USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE | AFGHANISTAN

BRIEFING PAPER

STABILITY IN KEY AREAS (SIKA) – EAST

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON DISTRICT PLANNING

Women from Qarabagh District, Ghazni Province

JUNE 2014

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

USAID | AFGHANISTAN
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

STABILITY IN KEY AREAS (SIKA) – EAST

BRIEFING PAPER: WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON DISTRICT PLANNING

Contract Number: AID-306-C-12-00002

Submitted to:
United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Afghanistan

Prepared by:
Melissa Payson and Dina Scippa
AECOM International Development, Inc.

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS ii
INTRODUCTION 1
Key Findings 2
SIKA-EAST 2
DISTRICT PLANNING PROCESS 3
Women's Role 3
Women's Perspectives 5
GENDER DIMENSIONS 8
Voice, Representation, and Leadership 8
Influence and Decision-Making 9
Participation 13
Access to Information 13
Benefit from Services 15
CONCLUSION 16
ANNEX A – SIKA-East Coverage Area 17
ANNEX B – District Planning Statistics 18
ANNEX C – Sex-Disaggregated Issues, by District 19
ANNEX D – Sex-Disaggregated Projects, by District 20

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON DISTRICT PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

This briefing paper is one in a series of SIKA-East reports illuminating gender perspectives in key areas of governance and development on themes such as district representation, strategic planning, resourcing and budgeting, and delivery of services. With particular focus on women's status and contributions, the series examines five dimensions of gender: 1) voice, representation and leadership; 2) influence and decision-making; 3) participation; 4) access to information; and 5) benefits from services. Recognizing gender dimensions and applying a gender-sensitive approach are fundamental aspects of leadership, good governance, and accountability and these go hand-in-hand with efforts to reduce disparities and discrimination. As USAID explains:

> Gender analysis examines the different but interdependent roles of men and women and the relations between the sexes. It also involves an examination of the rights and opportunities of men and women, power relations, and access to and control over resources. Gender analysis identifies disparities, investigates why such disparities exist, determines whether they are detrimental, and if so, looks at how they can be remedied.[1]

Women's Perspectives on District Planning examines the role of women leaders in district planning processes facilitated by SIKA-East in 2012 and 2013 under the aegis of Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) and Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) in 21 districts[2] in five provinces: Ghazni, Khost, Logar, Maydan Wardak, and Paktya. In coordination with male leaders and GIRoA authorities, the women develop a district strategic plan that encapsulates their perspectives about local problems, root causes, and solutions – the District Project Portfolio (DPP). This DPP becomes the guiding document for local leadership and GIRoA to improve the district's governance and service delivery with the technical and financial support of SIKA-East.

Harnessing the vast potential of the emerging cadre of Afghanistan's female leaders to play meaningful roles in subnational governance and development is a multi-faceted endeavor. Women's involvement in and influence over district planning is one of a host of factors that can determine sustainable gains for women. Cultivating women's representation and leadership capacity, responding to their concerns, and resourcing their priorities are also integral to success. SIKA-East shares its experiences and analysis with the intent to inform the discourse on "gender disparity in Afghanistan"[3] and to enrich inclusive practices and women's empowerment in accord with the aims of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA).

---

[1] U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). *Guide to Gender Integration and Analysis: Additional Help for ADS Chapters 201 and 203.* Reference 03/31/2010, File Name 201sab_033110, http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/201sab.pdf, p. 5.

[2] In addition to the 21 districts, SIKA-East implements activities in Garda Serai, officially part of Zadran District but informally operating as an independent administrative unit. For simplicity, this paper refers to 22 "districts", but this reference does not imply recognition of formal district status for Garda Serai.

[3] USAID Mission for Afghanistan. *Mission Order for Gender Analysis and Integration*. M.O 201.02, September 24, 2011, p. 2.

