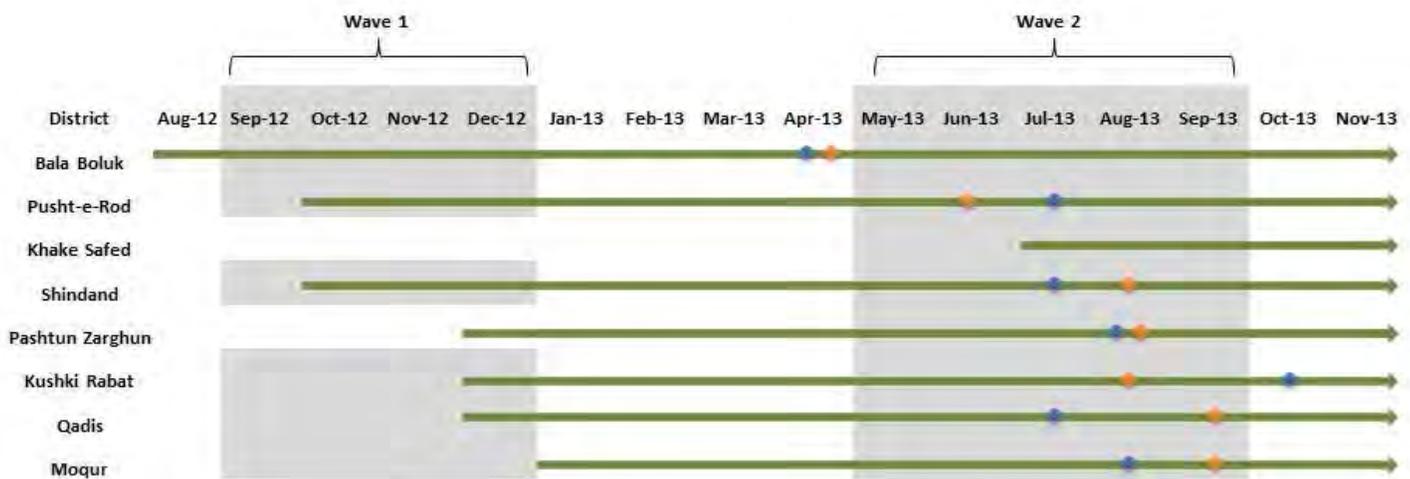
⁷ MISTI conducts semiannual surveys in SIKa West districts on a range of security, governance, and service delivery questions, and uses the data to conduct quasi-experimental impact evaluations, measure specific program performance, and compile a trends analysis on key indicators.

third wave of the survey, scheduled to end data collection in early February 2014, should provide greater insight into SIKA West’s stabilization impact as all districts now have ongoing mitigation activities.

Major SOIs as seen on DPPs are unemployment, presence of Anti-Government Elements (AGEs), and illiteracy/lack of education. SIKA West focused most mitigation activities on addressing unemployment through various vocational trainings that were meant to increase participant skills for future potential income generation and through infrastructure development projects focused mostly on the agricultural sector. These infrastructure projects provided short term employment opportunities and were built to improve agricultural infrastructure identified by the communities. However, a common programmatic complaint by the beneficiaries as well as Afghan Government officials is how short term employment does not address the SOI because it is a temporary solution. Furthermore, vocational trainings without requisite market access and demand do not address unemployment.

The DSC meetings have been instrumental in bringing the community together. District government is now more in touch with the people and services have been seen to improve. Building trust between communities and their district government has been the most observable achievement of SIKA West. The District Governor is now speaking directly to the communities and asking them about their problems and finding solutions. There is less an anticipation of project money in most districts and more a focus on using existing and available resources to improve community resiliencies and strengths. Conflict resolution committees established with SIKA West support have been popular, addressing a number of SOIs that do not require project funding.

FIGURE 2. SIKA WEST DSC MEETINGS AND PROJECT START DATES

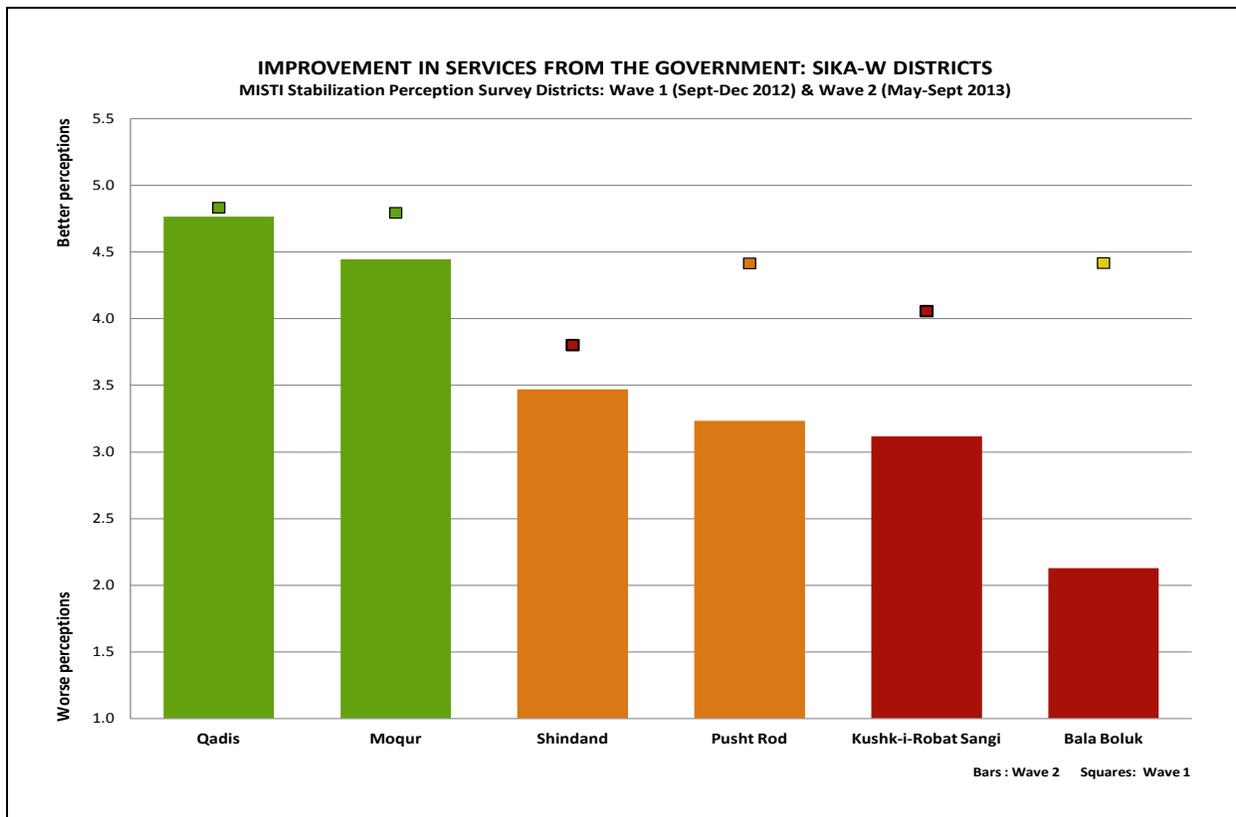


Although SIKA West’s contract was signed in January 2012, official operations did not begin until September 2012 when USAID and MRRD signed the SIKA implementation letter. Green arrows represent monthly DSC meetings where the SAM process results in identification of SOIs, proposal of mitigation activities, and the creation of DPPs. Blue dots on the timeline are when hard projects first started, orange dots are when soft projects first started. MISTI’s semiannual survey fieldwork in these districts is shown in gray (waves 1 and 2). Wave 1 did not include Khake Safed or Pashtun Zarghun.

The evaluation team found that addressing legitimate SOIs is challenging with district “back engineering” at the DSCs. Back engineering of SOIs is the process by which DSC members decide upon which projects they want to receive and then work backwards through the Stability Assessment Mechanism (SAM) process to engineer the SOI. Multiple programs prior to SIKA West just responded to the needs of communities. DDAs and CDCs were used to getting their needs met through development and quick impact work under the PRTs and previous MRRD programming. Many of these communities have been back engineering their needs to fit the new SAM approach. Equitable distribution of resources also plays a role in back engineering as communities will demand the same projects as other communities received even if those projects do not address major SOIs in that community. There were concerns with some of the early water divider projects in Bala Boluk and Pusht-e-Rod as they showed evidence of back engineering.

SIKA West has done well to mitigate further instances of back engineering by training its staff. Given that there are monthly DSC meetings, it is much easier to discuss SOIs and mitigation projects and reach a consensus. The DPPs are constantly scrutinized during the DSCs, leading to better mitigation against back engineering, although there is very little SIKA West can do to stop district entity collusion once they understand how the system works.

FIGURE 3. IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICES FROM THE GOVERNMENT IN SIKA WEST DISTRICTS



When looking at Figure 3, which uses data from the MISTI Wave 2 survey, each district experienced a

MISTI’s trends analysis shows a drop in perception of service delivery from the government possibly associated with inequitable distribution of grants, community fatigue with the long delays in project implementation, and/or due to most grants occurring after wave 2 sampling. The results shown here are not indicative yet of program impact. MISTI’s third wave of the survey, scheduled to end data collection in early February 2014, should provide greater insight into SIKA West’s stabilization impact as all districts now have ongoing mitigation activities.

decline in perceptions of improvement in services from the government. Taken together with the timeline in Figure 2, which shows when DSC meetings and project activity started, these findings illustrate what may potentially be program-wide issues with SIKAWest’s implementation strategy: (1) The DSC meetings occurred for several months before the first projects started, leading to community fatigue with the process; (2) Figure 2 only shows the start of the first project, which is for one CDC. Most projects began after Wave 2 of the survey; and, (3) most projects were granted to CDCs close to the district center.

MISTI surveys across the entire district area. Those sampled by MISTI’s survey outside of this “grants bubble” may have felt disserved by their government, thereby expressing negative sentiments illustrated in Figure 3 due to the inequitable distribution of projects. It will be interesting to see from the Wave 3 results if perceptions have improved as programming expands.

Which Activities Undertaken by SIKAWest Had the Most or Least Contribution to Stabilization Objectives?

Stabilization efforts in Afghanistan work on reducing insurgency, increasing the legitimacy, reach, and capacity of the Afghan Government, and bolstering the resilience of communities to resist external threats and solve local problems. Stabilization programming needs to be highly responsive to local sources of instability and grievances against the local government⁸. While MISTI measures specific perceptions where stabilization is measured in improvements in these perceptions, the evaluation team utilized a modified assessment approach that sampled all of SIKAWest’s completed mitigation activities in Farah and a cross section of ongoing mitigation activities in Farah and Herat under the period of performance.

As SIKAWest’s focus is to identify and effectively respond only to those conditions that drive instability (SOIs), the following objectives must be met in order to qualify as having a stabilization impact:

1. Increase support for the Afghan Government,
2. Decrease support for Anti-Government Elements (AGEs),
3. Improve the normal functioning of society.

The evaluation team found that female vocational trainings in Farah generally met all of the criteria, although it should be noted that most women do not have direct exposure to AGEs. Bala Boluk females, in particular, said how this is the first time they can recall the government supporting women’s programming in their area. Male vocational trainings in Farah did not contribute much to stabilization objectives. Although most male participants in auto mechanics and mobile phone repair trainings appreciated that the district entities provided such opportunities, they did not feel support for AGEs would decrease due to vocational trainings, nor did they believe that the normal functioning of society would improve through such small projects limited to a few individuals already connected to the district center. During interviews with beneficiaries, the evaluation team found these male vocational trainings largely discounted due to poorly qualified instructors and lack of local demand for learned skills. For example, one male beneficiary from the Middle Kanisk CDC said, “Through this project I can now repair the phone, but it is not a very good project in our area because there is little demand for this service.” The evaluation team also found that SIKAWest did not conduct effective market feasibility studies for these kinds of vocational trainings, although acknowledging that the demand for many vocational skills may well be limited in programming areas.

Infrastructure development mitigation activities in Farah by and large met the stabilization objectives. Support for the government increased due to the projects, many beneficiaries reported that employment

⁸ Stabilization Unit PMP

opportunities reduced support for AGEs, and any kind of infrastructure development tied to agriculture or transportation (the types of projects sampled) have beneficial effects on society as they improve agricultural potential and connect villages to one another. However, there is a distinction to be made in places like Farah between actual decreased support for AGEs and respondent answers to the question when asked about specific projects. In order for these projects to occur the active AGEs have to allow it. The evaluation team was told that the Garani/Ziarat CDC water dividers project only occurred after AGEs consented to construction. The Tapan Shiran CDC reported giving a portion of the project funds to the Taliban in order to construct 10 water dividers. Beneficiaries from that area told the evaluation team how the project quality was low compared to water dividers in other CDCs, likely as a result of inferior materials purchased due to less funding available after the payoff. Lastly, a number of beneficiaries did not associate projects with the government, but with SIKA. When asked how they felt about government support in their area, they replied that they “want to see more projects from SIKA.”

Herat infrastructure projects also met stabilization objectives. Many beneficiaries reported that the government is now more responsive to community needs and how this was the first time some communities received tangible services from the government. One CDC beneficiary from Gazagh Hulya Village in Pashtun Zarghun said this about the DSC and subsequent processes:

“It was the first time that we saw the government was friendly. All these meetings and the government showed up to hear all of our grievances, conduct conflict resolution, include women in the DSC... these increase support for the government and increase trust between the government and the community. Before I heard wrong things regarding some government officials. But now that I saw them up close at these meetings, they’re actually not bad people. There are a lot of people in the community who think these government officials are bad people, but once they sit with us and talk with us, they will realize that this government is here to serve them. With time we are building trust among the communities and this is a positive achievement.”

A bridge constructed in Safidan Ullah CDC in Pashtun Zarghun had the most noticeable stabilization impact. Prior to the bridge’s construction police vehicles could not reach a large number of villages across the river because the old bridge was broken. After it was refurbished the police increased the geographic scope of their patrols and forced a number of AGEs out of these previously inaccessible villages.

Although there is considerable positive sentiment regarding these infrastructure projects, and most have indeed contributed to stabilization objectives, the nature of these projects is to address a particular SOI – unemployment. All of these projects were short term cash for work type activities aimed at giving local communities employment opportunities. Once these projects are complete, each worker reverts back to unemployment. If the goal of SIKA West’s stabilization programming is to create sustainable employment opportunities so that young men who have jobs will not join AGEs, short term work programs have a limited effect.

Was the approach to women inclusion appropriate and effective in empowering women and increasing their participation in decision making in SIKA West activities?

Cultural and religious norms in Afghanistan are two of the biggest obstacles to women’s participation in DSCs/DDAs. Traditionally, women play a limited role in decision-making when it concerns community development. SIKA West has a gender unit responsible for facilitating the inclusion of women in the DSC process (through a women’s shura), facilitating gender mainstreaming sessions for district entities,

organizing capacity building programs for women and DDA members on women's participation, self-development, leadership, and working with other departments within SIKA West to ensure that women are included in programming and that their voices are heard. The women's shuras hold regular meetings in order to listen to their needs, concerns, challenges, and discuss possible solutions.

SIKA West has been successful at including women and ensuring their participation in the DSC process. For example, in Pashtun Zarghun District the first DSC meeting included only two female DDA members. For the second DSC meeting (after encouragement by SIKA West staff and buy-in from the District Governor), these female DDA members invited other influential women they knew to come to the district center and participate in the DSC. They have also created a new women's shura which includes women from all backgrounds in the district. More women are coming to the district center to voice their concerns and play an active role in the DSC meetings, something that has not been seen before in Pashtun Zarghun. Similar activities to include and empower women were observed in Kushki Rabat-e-Sangi, where women have begun to play a greater role in the DSC's decision-making process. For many women, this is their first opportunity to participate in such district meetings. Women's inclusion in the more conservative districts required additional effort from the gender unit. Bala Boluk and Pusht-e-Rod Districts in Farah Province had no female members in the DDAs. So the gender unit received information about influential local women from each District Governor and contacted them directly to encourage them to attend DSC meetings. However, simply having women attend meetings isn't enough to ensure their voices are heard as these two districts are particularly conservative. Therefore, the gender unit also conducted gender mainstreaming workshops for men. The observed effect has been that male DSC members have come to understand the need for female participation and are slowly acquiescing to increasing their participation in decision making.

Although including women and encouraging their participation in decision making has seen positive results, female-focused mitigation activities have seen mixed results. According to the gender unit, the most important SOIs discussed by women at working groups, DSC meetings, and at the Department of Women's Affairs (DoWA) working groups are: (1) revenge killings, (2) forced marriages, and (3) high bride prices which result in young men going to Iran or Pakistan for work and coming back as opium addicts. Unemployment is not mentioned as a first round SOI even though the vast majority of SIKA West's mitigation activities for women have focused on addressing unemployment through vocational trainings such as tailoring, embroidery, or carpet weaving. SIKA West has also conducted a series of mid-wife courses in Farah. It is important to note here that the evaluation team found the most common female-specific vocational activity (tailoring courses) in Farah and Badghis were not put forth by the women's shura, but by male DDA members after SIKA staff discussed potential soft activities they can do to address unemployment.

Vocational trainings in Farah are by and large appreciated by female participants as this is the first time many of these women have had specific activities address their grievances, although it isn't clear how SIKA West plans to assist these women with market access for their newly acquired skills. Vocational trainings in Qadis were considered a "waste of time" by several of the recipient CDC members who said that the tailoring teacher was not properly qualified. This highlights a particular issue with SIKA West programming in Qadis where coordination with the DoWA is weak. According to DoWA, if SIKA West had informed them of the activity before inviting them for the award ceremony, DoWA would have been able to help with the trainer selection, implementation, as well as a better monitoring process.

In Kushki Rabat-e-Sangi, SIKA West budgeted 20 tailoring machines for a 20-woman tailoring course. However, because of SIKA West's milestone payments scheme which pays the CDC in installments after measured progress, only five machines were provided under the first milestone, preventing the other 15 women from using the machines. In Shindand, a number of the machines broke within the first few weeks and were not replaced. While in Pashtun Zarghun, a number of mitigation activities such as chicken

farming were rejected by SIKA West under the pretense that it would only benefit the project participants, even though the Herat DoWA strongly supports such mitigation activities as they are more substantive⁹.

SIKA West does several direct implementation activities with the DoWA. These activities work differently than fixed obligation grants (FOGs) because the DoWA does the implementation, project management, and monitoring even though the funds are given to selected CDCs. Whereas FOGs are CDC-specific, direct implementation through the DoWA affects the entire district and has the potential to reach more women because at the end of training the DoWA is responsible for collecting the supplies (such as sewing machines) and organizing market access. SIKA West's gender unit has conducted (or is conducting) six month trainings and work plans for the DoWA in districts where they exist in order to build their capacity. Since direct implementation works through line ministries and relevant departments while still maintaining the essence of specific mitigation activities identified through the SAM process, aligning programming more closely with the DoWA can produce more impact for women.

However, SIKA West has decided that it will no longer offer vocational trainings during the option period. The gender unit will continue to conduct capacity building trainings as well as continue to hold workshops with DoWA and encourage female participation in DSCs. However, it is not clear what specific mitigation activities for women will be proposed in the option period if no vocational trainings will continue.