KEY FINDINGS

- In 75% of districts, women played an important role in district planning. Their involvement was significant – particularly given the conflict-affected context – but several factors tempered the impact.
- Women identified an array of issues and solutions, informed by their unique life experiences and the roles they play in families, communities, and society at large. Their contributions resulted in distinctive, gender-sensitive district plans.
- The planning process proved a valuable platform for women leaders to represent district perspectives and expand leadership beyond their traditional local domain, including to the provincial level. Without such representation, women's voices were effectively silenced.
- Women wielded decisive influence in defining issues and solutions in the districts in which they participated. However, they were largely unsuccessful in transforming influence into equitable representation on the final plans and ensuring women's priorities were fast-tracked for action and resourcing.
- During 2012-2013, women participated in planning sessions in most districts. During 2014-2015, SIKA-East expects women to participate in planning activities in 100% of districts, which is being achieved through enhanced engagement with male allies, influential women, and GIRoA.
- Women District Development Assembly Plus (DDA+) members and DDA+ Communication Committees served as essential conduits for women's perspectives, with information deftly used to mobilize action. However, insufficient coordination between men and women at times hampered progress.
- While women and girls will clearly benefit from many of the communal services delivered in response to male demands, they are not as likely to experience a proportional benefit in response to their own demands, which have not always been prioritized and resourced.

SIKA-EAST

Under the leadership of IDLG (Independent Directorate of Local Governance) and MRRD (Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development), SIKA-East promotes good governance and effective service delivery by building the capacity of IDLG and MRRD in conflict-affected areas. Through its work, the program fosters strengthened relationships and engagement between district and provincial entities and constituencies, develops capacities that enable and sustain responsive and accountable governance, and enhances the delivery of services that respond to public needs and demands.

At the provincial level, program partners include the Provincial Governor's Office (PGO), Provincial Rural Rehabilitation and Development Directorate (PRRD), and Provincial Directorate of Economy. At the district level, partners include the District Governor's Office (DGO) and the District Development Assembly Plus (DDA+), a unified, representative district council established under the aegis of IDLG, MRRD, and SIKA-East to facilitate local governance and development. The DDA+ includes both male and female District Development Assembly (DDA) and District Community Council (DDC) members along with tribal, religious, and other influential leaders.

Partners are provided with a wide range of support to build institutional and human capacity, including technical assistance, training, mentoring, and "on-the-job" practice, complemented with access to small grants for district entities to enable delivery of demanded services. SIKA-East is active in 30 districts in the six provinces of Ghazni, Khost, Logar, Maydan Wardak, Paktika, and Paktya (see Annex A: SIKA-East Coverage Area). The program runs from December 2011 to September 2015.

DISTRICT PLANNING PROCESS

In each district, SIKA-East guides the DDA+ through the development of a strategic plan to address public interests and concerns during a series of workshop sessions and complementary field activities. SIKA-East begins the process with comprehensive training-of-trainer (ToT) sessions for key staff in each district as well as MRRD subnational representatives. Covering all aspects of district planning, these sessions result in practiced trainers ready to guide the subnational process.

At district level, men and women (typically separately) engage in intensive dialogue to identify local problems, analyze root causes, and detail solutions. Arising from this process, each group develops a draft DPP, including a notation about the sex-disaggregated origin of problems and solutions ("women," "men," or "both")[4], following which male DDA+ members merge these contributions into one district plan and identify a short-list of projects for priority resourcing and action – the "Cycle 1" list. The men then finalize and endorse the consolidated DPP and shepherd this DPP through district and provincial endorsements, including by the District Governor and PRRD Director. Once received, SIKA-East finalizes the electronic DPP, develops an accompanying process narrative, and submits these documents to USAID for approval.

After USAID approval, the DDA+ and DGO take part in comprehensive district and provincial communication, coordination, and outreach activities to mobilize GIRoA, donor, and public resourcing and support to deliver interventions identified in the plan. SIKA-East supports implementation of the plan's solutions with approximately $500,000 in grant funds per district, subject to eligibility requirements and a standardized grant-making process detailed in the SIKA-East Grants Manual.

WOMEN'S ROLE

In 75% of districts, women played an important role in district planning. Their involvement was significant – particularly given the conflict-affected context – but several factors tempered the impact.

As standard procedure, SIKA-East sought the inclusion of women in the planning process and the space for them to contribute to defining district issues and priorities and determining approaches and solutions appropriate and secure within local religious, cultural, and social contexts. Conscious of the difficulties of challenging long-established conventions concerning women's roles and responsibilities, SIKA-East closely engaged with male leaders to reach agreement.