How Effectively Did SIKA West Incorporate the Spirit of the Kandahar Model as Defined in the Latest Modification to the Contract?

SIKA West appears to be following the Kandahar Model as best it can in a stabilization/local governance context and given limited USAID and MRRD guidance and process efficiency.

The SIKA West contract and Grants Manual require it to work within the existing framework and methodology of the NABDP's Kandahar Model which features a decentralization of procurement and financial procedures, coupled with community contracting. When the NSP and NABDP established CDCs and DDAs, they were meant to serve as a platform for strengthening sub-national governance through direct community participation that fed into the district planning and budgeting framework, making decision making more transparent, accountable, and centered on community grievances. An essential aspect of the Kandahar Model has always been to hand finances directly over to the CDCs (or DDAs) so that local communities can manage their budgets themselves and take more appropriate localized decisions based on available resources with decidedly quick delivery.

As outlined in the MRRD's Kandahar Model brochure, the implementation of the model follows a three step process that ensures decentralization of development work and quick delivery:

1. Community Participation – CDCs and DDAs are involved in the following phases of project implementation:
 - a. Identification of individual community needs and localized prioritization of projects (mitigation activities).
 - b. Implementation of prioritized and funded projects.
 - c. Monitoring of projects by the CDC (in addition to PRRD and central monitors from MRRD).

⁹ Chicken farming is a common female activity in Afghanistan and provides revenue for families. Another USAID stabilization program, ACAP II, hands out live chickens to affected civilians as part of their compensation packages. Tailoring courses are also of benefit only to project participants, as are most vocational courses.

2. Faster Decision-Making Process, Quick Delivery, and a Reduction of “Red Tape”.
3. Regionalized Project Cycle Management – through CDC facilitation, rapid decision making, reduction of red tape, combined with local labor and resources instead of external contracting, leads to rapid implementation.

The benefit of this model is that not only do communities respond to their own priority grievances quickly, but that a social asset base is created which can now prioritize, implement, manage, and monitor projects that have directly responded to community needs, but not identified sources of instability.

All of SIKA West’s stabilization programming is identified through the DSC process at the local level and all projects are implemented entirely by the community through direct funding into CDC bank accounts either already set up by the NSP or set up anew with SIKA West’s assistance. SIKA West also conducts a capacity assessment of each CDC to ensure it is able to manage the grant. However, a recurrent complaint from CDC and DDA members is that project selection and implementation take too long. While SIKA West has monthly meetings with DSCs to reach an agreement on the DPPs, some mitigation activities have taken months to implement¹⁰. SIKA West justified delays by stating that stabilization is not a quick process like development as it requires numerous consensus building meetings before a mitigation activity can be implemented. However, after careful review of SIKA West DPPs, it is apparent that even after the mitigation activities were approved at the district and provincial levels, implementation delays still plagued the program. These delays have run counter to the Kandahar Model’s quick delivery approach (step 2 above) which the MRRD views as an essential stabilizing component. Furthermore, the Implementation Letter signed between USAID and the MRRD intended to make SIKA West a quick delivery program in which locally identified projects were implemented quickly but had long lasting results.

Some of the impediments to quick delivery are an unclear approval process from USAID and a lengthy vetting process through USAID’s Vetting Unit on fixed obligation grants totaling more than \$25,000. According to SIKA West’s Grants Manual, the Chief of Party can approve any grant up to \$9,999 without USAID approval. Within this period of performance, 59% of all SIKA West grants fall under this threshold. However, SIKA West sends all DPPs and FOGs to USAID for approval regardless of value. Although the current turnaround for SIKA West COR approval is 3-5 days, early on approval delays coupled with up to eight-month implementation delays after DPPs were signed by the community and PRRDs have led to community disillusionment.

Month-long delays at USAID’s Vetting Unit have also hindered quick delivery. While FOGs over \$25,000 are delayed by USAID, SIKA West said it has taken steps to conduct small and quick mitigation activities for the same CDC in the interim in order to manage expectations and keep the momentum necessary for stabilization. This only occurred for 4% of such CDCs¹¹. Furthermore, the Vetting Unit has recently begun to vet Roshan as SIKA West’s telephone bills have surpassed the \$25,000 mark. Roshan is an Afghan telecommunications company used by almost every American in Afghanistan. This particular

¹⁰ For example, Shindand District in Herat Province had its first DSC meeting on October 10, 2012, its first DPP was signed on April 25, 2013 (a six month delay even though Shindand had regular monthly DSC meetings) and the first project started on July 18, 2013 (a three month delay for a vocational/soft grant under \$9,999 that required no USAID vetting or engineering/feasibility study).

Bala Boluk District in Farah Province (the “pilot district”) had its first DPP signed on October 28, 2012 and the district’s first project started on April 9, 2013 (a six month delay for another vocational/soft grant under \$9,999 that required no USAID vetting or engineering/feasibility study).

Other SIKA districts experienced similar delays. Although the process has been streamlined since the first DPPs, the average delay now is roughly three months.

¹¹ 49 (23% of total CDCs) of SIKA West funded CDCs’ first projects were over \$25,000. Only 2 (4%) of total SIKA West-funded CDCs received an additional project while waiting for USAID to approve their FOG. These two CDCs are Lamani in Muqur, Badghis Province and Rawandan in Pashun Zarghun, Herat Province.

case highlights how an inadequately staffed Vetting Unit and cumbersome USAID procedures hinder performance.

According to SIKA West, district and provincial officials are light on monitoring and do not always involve the district and provincial entities in the process. For example, the Farah Province PRRD Director said that he was asked to sign a final completed projects form stating that SIKA West completed 10 projects without any monitoring of project completion. The document wasn't signed by SIKA West before submission to the Farah PRRD (a key requirement before a government official can sign). Several district governors have commented that they were not able to monitor projects in their districts because local SIKA West staff either told them it was unnecessary¹² or perceived insecurity prevented them from visiting project sites – a key component of the Kandahar Model and a key requirement of SIKA West's district entity capacity building component.

Under the Kandahar Model of community contracting, SIKA West must follow the NABDP's guidelines to implement community projects. Since community contracting ensures that CDCs and DDAs gain hands-on experience in project planning, execution, and management of finances, the NABDP strongly encourages projects that can be managed by the CDCs and DDAs without private contractors. According to the NABDP, there are three types of projects based on their technical complexity: complicated, semi-complicated, and simple.¹³ Only the latter two fall within the spirit of the Kandahar Model. SIKA West has been fully compliant with this requirement to date.

The MRRD was pleased to find the Kandahar Model included in the SIKA design, but feels that few people at USAID understand exactly how the Model was implemented on the ground in Kandahar. According to the MRRD, USAID views the Kandahar Model as a bottom-up approach and sees SIKA West as doing this well. However, this is only one aspect of the Model. When MRRD started the Kandahar Model, quick delivery mattered more than anything else because it built stabilizing momentum. The communities began to see that government promises and implementation happened quickly, thereby building trust and confidence in local government's ability to provide services. The MRRD said it spent 80-85% of its program budget on grants in Kandahar while SIKA West spends roughly 20% on grants¹⁴. This minimal focus on grant activity coupled with slow delivery, "red tape", and weak Afghan government monitoring has left the MRRD thinking that the Kandahar Model has not been implemented in the SIKAs at all.

While the MRRD's Kandahar Model has a stabilization objective, it is largely a quick delivery development approach that focuses on implementing many infrastructure projects. Aside from the focus on using CDC/DDA capacity to manage projects, there is no focus on building local governance capacity or in ensuring that local government can respond to future needs without sufficient funding and resources from a centralized donor as SIKA West does under IRs 2 and 3. Moreover, the Kandahar Model's focus is on addressing priority community grievances which may or may not be appropriate mitigating activities for local sources of instability. Given these issues, SIKA West appears to be following the Kandahar Model as best it can in a stabilization/local governance context and given limited USAID and MRRD guidance and process efficiency.

¹² The District Governor of Pusht-e-Rod District, Farah Province has been the most vocal critic of monitoring saying that SIKA West provincial staff have not involved him in the monitoring of projects.

¹³ Complicated projects require the use of a private contractor and are outside the capacity of the CDC/DDA. Semi-complicated projects are contracted directly with the CDC/DDA while the PRRD engineers provide assistance to the CDC/DDA to implement the project. Simple projects are contracted directly with the CDC/DDA and require no further support. See Appendix #___ for NABDP's project criteria.

¹⁴ This is the MRRD's viewpoint and not based on a review of SIKA West's operating budget.

To What Extent Have SIKA Activities Been Successfully Presented as Government Activities, Connecting People to Resources (both Government and Non-Government) for Service Delivery?

Overall, SIKA West activities have been presented as government-led activities and major efforts have been made to work through government structures in order to provide service delivery. SIKA West has encouraged project selection through regular DSC meetings held with government officials at the district center. All mitigation activities are funded through CDC-linked bank accounts and some monitoring is conducted by government officials, although this has been sporadic¹⁵. There is also general satisfaction with SIKA West-created conflict resolution committees which are led by government officials, particularly in Qadis and Pashtun Zarghun where monthly DSC meetings encouraged influential elders who saw each other regularly to resolve disputes.

The evaluation team found that most beneficiaries knew there was an international donor behind government activities as funding for such projects rarely comes directly from the Afghan Government. Many beneficiaries also knew that project selection needed to follow certain guidelines not entirely known to the district entities, hence removing some credibility that this was a government led activity. Nonetheless, beneficiaries were appreciative of the government entities taking a leading role in project identification through the consultative DSC process. Most SIKA West district residents have not experienced such a community-driven analytical resource development process and few residents have historically been consulted (and continuously re-consulted) by their government when it came to stabilization or development programming. This has drawn many beneficiaries closer to their district governments, exposing them to a government that listens to concerns, implements mitigation activities, and improves district service delivery, albeit with considerable help from SIKA West district staff.

For this period of performance, the Service Providers Catalogue (SPC) under IR2 was printed but not yet fully distributed in Farah Province. The SPCs for Herat and Badghis were still in development. These SPCs are meant to serve as a vehicle for connecting people to service delivery resources they would otherwise not be familiar with- comparable to a “yellow pages” for the province. Given the period of performance, it is too early to measure the effects of the SPC.

How Effectively Did a Bottom-Up Communications Process Link MRRD-Developed DDAs to the District and Provincial Development Planning Processes?

The NABDP created DDAs shortly after NSP had established several thousand CDCs as a way to bridge the gap between village-level and provincial-level governance institutions, paving the way for a bottom-up framework for development. The intent was to accomplish this through district development plans (DDPs – not to be confused with SIKA DPPs – District Project Portfolios). These DDPs are meant to outline the projects DDA members hope to implement in their district. In order to develop this DDP, a DDA is tasked with collecting all of their CDCs’ prioritization lists through a Community Development Plan (CDP). Given that DDA members are also CDC members, this is a wholly bottom-up approach. These DDPs are then presented to the provincial government and the PRRD for approval. This is, at least, how the DDAs work in theory.

In reality, there are no known cases of DDPs approved by provincial governments in Badghis, Farah, or Herat. A significant number of DDAs were inactive when SIKA West began operations, having been sidelined during the height of CDC-focused NSP projects. The DDAs were in a sense created by the

¹⁵ Mostly PRRD/DRRD staff and, occasionally, line departments directly involved in select mitigation activities.

NABDP and then abandoned to uninterested provincial governments. The NABDP's own reporting says "Not only were CDPs not consulted during the DDA development process, but provincial council members interviewed also attested to disregarding DDPs."¹⁶

When SIKa West began operations, it had a mandate to revive the DDAs and accomplish what the NABDP originally set out to do with the consultative DDP process, albeit in an environment that was weary of MRRD affiliated programs making new empty promises. Even though it entered into a difficult development establishment, SIKa West has generally worked within the Afghan government structures to promote a bottom-up communication processes linking DDAs to the district and provincial development planning processes by:

- Reactivating DDAs through the DSC meetings, empowering them to make decisions and develop new district development plans (or DPPs under SIKa West nomenclature).
- Enabling the DDAs to prioritize their projects based on SAM. In NSP they were prioritizing projects based on need. Now it is a consultative process that focuses on community issues, rather than individual CDC grievances.
- Hiring of PRRD affiliated social mobilizers who coordinate with DDAs (inviting them to meetings, going with SIKa West staff to conduct feasibility studies and occasional monitoring, and serving as a link between SIKa West, the DDAs, and the PRRD).
- Increasing the capacity of DDAs through project cycle management training.
- Empowering the DDAs to take a greater role in district service delivery with a greater focus on ensuring there is a strong bottom-up link between project-recipient CDCs and project-selecting DDAs.
- Accepting female participation in DSC meetings by listening and respecting women's decisions. The women's shuras in particular are connected to the DoWA in districts where the line department operates.
- Due to constant exposure of the DDAs to district entities (particularly the District Governor), they now take into account DDA member opinions and respect their decisions on development district priorities. As a result, the concerns, grievances, and decisions often reach the provincial line departments due to more exposure of DDAs to these district level line departments.

While most of the bottom-up communication has occurred at the district level, there is a push to connect DDAs more to the provincial level during the option period. Aside from connecting the DDA to the PRRD, the evaluation team did not find any discernible amount of coordination with provincial entities responsible for service delivery. Furthermore, the MRRD regional coordinator hired and paid for by SIKa West was observed on several occasions going directly to the MRRD SIKa Unit in Kabul rather than to the Herat PRRD, effectively sidelining the provincial development planning process.

¹⁶ NABDP Beneficiary Assessment – Fieldwork Synthesis, October 2012 p26

How Effective Were Capacity Building Initiatives Aimed at Teaching District Entities How to Plan, Design, Implement, and Monitor Various Types of Development Projects?

The evaluation team found SIKA West's capacity building department weak and ineffective. Capacity building initiatives are meant to teach district entities how to work through a project management cycle in order to properly manage development projects. The district entities which benefit most from these trainings are DDAs (specifically members who are also project-recipient CDC representatives) and DRRD officials. These trainings were conducted over a three to five day period only once. While DDA members learned essential tools of project management, few of them could adequately explain what they learned during interviews. When asked if they managed projects differently after the training most said they couldn't recall much but were now better at managing projects. Taken in context, this may likely not be an outcome of the trainings but rather an outcome of DDA members newly managing projects after a long hiatus following NSP's decline¹⁷.

Capacity levels also differ from district to district. For example, Herat DDAs have significantly more aptitude than their Farah counterparts due to a variety of societal and economic factors. However, SIKA West trainings were standard throughout the districts, relying only on the facilitators to align trainings to capacity levels. This was found to be inconsistent. Furthermore, while SIKA West conducted a lengthy capacity building assessment of each district, few trainings aside from communications were conducted¹⁸. This was likely a result of a change in SIKA West's CoP, which resulted in the capacity building department's former manager becoming the current CoP. His replacement stopped all project-related capacity building trainings to district entities, focusing instead on management trainings (e.g. meeting management, time and task management)¹⁹.

While the basics of management and project management cycle trainings were conducted in Bala Boluk, Pusht-e-Rod, Qadis, and Moqur, none of these trainings occurred in the three Herat districts. During these trainings none of the district governors were present and since these trainings occurred once per district, the district governors have not benefitted from this capacity building at all²⁰. Furthermore, many of SIKA West's conducted trainings were only one or two hours long, resulting in little to no retention of information by district entities. Most of the project-specific trainings were conducted in February 2013 and never repeated. For example, project cycle management training in Qadis on February 21, 2013 was two hours, M&E report writing and road project site visits (monitoring) training in Kushki Rabat-e-Sangi on February 5, 2013 was one hour, and M&E report writing, how to conduct site visits, site surveying, and check list training in Pashtun Zarghun on February 11, 2013 was also one hour. The evaluation team found these trainings to be poorly aligned with the aptitude levels of district entities who, when interviewed, could not recall anything they learned except for the subject titles. When asked to present outcomes of capacity building initiatives, SIKA West's M&E department did not have any outcome or impact assessments conducted on the efficacy of any of these trainings.

While SIKA West's strongest capacity building initiative has been on communications, this is also considered minimal and ineffective by interviewed recipients as well as IDLG officials. Some of the

¹⁷ All DDA members are also CDC members. Therefore, CDCs which receive funding for mitigation activities have representation within the DDA.

¹⁸ The evaluation team found the district capacity assessments basic and generalized. The assessments were based in part on district entity level of education and current tasks. However, there was no discernible change in training packages by district based on variances in assessments.

¹⁹ Specific capacity building requests by district governors were often not responded to by SIKA West staff. For example, the Pashtun Zarghun District Governor requested support in making a proper M&E checklist for funded activities/projects. SIKA West, per the evaluation team's findings, does not appear to have responded to the request.

²⁰ Some line departments were asked to participate in trainings that had no direct relation to their daily work.

trainings lasted for a few hours while others were only one or two days. In the eyes of the IDLG, they cannot comprehend how a district official can understand and act upon such training after a short session. Furthermore, a common concern has been how SIKa West can program mitigation activities (IR4) without first building the capacity and communication skills of the district entities (IR3) who are ultimately responsible for designing, implementing, and monitoring these activities. This is an important issue that has not yet been addressed by SIKa West which rolls out development projects before any of the district entities are able to fully conduct their project cycle management tasks.

Lastly, all capacity building initiatives must align with Afghan Government processes in order to satisfy the demands of the SIKa West contract with USAID and to be sustainable. The IDLG has consistently and loudly complained how SIKa West’s capacity building and communications trainings do not align with their operational guidelines. This is the fault of both the IDLG and SIKa West. The IDLG does not have a capacity building guideline in place currently, so SIKa West cannot be accused of not aligning with that strategy. However, an IDLG communications strategy does exist and was shared with SIKa East (another AECOM implementing partner). The evaluation team found that the previous capacity building department manager did not make any requests to receive guidelines from the IDLG nor did information sharing of these documents occur between the SIKAs.