In many cases, this effort was successful, resulting in women's participation in 17 of 22 districts (77%), comprising 39% of participants. Women's involvement afforded them a valuable opportunity to harness and formalize their leadership abilities to yield influence, as they took part in decisions that affected their constituencies and increased ownership and accountability for results. It also provided a more realistic environment to identify district problems and solutions, taking into account women's and men's interdependence as well as similarities and differences in roles, status, and viewpoints. Districts in Paktya Province were the distinct exception, with only one of six districts includ-

[4] This briefing paper draws upon data from 22 district planning sessions, the associated sex-disaggregated DPPs, and anecdotal evidence accumulated during program implementation activities.

ing women. However, in the single district where women did take part (Ahmad Abad), 56% of participants were female, exceeded only by Khwaja Umari District in Ghazni Province with 58% female participation. The table below provides a comparative snapshot of women's participation across provinces, with district details provided in Annex B: District Planning Statistics.

Table 1: District Planning Participants by Province (17 districts)

Province	Total	# Men	# Women	% Women
Ghazni	**387**	210	177	46%
Khost	**403**	240	163	40%
Logar	**326**	236	90	28%
Maydan Wardak	**268**	177	91	34%
Paktya	**110**	48	62	19%
Total	**1,494**	**911**	**583**	**39%**

** Data corresponds to Stability Unit/SIKA-East Indicator 1.3.3.*

While not quite equal, women's participation was significant – particularly given the conflict-affected context. However, a mix of factors tempered impact, and SIKA-East has learned valuable lessons from some early miscalculations. SIKA-East required a cadre of female staff to lead women's trainings and activities in order to accommodate traditional restrictions on interaction between unrelated males and females. However, the process of recruiting female staff in these areas faced the same challenges, often compounded by family concerns about uncertain security conditions and a limited pool of qualified applicants.

In addition, SIKA-East female field staff members were not routinely included in preparatory ToT sessions, due to perceptions that their participation was not necessary, insufficient management oversight, the press of other responsibilities, and similar issues. SIKA-East's engagement with provincial Departments of Women's Affairs (DoWA) was also somewhat haphazard at that time, with little steady involvement in activities. As a result, women's planning sessions often lacked important institutional presence, adequate staffing, and the confident leadership of men's sessions. Although still facing recruiting difficulties, SIKA-East has now ensured that subnational female staff members are included in ToTs. In addition, the program has strengthened links with DoWA in each province as well as engaged the central Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) in key discussions, such as honing outreach methods.

Women were further disadvantaged by SIKA-East's original modified approach for females, which involved fewer topics and a shorter process and did not include constituent consultations. These modifications were shaped by misguided attempts to speed up district planning as well as assumptions that women did not need to be involved in all steps and that smaller groups would require less time to analyze issues and draft plans. This approach usually resulted in women's exclusion at key points in decision-making and an associated lack of knowledge about and consensus on the substance of the finalized DPPs and Cycle 1 projects. SIKA-East has now eliminated discrepancies in content and duration as well as equalized decision-making involvement between men and women, as further described below.

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES

During district planning, women identified an array of issues and solutions informed by their unique life experiences and the roles they play in families, communities, and society at large. Their contributions resulted in distinctive, gender-sensitive district plans.

The 17 district plans provide rich insight into local interests and concerns as defined by a broad cross-section of district leaders in conflict-afflicted areas. Women's perspectives were particularly valuable, given the typical rarity of their voices during public planning and decision-making.

PROBLEMS

Women and men identified a multitude of issues during the planning sessions, with a total of 98 sources of instability[5] identified in the 22 districts. Upon analysis, these issues were organized into five categories and eight key problems that capture the essence of the many issues raised:

A Governance
1 Weak government-citizen relations
2 Deficient service delivery
B Conflict
3 General social disunity
C Economy
4 Dysfunctional agricultural institutions and systems
5 Lack of livelihood and employment opportunities
D Physical Insecurity
6 Low security force capacity
7 Security force misconduct
E Gender-Based Violence
8 Violence against women

In the 17 districts in which women participated in planning, their discussions were dominated by governance and gender-based violence, which accounted for 65% of all issues raised. In 15 districts, women were especially concerned about weak relations between government and citizens, citing growing gaps between district entities and the people, mistrust, loss of people's cooperation and support, and similar problems. Often, they attributed limited livelihood and income-generating opportunities to governance – rather than economic – causes. Consistent with their traditional role as gatekeepers for family well-being, women also frequently highlighted problems about access to and quality of health and education services. A sampling of governance issues raised by women includes:

Governance	Corruption, lack of employment opportunities, inattention to women's economic needs, lack of markets for selling women's handicrafts, low capacity of local midwives, shortage of clinics, inattention to education, insecure atmosphere at schools, lack of literacy courses, insufficient home-based classes for female students, lack of professional female teachers

In 13 of the districts, women cited gender-based violence as a key problem, including denial of girls' and women's rights as well as economic struggles. They also cited harmful traditional practices, often involving and impacting both females and males. In Andar District of Ghazni Province, women explained far-reaching and damaging effects:

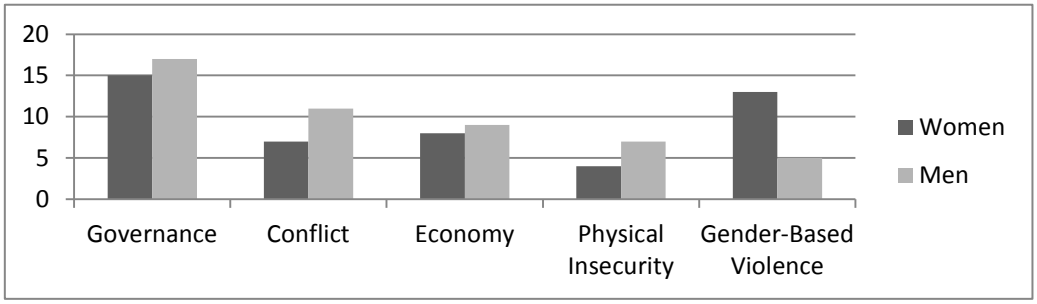
> Violence against women not only affects other family members, especially children, but could also transfer to other generations as well. For example, families approve their daughters to be married off to each other's sons when the girls are too young to be married. When they grow up and are about to be married, disputes between the two families arise over the wedding expenses and so forth. This leads to resentment between the families, further leading to long term conflicts, which the local government remains unable to respond and clear the situation."[6]

[5] During the program's base period, "sources of instability" terminology denoted district problems and conflicts.
[6] DPP, Andar District, Ghazni Province, approved by USAID on August 8, 2013.

The strong sense of marginalization and mistrust of government that emerges from the women's sessions echoes women's grievances voiced during extensive SIKA-East–facilitated focus groups in the same districts in 2012 and 2013.[7] A sampling of gender-related issues noted by women includes:

Gender-Based Violence	Forced marriages of teenage girls, high wedding expenses, family customs preventing girls from going to school, girls exchanged between families, violation of women's rights from Islamic point of view, denial of women's legal rights, lack of awareness of mutual rights among men and women, unemployment and economic hardship

Men shared women's serious concerns about governance, with male participants in all 17 districts citing related issues, accounting for 50% of problems they cited. Yet, in contrast to the 13 districts in which women highlighted gender-based violence, the men highlighted this issue in only five districts. Conflict was of relatively greater concern (particularly related to natural resources), cited by males in 11 districts in comparison to seven where women cited such concerns. See below for summary comparison and Annex C: Sex-Disaggregated Issues, by District for district detail.



SOLUTIONS

Women and men proposed a wide range of solutions to address the complex issues identified during district planning. These included infrastructure projects as well as institutional and social development initiatives (loosely grouped by SIKA-East as "non-infrastructure projects," sometimes referred to as "soft" projects). Institutional development included governance initiatives, such as mechanisms to improve coordination and communication between GIRoA agencies, district leaders, and citizens; trainings to build competencies of government departments; and introduction of transparency and accountability measures. Social development included rights advocacy, anti-narcotics campaigning, and training of religious leaders and elders on harmful traditional practices, among other projects.[8]

In all, 2,395 solutions were identified in the 17 districts, with 705 of these prioritized for action on Cycle 1 project lists. These solutions were variously identified by women, by men, and by both women and men (shared solutions). When identified by both women and men, this briefing generally considers them as part of the body of women's proposed projects as well as part of the body of men's proposed projects. As illustrated below and in Annex D: Sex-Disaggregated Projects, by District, men proposed the majority of solutions:

[7] An internal SIKA-East impact study, *Delivering Demand-Driven Results: Women's Vocational Training under SIKA-East*, provides a snapshot of women's governance grievances drawn in part from focus group data.