What Lessons Learned from the SIKa West Program Implementation Can Inform Future USAID Programming?

| LESSONS LEARNED | FUTURE USAID PROGRAMMING |
|--|---|
| COORDINATION AND ALIGNMENT | |
| <p>There is a flat structure in Afghanistan when it comes to governance. If the MRRD proposes a solution, the IDLG cannot object even if they disagree. There is still no clear line of authority of which ministry is responsible for what aspect of SIKa West’s programming and what the associated responsibilities are.</p> | <p>Implementation letters signed between USAID and relevant Afghan ministries should clearly outline what ministry (and specifically what department within the ministry) is responsible for overseeing programming, and what are the particular responsibilities, deliverables, communication channels, and necessary coordination activities. Also, the IL should include a method for addressing grievances by either the IP or the ministry.</p> |
| <p>SIKa West’s reporting chains to Afghan counterparts are often convoluted and result in poor coordination as well as lack of information sharing. As an example, the MRRD is involved in development and the IDLG is involved in governance. PRRDs report directly to provincial governors and then to the MRRD. If the PRRD is not involved in SIKa West’s work at the district center, the MRRD is left out of the loop.</p> | <p>Effective coordination can only occur when clear reporting requirements are enunciated in the IL. Also, having relevant ministry regional coordinators work directly with each IP is necessary to maintain a proper flow of information. These coordinators should be attached to IPs at the start of the contract in order to avoid early missteps. They should also be paid by the ministry rather than the IP as such dual parentage may cause conflict of interests.</p> |
| <p>Regional coordinators for the MRRD and the IDLG were only hired mid-way through the base period. This hindered early coordination and communication. These coordinators work for their respective ministry but are paid salaries by SIKa West, resulting in dual parentage.</p> | |

| LESSONS LEARNED | FUTURE USAID PROGRAMMING |
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| <p>Early weak coordination with DoWA resulted in a lack of information sharing and ineffectual implementation of women’s activities. Certain activities rejected by SIKa West (like chicken farming) were recommended by DoWA as more sustainable vocational programming.</p> | <p>Gender programming should have strong coordination with DoWA from the start. Any activities should have buy-in from DoWA in order to be effectively implemented (as they can recommend trainers) and to be sustainable as DoWA may continue trainings once USAID ends a project.</p> |
| <p>Certain capacity building, communication, and other relevant district entity trainings did not align with MRRD and/or IDLG processes, procedures, or guidelines either because SIKa West did not use those guidelines or because the guidelines are still in draft form at the ministry and have not been shared.</p> | <p>In order to ensure sustainable and relevant trainings are conducted, they must align with government processes, procedures, and guidelines. USAID should receive these before an IP begins implementation so that they may be included in the contract, PMP, and work plan. It should not be left up to the IP to procure necessary national-level documents from often unresponsive ministries.</p> |
| STABILIZATION PROGRAMMING AND GRANTS | |
| <p>Small-scale projects have been a good way to showcase government service delivery post DSC meetings. However, these projects do not address a major SOI in the districts – unemployment. They often end up being small cash for work projects that do not alleviate the SOI past the project end date and have minimal long term effect countering the SOI. Many of the small scale mitigation activities could have been done by villagers themselves as they required few tools and little expertise.</p> | <p>Cash for work projects and vocational trainings without requisite access to markets have been ineffective at increasing stability historically. Larger projects that connect many communities and showcase larger scale government service delivery are viewed more positively by communities. SIKa West has focused heavily on improving processes that are unsustainable if there is no future funding for the same district entities. Instead, future programming would have greater stabilizing and sustainable effects if it focused more on outcomes rather than processes.</p> |
| <p>SIKa West provides the same transportation allowance to DSC participants regardless of where they come from in the district. This disproportionately favors those close to the district center, disenfranchising those who are further away but would also like to participate. Stabilization programming should not discriminate against CDCs far away from the center, especially as they are often most under the influence of AGEs and have historically received the least government service delivery.</p> | <p>Most development work has focused on communities within reach of the district center. Stabilization programming needs to also focus on areas further away. Proper incentives and allowances should be provided to distant communities in order to bring them to the district center. Afghanistan is a word of mouth culture. If distant communities have good exposure to the district government, there is a strong chance the influence of AGEs will be at least somewhat countered.</p> |
| <p>Vetting issues and other delays have plagued efforts to ensure the program conducts quick delivery interventions. Most DPPs are approved by USAID</p> | <p>USAID should allow IPs to approve FOGs under a certain threshold if an agreement exists to do so. Vetting can occur more expeditiously if that unit’s</p> |

| LESSONS LEARNED | FUTURE USAID PROGRAMMING |
|---|--|
| <p>even if mitigation activity amounts are under \$9,999, activities only the CoP needs to approve. USAID vetting procedures are cumbersome, fraught with duplication of effort, and create impediments to effective stabilization programming.</p> | <p>processes and procedures match the reality on the ground. Often IPs use the same suppliers/contractors, but the vetting unit vets them even if they have recently been vetted and are in current use by other IPs. This is wasteful.</p> |
| <p>SIKA West says it measures a CDCs success at how well they can manage a project by first giving them a small-scale project. This is not entirely accurate as many CDCs received high value projects before they were “measured”.</p> | <p>Since stabilization programming is focused heavily on local governance, increasing the district entity’s capacity to manage projects should follow the progressive development model of giving CDCs a small project first before funding larger infrastructure development activities as this can be an opportune time to program capacity building initiatives. It also tests the particular CDC’s honesty before it is given a large cash disbursement.</p> |
| <p>Conflict resolution committees and trainings were effective initiatives in districts where the local government was capable and willing.</p> | <p>Conflict resolution is a major stabilizing initiative when done correctly. Future programming should have a more nuanced component that aligns with the IDLG and relevant ministries to ensure these conflict resolution initiatives develop into sustainable processes.</p> |
| MONITORING AND EVALUATION | |
| <p>District security is an issue when monitoring projects. District and provincial entities often do not have the clout or resources to arrive with a security detail. Weak monitoring may result in implementation uncertainties.</p> | <p>While IP monitoring is necessary, and while district entity monitoring is fundamental to improving local governance, USAID should consider two concerns:</p> <p>Should programming occur in districts where IP monitoring is inherently difficult or impossible?</p> <p>Should stabilization programming occur in districts where government officials do not have an interest in monitoring?</p> |
| <p>SIKA West’s M&E unit relies on MISTI to provide it with an understanding of the causal relation between programming and impact. Its PMP only requires it to report on outputs, not outcomes.</p> | <p>Measuring the effects of stabilization programming is fundamental to understanding if particular interventions had positive outcomes. If an IP does not measure outcomes, USAID may not know the effects of its investment. PMPs should have measurable outcomes and a theory of change articulated within the results framework.</p> |
| <p>SIKA West’s “pilot district” was Bala Boluk where they spent three months programming before moving on to their second district. This was not enough time to realistically measure and evaluate which interventions worked and which didn’t.</p> | <p>Time constraints to conduct proper M&E are understandable in short two or three year contracts. However, if USAID is interested in piloting new stabilization programming in a chosen district, it should wait to see IP evaluation/assessment reports before moving on to another district to conduct</p> |

| LESSONS LEARNED | FUTURE USAID PROGRAMMING |
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| | similar programming. |
| HUMAN RESOURCES | |
| Early local national hiring did not proportionally represent ethnic and tribal realities on the ground. | Ethnic and tribal sensitivities are one of the most common destabilizing factors in Afghanistan. This concern should be taken into account when hiring local staff. |
| SIKA West’s internal policies and procedures resulted in the recruitment of young and often inexperienced individuals who do not garner the respect of elders in most communities. | Afghan youth are understandably more qualified to work in international organizations because of their office and language skills. However, in rural areas where many IPs implement, older men garner respect regardless of Western-valued skills. Hiring older men to represent IPs in rural areas is key to community acceptance. |

What Components of SIKa West Were Most and Least Valued by District and Provincial Entities?

After discussions with district entities, line departments, and provincial governors, the evaluation team found they appreciated many components of SIKa West programming with the occasional reservations. The least valued components centered on poor coordination, insufficient monitoring of projects, and a weak capacity building programming. It is important to note the components/activities outlined below are not necessarily valued for their stabilization effects.

Most Valued:

Protection Walls – The evaluation found that protection walls were the most valued mitigation activity SIKa West funded²¹. Agricultural land is eroded by annual flooding. Protection walls serve as barriers to Spring flooding, protecting important farmland and houses. The only complaint centered on the Jagatai (Rabat-e-Sangi Sharqi) village stone masonry wall. This particular project was regarded by several DDA members as benefiting only one influential DDA member who convinced others to build this wall next to his house.

DSC meetings – These monthly meetings have given district entities a new opportunity to interact with their constituents and to see people from different communities. Community elders are now coming and sharing information with district entities and line ministries - something that has not been seen often under this government. This has contributed heavily to increased community cohesion²². In particular, the newly appointed Qadis District Governor was so happy to have these meetings he wanted to have them more often. In Pashtun Zarghun, the DSC meetings resulted in the creation of a SIKa West sponsored conflict resolution committee which has seen people come to the district center who haven’t been there in the last ten years. There is a renewed eagerness to work through official government

²¹ Pashtun Zarghun and Kushki Rabat e Sangi districts received most of SIKa West’s protection wall projects. Officials from these two districts were highly content with this mitigation activity.

²² DSC meetings were most valued in Qadis, Pashtun Zarghun, Kushki Rabat-e-Sangi, Bala Boluk, and Pusht-e-Rod (Moqur and Khake Safed were not sampled).

channels to resolve disputes, address grievances, and seek service delivery. Shindand is an outlier as there has been observed fatigue with the meetings and fewer DDA members reported attending.

Water dividers – Farah residents, in particular, have few infrastructure projects and there is a lack of investment in the agricultural sector. These dividers have resulted in improved water access and some much needed short term employment for villagers²³. However, the Kushki Rabat-e-Sangi, Bala Boluk, and Pusht-e-Rod District Governors mentioned (in a group meeting) that these water dividers are so small villagers could have built them without SIKa West support. Larger water dividers that benefit more families within a community would have been more valued by the district leadership²⁴.

Community center (mosque) refurbishment – Three Bala Boluk CDCs were initially hesitant to participate in SIKa activities until they received this project. After several years of PRT and other foreign donor funded projects in the area, locals understood that foreign donors do not fund religious structures. However, once SIKa funded the project, they understood that this was a government program and were happy to participate in SIKa activities. The evaluation team was told that even the local Taliban were appreciative of the project and did not intimidate the CDC members when they visited the district center for the planning, implementation, and monitoring meetings. It should be noted here that mosque refurbishment is on the MRRD’s activity black list and is not allowed under 22 CFR Part 205, Section D²⁵.

Culverts – Benefit the agricultural sector and provide short term work, temporarily addressing unemployment. Culverts are a common development project and are generally valued by stakeholders and beneficiaries²⁶.

Service Provider Fair (Farah) – Provided an opportunity for the district and provincial government entities to showcase their activities to the general public. Private enterprises such as banks were also invited. This was seen as an important event for government officials, Farah residents, and private enterprises to get to know the services available in Farah.

Midwife training in Pusht-e-Rod – PRRD, DDA members, the Farah District Governor, and the DoWA mentioned this was an excellent training as they all received numerous complaints previously that women were having issues during childbirth.

Coordination with Provincial Government and Line Ministries in Farah – This is exclusive to Farah where SIKa West coordination with the Farah District Governor, the DoWA, Department of Social Affairs, Director of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (DAIL), Education Department, PRRD, and DDAs was deemed strong. Herat and Badghis Province provincial officials felt less satisfied with SIKa West’s coordination efforts there.

Mixed and Least Valued:

Tailoring courses – In Qadis these were considered a “waste of time” by the district entities because of a lack of qualified trainers and no monitoring by SIKa West or district entities. In Kushki Rabat-e-Sangi SIKa West’s milestone payment scheme prevented 15 out of the 20 selected women from using sewing

²³ Observed as most valued in Kushki Rabat-e-Sangi, Bala Boluk, and Pusht-e-Rod.

²⁴ The consultative DSC process and SIKa West’s limit on district expenditures resulted in these smaller water dividers, which the recipient communities appreciated but district officials thought could have been done better to benefit more people.

²⁵ Section D: “USAID funds may not be used for the acquisition, construction, or rehabilitation of structures to the extent that those structures are used for inherently religious activities... Sanctuaries, chapels, or other rooms that a USAID-funded religious congregation uses as its principal place of worship, however, are ineligible for USAID-funded improvements.”

²⁶ Pashtun Zarghun and Qadis districts received most of SIKa West’s culvert projects. Officials and beneficiaries from these two districts were highly content with this mitigation activity.

machines during half of the training. In Shindand, SIKA West purchased low quality machines which broke and were not replaced. On the other hand, Farah women were largely happy as this is the first time women in those districts were able to participate in such trainings and complete them successfully.

Road gravelling projects in Kushki Rabat-e-Sangi – The Herat Provincial Governor, several district entities, and community members (including CDCs) said the roads are not graveled properly and some parts of the roads are already eroded due to weather and heavy use.

Coordination with DoWA – SIKA West’s Herat and Badghis coordination with the DoWA was considered inadequate as the DoWA was rarely included in project selection, implementation, or monitoring. Several issues with female-specific activities could have been avoided had SIKA West consulted with the DoWA and included it in the DSC process²⁷.

Monitoring of projects – This is considered weak by provincial and district entities. Although SIKA West staff monitor projects, there is very little inclusion of government entities in the monitoring process²⁸. These entities feel that in order for them to have full ownership of the projects they must also be involved in the monitoring in order to keep transparency and accountability as well as present a government face to beneficiaries.

Capacity building of district entities – Several hour trainings were deemed highly ineffective by district entities as there was very little retention of information and no discernible usage of taught skills. The Pashtun Zarghun District Governor, in particular, commented how SIKA West doesn’t have much focus on district officials’ capacity. He requested and gave a list of 13 trainings for the capacity building of his staff but received no response from SIKA West. Trainings he requested were procurement, management, planning, budgeting and finance, M&E, and good governance. According to the Deputy District Governor, SIKA West told him they will conduct trainings but these had not occurred under the period of performance. According to SIKA West, they provided conflict resolution training for one hour, main elements of communication for one hour, M&E report writing, site visits, site surveying, and check list training for one hour on Feb 11, 2013. However none of the district officials the evaluation team spoke with could remember these trainings.

How Effectively did SIKA West Work Through Afghan Government Structures and Within Afghan Government Processes to Empower the District Governments in Decision Making and Community Engagements Under Existing District Level Interventions?

The evaluation team found that SIKA West was adept at empowering the district governments to engage communities under their existing district level interventions. However, when it comes to empowering the district governments in decision-making, the evaluation team found SIKA West’s efforts weak and occasionally counterproductive.

Various Afghan government structures exist in SIKA West operating districts. These vary from the district governors and their staff to line departments to DRRD officials and DDA members elected through the MRRD structure. The DoWA exists in Shindand, Bala Boluk, Qadis, and Moqur. Where the DoWA does not exist SIKA West has helped facilitate a new or revived women’s shura. These district government entities are responsible for:

²⁷ Including DoWA in the DSC process does not require representation in the DSC as there is already a women’s shura. What DoWA requested was to have input on mitigation activities before they are signed off on by the PRRD.

²⁸ The evaluation team found that the DRRD/PRRD visited project sites. However, consistent monitoring by other government officials was minimal.

- District Governor: District engagements, conflict resolution, responsiveness to community needs, service delivery when funding is available, monitoring activities, coordinating with line departments working in the district.
- Line departments: DRRD is responsible for ensuring an active and responsive DDA as well as coordinating, implementing, and monitoring MRRD-funded projects. The DoWA is responsible for women's affairs. Various other line departments, where they exist and have an adequate tashkiel, work on their specific ministry's agenda.
- DDA: Elected district representatives who are in charge of selecting development activities, ensuring their implementation. [more from DDA section in NABDP]

The evaluation team found that SIKa West was adept at empowering the district governments to engage communities under their existing district level interventions (or through the creation of new and appropriate mechanisms if none existed). For example:

- The monthly DSC meetings provide district entities with considerable exposure to their constituents. These meetings empower the district governments to discuss people's concerns and to use existing or newly funded district interventions to provide services.
- Conflict resolution can occur only after the community is engaged effectively and appropriately and trusts the district government to impartially resolve disputes. Although this mandate is largely the responsibility of Provincial Councils, these entities are rarely present in district centers and are much too high level to resolve low level disputes more appropriate for a district government. SIKa West has been effective at working through traditional Afghan structures and incorporating those cultural norms into Afghan government sanctioned conflict resolution undertaken by the district governments.
- Women are engaged more frequently through shuras, activities, and projects. Albeit the process has been slow and inconsistent throughout the districts, the DoWA is being empowered to take a greater role in engaging women in the communities, especially when SIKa West directly implements mitigation activities with the DoWA.
- The Service Providers Fair in Farah was considered a big success by many participants. This is a great example of connecting communities to government resources.
- When monitoring actually happens, the district entities responsible for conducting it are empowered to take greater ownership in the mitigation activity. As the community sees a keen government interest in the success of the project and the wellbeing of the community, they become more responsive to future efforts.

When it comes to empowering the district governments in decision-making, the evaluation team found SIKa West's efforts weak and occasionally counterproductive. District governors often complained to the evaluation team that they did not have enough authority in selecting projects or removing unsustainable and ineffective projects from the DPPs. As a result of the consultative DSC process, the district governors are members of the body, not the ultimate decision makers. This sometimes elevates the status of DDA members and creates a tug of war between influential elders. The district governors also complained they are weakened by SIKa West's direct financing of CDCs without requisite monitoring and oversight by the District Governor's office. There have been a number of reported cases of CDCs entirely bypassing a District Governor's office to get to SIKa West staff, thereby weakening his authority. This was most

evident in Pusht-e-Rod where the District Governor has observed deterioration in his authority with the CDCs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above evaluation question findings, the evaluation team offers observations and recommendations as follows:

Observations

- The PMP is limited to measuring output indicators. There is no focus on outcomes as SIKA West relies heavily on MISTI survey data to understand the impact of its programming. The lack of a theory of change or any other casual model hinders effective internal M&E and does not provide USAID with lessons learned on how to contribute effectively to the stabilization process.
- SIKA West is not a stabilization program, but a local governance program with a stabilization component.
- Mitigating against SOIs requires more than just small grants and unrealistic vocational trainings. This is a design flaw of the SIKA model. Adequately addressing SOIs works best if more communities are involved rather than individual CDCs. This is the stability in key **areas** program, not stability for key **people**.
- The monthly DSC meetings were effective at attracting the community to the district center, increasing the authority and exposure of district entities to their constituents. While many DSC participants come in anticipation of receiving projects, the DSCs have built very positive momentum that should be exploited.
- SIKA West appears to be following the spirit of the Kandahar Model as best it can in a stabilization/local governance context given limited USAID and MRRD guidance and process efficiency. USAID’s Vetting Unit appears to be the biggest cause of delays.
- There appears to be an effective bottom-up communication process for DDAs, linking them to district and provincial planning processes. This is a result of the DSC meetings.
- Direct implementation of gender mitigation activities/grants appears to be more sustainable than FOGs. The expertise of the DoWA is important for effective gender programming in unstable areas. Directly implementing through the DoWA results in a “training of the trainer” scenario where learned skills are sustainable compared to implementing directly through CDCs which may or may not conduct further gender programming.
- Female vocational trainings and the majority of infrastructure development activities contributed most to the three stabilization objectives. While they met the objectives, they did not necessarily fully address the most common SOI – unemployment. Short term projects and vocational trainings without acceptable market access and demand, do not mitigate against unemployment.
- Capacity building initiatives were weak and ineffective at the district level. Most trainings were a few hours long and resulted in little retention of information. SIKA West has also ignored district entity requests for trainings.

- High SIKa West leadership turnover (three different COPs during the base period) resulted in a number of management pivots. These caused process changes which put some local nationals in the lead who were not up to the task.

General Recommendations

- SIKa West's PMP should be rewritten to include outcome indicators that measure whether programs had an effect rather than simply measuring number of meetings held or percentage increases in activity participation. The current outcomes are in reality mislabeled outputs.
- The back engineering of SOIs by district entities robustly exposed to previous development aid of particular types by international and national donors is an impediment to effective stabilization program. SIKa West should continue to mitigate against back engineering. Developing a process manual to help identify against back engineering would streamline efforts across all districts.
- If SIKa West continues to program vocational trainings to address the unemployment SOI, it should first conduct a market access and demand study to determine whether the vocational training has merit. Furthermore, unqualified trainers plagued select trainings. SIKa West should hire qualified trainers in coordination with the relevant line department, as they tend to know who in the district has the requisite qualifications.
- Milestone payments for vocational trainings should be reconsidered as they have resulted in insufficient materials for the number of trainees. The quality of these materials/machines should also be checked as a number of materials were found to be subpar and several cheap machines broke during the trainings.
- In order to ensure sustainable gender programming, SIKa West would ascertain whether continued direct implementation through the DoWA is still feasible and mitigates against yet unaddressed SOIs.
- Monitoring and evaluation systems should conduct impact studies after an intervention is completed to extract lessons learned on how to contribute effectively to the stabilization process. SIKa West's M&E unit should conduct these as regularly as possible within the confines of their insecure environment and budget.
- In order to reach more distant communities, SIKa West should reconsider its flat transportation cost reimbursements. These disproportionately favor communities close to the district center at the expense of those further out.
- Under the Kandahar Model, SIKa West needs to be a quick delivery program. This can be realistically accomplished when bureaucratic impediments are resolved expeditiously. The USAID Vetting Unit has been the cause of most delays. Furthermore, FOGs under \$9,999 should be approved by the COP without USAID as outlined in the Grants Manual. This will expedite the grants process, assure quicker delivery, and conform to USAID-approved SIKa West documents. The current COR does an expeditious job of approving FOGs, but this may not be the case when CORs change.
- The Kandahar Model is only partially relevant to SIKa West. USAID should change the requirement that it follow the model in its entirety. SIKa West should focus on community contracting in line with the NABDP methodology and with monitoring of projects. Quick delivery, although important, should not be the sole focus. SIKa West is focused on the most tangible aspect of stabilization

programming – improving local governance – and that is not explicitly proscribed in the Kandahar Model. Furthermore, while the Kandahar Model is only described in a general six-page brochure, the NABDP approach is codified in a lengthy, detailed manual available from the MRRD.

- The NABDP currently pays DDAs administrative costs equivalent to 1.5% - 3.5% of the FOG. These are used for planning, meetings, implementation, and monitoring. In order to ensure alignment with MRRD processes and to ensure that DDA members are adequately compensated for project management, this administrative cost should be included in the FOGs if allowable under USAID regulations.
- NABDP officials have expressed interest in monitoring SIKA projects. As this is part of MRRD alignment, the spirit of the Kandahar Model, and encourages more coordination with PRRDs, having NABDP included in the monitoring process is strongly recommended.
- SIKA West’s IDLG and MRRD coordinators work for their respective ministries but are paid for by SIKA West. This creates a precarious situation of “dual parentage” where the coordinators are supervised and report to their ministry, but actually work for SIKA West. Revising the relationships is recommended.
- Capacity building initiatives must align with Afghan Government processes in order to satisfy the demands of SIKA West’s contract with USAID and to be sustainable. While not all IDLG processes, strategies, and guidelines exists for every type of capacity building initiative, SIKA West should coordinate with the IDLG to ensure they are aligned with the directorate’s strategy, as available. The same applies for NABDP guidelines, specifically if the Kandahar Model requirement is revised. USAID should assist with the alignment process as was requested by IDLG and MRRD at several high level meetings.
- Mosque refurbishment grants (commonly referred to as community center grants) are a double-edged sword. While they are highly valued by district entities and communities, they are also not allowed under 22 CFR part 205, Section D, MRRD rules, and indirectly by the Kandahar Model. SIKA West should conform to US Government regulations unless there is a USAID Mission exception policy in place. It should also conform to MRRD policies in order to align with the Ministry.
- There is a flat structure in Afghanistan when it comes to governance. There is still no clear line of authority of which ministry is responsible for what aspect of SIKA West’s programming and what the associated responsibilities are. USAID should revise the implementation letter with the MRRD to clearly outline what ministry (and specifically what department within the ministry) is responsible for overseeing programming, and what are the particular responsibilities, deliverables, communication channels, and necessary coordination activities as well as methods for addressing grievances by either SIKA West or the ministry.
- Since stabilization programming is focused heavily on local governance, increasing the district entity’s capacity to manage projects should follow the progressive development model of giving CDCs a small project first before funding larger infrastructure development activities as this can be an

opportune time to program capacity building initiatives. It also tests the particular CDC's honesty before it is given a large cash disbursement²⁹.

Conclusions

SIKA West is not a stabilization program, but a local governance program with a stabilization component. The focus on programming is on improving local governance, service delivery, and linkages of communities to district and provincial entities. While this is done through a DSC process that has shown notable success at strengthening community cohesion, other programming does not appear to match IDLG nor MRRD expectations for alignment and sustainability. The inherent issue with SIKA West's programming is its lack of a properly articulated theory of change which would explain to management and stakeholders what the results of implemented activities should be. This lack of a defined theory of change results in a scattershot implementation of the four IRs- and without an outcomes measurement in its PMP results in no lessons learned that can tie directly back to implemented activities.

Given these design weaknesses, SIKA West conducts multiple activities it says are part of stability programming, but are in effect small scale interventions at the district level that may end quickly once project funding dries up. Two hour communications trainings, English classes for PRRDs, and a variety of similar activities are not generally considered stabilization programming. If the goal of SIKA West is to increase confidence in local government through provision of service delivery, it needs to focus more on increasing the government's capacity to understand what services are needed and how best to provide them through available mechanisms.

While this is done successfully with service provider fairs and through the DSC process, it is not enough to simply have meetings with the community. DPPs created via the SAM process are incredible tools that have been shown to link communities to the district government. They are created by the people with projects aimed at addressing SOIs faced by the people. SIKA West's design weakness is that it immediately limits what SOIs and what mitigation activities can be placed on the DPP for a number of quick delivery, feasibility, and budgetary reasons. These reasons combined have resulted in DPPs limited to broadly general SOIs (unemployment, insurgency, illiteracy) that cannot be mitigated through small FOGs given to individual CDCs because these are, in fact, not SOIs, but systemic causes of the SOIs.

The majority of SIKA West's grants activity has been budgeted to address unemployment. This was done through vocational trainings and short cash for work type programs. Once completed, beneficiaries were once again unemployed, showing an outcome that had little if any stabilization impact. Every community and government ministry wants larger projects that include multiple communities not just individual CDCs. This is important for perceived equitable distribution of resources and for truly addressing a community-wide SOI, rather than SOIs particular to individual CDCs.

Lastly, aligning SIKA West's activities with the government's should be the focus at every step, where possible. If SIKA West is not aligned with government line ministries it programs with, then this in and of itself creates negative perceptions of that line department. The MRRD has been programming in Afghanistan for a long time. The NABDP has been programming since 2007 and has a plethora of

²⁹ To clarify, the proposed new mitigation activity (FOG) methodology should follow this model: each CDC receives two FOGs based on DPPs approved through the DSC process. The first FOG should be rather small and focused on being a quick delivery implementation that can be used to assess the project management weaknesses within the CDC and district center. During and after the first FOG's implementation, SIKA West will assess these weaknesses and devise capacity building initiatives aimed at those weaknesses. After the capacity building is complete, the CDC will receive the second FOG which would be a larger project. The CDCs will know they will get two projects as long as they successfully complete required trainings. To ensure quick delivery, the second FOG should be sent to USAID for approval at the same time as the first FOG. This will cut down on perceived delays and ensure quick implementation once required capacity building trainings are complete. This satisfies part of the Kandahar Model and makes capacity building initiatives aimed at project management more relevant and measurable.

experience. Working through existing NABDP mechanisms must be the goal if this program is to leave something sustainable for future Afghan use.

SIKA West is building important momentum and is now starting to align appropriately and consistently with IDLG and MRRD. This is the time to take advantage of the momentum and improved alignment, as well as the findings and recommendations of this mid-term performance evaluation, to improve project implementation and performance monitoring in support of USAID's stabilization objectives.

ANNEX A: COMPLETE LIST OF PROJECT SITES VISITED

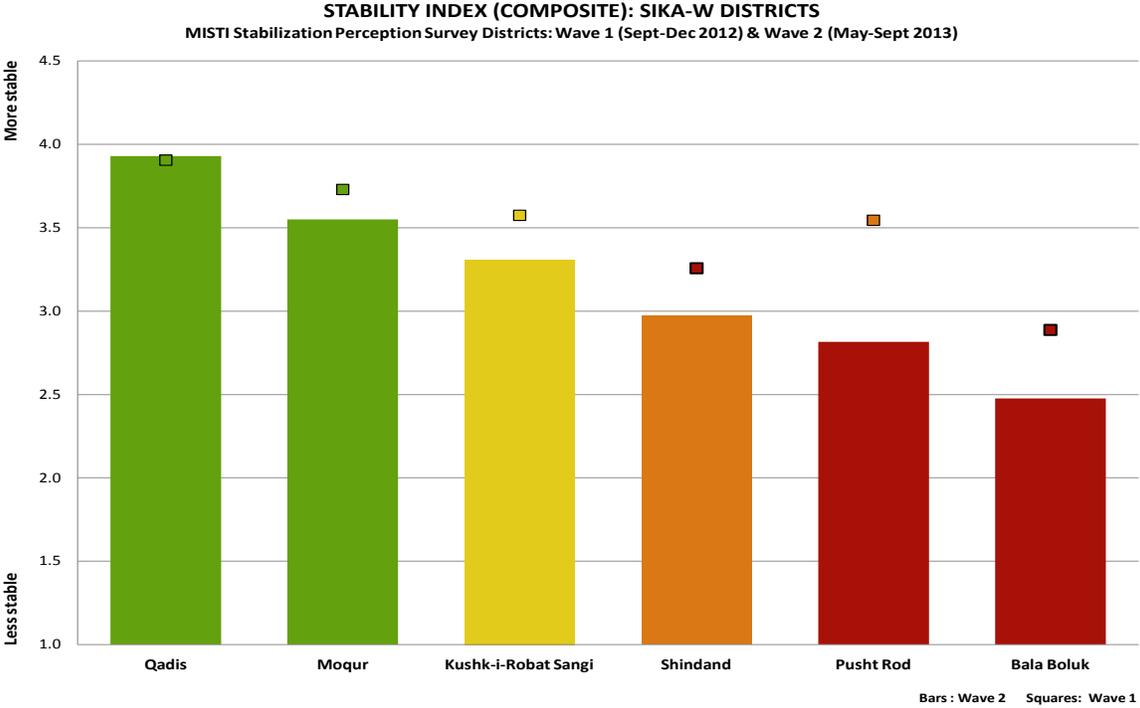
| Province | District | DPP/Grant ID# | Sector | Project Description | CDC |
|----------|---------------------|---------------|----------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Farah | Pusht-e Rod | PR-1-004 | Infrastructure | Construction of 10 Water Dividers | Tapah Shiran CDC |
| Farah | Pusht-e Rod | PR-3-001 | Course | Three months Community Based Health Education for 25 local women with Coordination of CHA | Massaw CDC |
| Farah | Pusht-e Rod | PR-3-003 | Course | Three months Community Based Health Education for 25 local women with Coordination of CHA | Doken CDC |
| Farah | Pusht-e Rod | PR-4-002 | Infrastructure | Construction of 7 Water Dividers | Jan Khani CDC |
| Farah | Pusht-e Rod | PR-4-006 | Infrastructure | Construction of 6 Water Dividers | Chardah CDC |
| Farah | Pusht-e Rod | PR-4-004 | Infrastructure | Construction of 9 Water Dividers | Joy Kharaba CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-2-001 | Vocational | Auto Mechanic Vocational Training Program For 6 Months For 15 Men | Middle Shiwan CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-2-002 | Vocational | Five months Mobile Phone Repairing Vocational Training Course for 15 local men | Middle Kanisk CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-2-003 | Vocational | Five months Embroidery Vocational Training Course for 15 local women | Lower Kanisk CDC (Payen) |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-2-004 | Vocational | Five months Tailoring Vocational Training Course for 15 local women | Dehzak Akbar Abad CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-2-005 | Vocational | Five months Auto-Mechanic Vocational Training Course for 15 local men | Dehzak Akbar Abad CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-3-002 | Infrastructure | Construction of 4 Water Dividers | Gerani Alokozai CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-3-004 | Infrastructure | Construction of 4 Water Dividers | Khawja CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-3-005 | Infrastructure | Construction of 4 Water Dividers | Garani/ Ziarat CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-3-006 | Infrastructure | Construction of 8 Water Dividers | Todanak Haji Malik Shir Khan CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-3-007 | Infrastructure | Construction of 8 Water Dividers | Lower Todanak CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-3-008 | Infrastructure | Construction of 8 Water Dividers | Todanak Abdul Wadood CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-3-009 | Infrastructure | Construction of 10 Water Dividers | Tapa e Sadat CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-3-010 | Infrastructure | Construction of 11 Water Dividers | Khawja Khedr CDC |
| Farah | Bala Boluk | BB-4-003 | Infrastructure | Construction of 13 Water Dividers | Safarak CDC |
| Herat | Shindand | SD-2-009 | Infrastructure | Refurbishment of Qaleh Karam High School & Construction of Surrounding Wall | Qaleh-Ye-Haji Karam CDC |
| Herat | Pashtun Zarghun | PZ-1-003 | Infrastructure | Construction of 6 Meter Length Bridge To Connect 25 Villages To District Center | Safidan Ulia CDC |
| Herat | Pashtun Zarghun | PZ-1-004 | Infrastructure | Construction of 44ML Flood Protection Wall | Qala Yusuf Khan CDC |
| Herat | Pashtun Zarghun | PZ-1-001 | Infrastructure | Construction of 100 Meter Length Flood Protection Wall | Ghazagh Hulya CDC |
| Herat | Kushk Rabat-e-Sangi | KR-1-005 | Infrastructure | 3km Graveling Road of char-darah with 1 Culvert & 25m Wash | Shalturi CDC |
| Herat | Kushk Rabat-e-Sangi | KR-1-007 | Infrastructure | 3KM Rehabilitation and Graveling with 5M Protection wall and 4 Culverts | Lak Lak Khana Village |
| Herat | Kushk Rabat-e-Sangi | KR-1-002 | Infrastructure | 1.5 KM Birjanak Road Rehabilitation and graveling | Birjang Hulya CDC |
| Herat | Kushk Rabat-e-Sangi | KR-1-004 | Infrastructure | 2km Rehabilitation and graveling Road with 1 Culvert & 16m Wash | Khowja Gul Baidak CDC |
| Herat | Kushk Rabat-e-Sangi | KR-1-011 | Infrastructure | Construction of 90M stone masonry protection wall | Khalawak Sufla CDC |
| Herat | Kushk Rabat-e-Sangi | KR-1-010 | Infrastructure | Construction of 60 M Stone Masonry Retaining wall | Robot-e Sangi Sharqi CDC |

ANNEX B: NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS

| Area | USAID | SIKA WEST | The Government | District Entities ³⁰ | Beneficiaries | Others | TOTAL |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|----------------|---------------------------------|---------------|-----------|------------|
| National | 4 | | 6 | | | 1 | 11 |
| Herat City | 1 | 18 | 7 | | | | 26 |
| Farah City | | 2 | 6 | | | | 8 |
| Kushki Rabat-e-Sangi | | 3 | 4 | 9 | 21 | 2 | 39 |
| Pashtun Zarghun | | 1 | 4 | 4 | 13 | 1 | 23 |
| Shindand | | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 | | 9 |
| Bala Boluk | | 1 | 1 | 5 | 70 | 3 | 80 |
| Pusht-e-Rod | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 28 | | 32 |
| Qadis | | 1 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 15 |
| Total | 5 | 28 | 36 | 27 | 137 | 10 | 243 |

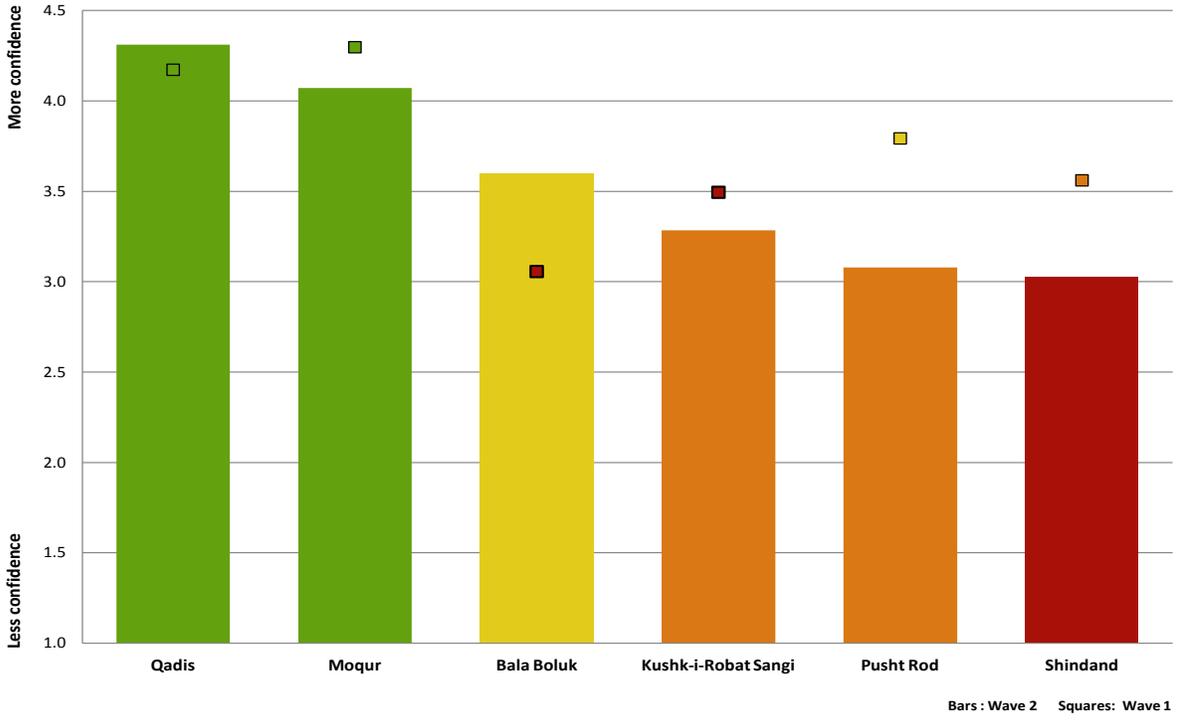
³⁰ Includes DDAs, but not CDCs as they are listed under beneficiaries.

ANNEX C: REFERENCED MISTI SURVEY RESULTS



Overall stability decreased in the surveyed districts while SIKAW West conducted initial programming and began to implement grant activities. The stability index is not exclusive to areas of the district where SIKAW West programs.

CONFIDENCE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: SIKA-W DISTRICTS
 MISTI Stabilization Perception Survey Districts: Wave 1 (Sept-Dec 2012) & Wave 2 (May-Sept 2013)



Overall confidence in local government decreased in the surveyed districts while SIKA West conducted local governance programming, capacity building initiatives, communications trainings, and began to implement grant activities. Please note these confidence results are not exclusive to areas of the district where SIKA West programs.