[8] SIKA-East uses MRRD's National Solidarity Program *Standard List of Sectors and Outputs* as a basis for project coding, suitable to the majority of DPP projects. SIKA-East is supplementing this with codes for initiatives falling outside of the NSP system, such as governance initiatives.

Table 2: Gender-Disaggregated Projects, by Province (17 Districts)

	DPP Solutions					Cycle I Priorities				
Province	**Total**	**Men**	**Women**	**Shared**	**Women + Shared***	**Total**	**Men**	**Women**	**Shared**	**Women + Shared**
Ghazni	503	361	108	34	28%	168	112	48	8	33%
Khost	536	483	24	29	10%	141	122	9	10	13%
Logar	494	165	98	231	67%	127	46	23	58	64%
Maydan Wardak	725	608	83	34	16%	239	203	23	13	15%
Paktya	137	131	6	0	4%	30	28	2	0	7%
TOTAL	**2,395**	**1,748**	**319**	**328**	**27%**	**705**	**511**	**105**	**89**	**28%**

** Data corresponds to SIKA-East Indicator 1.3.3.*

Women perceived education as a solution to many identified problems, and related projects constituted 42% of all those they proposed. The majority involved vocational training, such as short courses to improve food processing, garment production, and handicraft skills. Education was followed by governance initiatives, with emphasis on communication and coordination. In contrast, men focused significantly on irrigation, with related projects constituting 49% of all those they proposed, with emphasis on flood protection walls and water intakes. These were followed in popularity by education.

When viewed from a cross-sector perspective, the third most prevalent women-identified projects related to gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices. (Women associated these with a variety of sectors.) However, men rarely introduced measures to tackle these issues.

Cycle I priority projects followed somewhat similar patterns of popularity. However, many governance initiatives – while valued by both women and men – involved coordination and communication, requiring relatively little grant funding or other outside resourcing. Thus, planning participants often left these initiatives out of Cycle I priorities. The table below illustrates relative preferences, as measured by the percent of each group's identified solutions.

Table 3: Sex-Disaggregated Top Project Sectors

	DPP		Cycle I	
	Women	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**
1	Education	Irrigation	Education	Irrigation
2	Governance	Education	Water/sanitation	Education
3	Water/sanitation	Governance	Irrigation	Transport
4	Irrigation	Transport	Health	Water/sanitation
	79% of female-identified projects	*88% of male-identified projects*	*79% of female-identified projects*	*88% of male-identified projects*

GENDER DIMENSIONS

In the course of its governance and development work, SIKA-East is focusing on illuminating five dimensions of gender, with particular focus on women's status. Dimensions include voice, representation, and leadership; influence and decision-making; participation; access to information; and benefit from services. In addition to supporting informed implementation of GIRoA policy, these dimensions contribute to USAID's global gender aims to:

- Reduce gender disparities in access to, control over, and benefit from resources, wealth, opportunities, and services – economic, social, political, and cultural.
- Reduce gender-based violence and mitigate its harmful effects on individuals and communities, so that all people can live healthy and productive lives.
- Increase the capability of women and girls to realize their rights, determine their life outcomes, and influence decision-making in households, communities, and societies.[9]

Recognizing gender dimensions and applying a gender-sensitive approach are fundamental aspects of leadership, good governance, and accountability, and these go hand-in-hand with efforts to reduce disparities and discrimination. Thus, they are integral to SIKA-East's gender strategy, guiding staff, GIRoA, and district leadership to develop the awareness and competency to:

- Equitably enable women and men to become informed citizens; voice interests, concerns, and needs; access and control resources; and influence and benefit from public services.
- Assist women to become effective leaders and representatives, with expanded participation in local governance process and inclusion in public decision-making.[10]

In support of this, SIKA-East works to improve women inclusion in planning, budgeting, and service delivery. The district planning process lays the foundation for results, as the juncture where priorities are established, benefits allocated, and resources earmarked. Engaging women at an early stage was a step forward in ensuring that women's needs and concerns were represented, their voices were heard, and they had the opportunity to play a role in shaping district plans and service delivery, resourced with significant SIKA-East grant funds. Analysis of their involvement and contributions provides unique insight into the status, reach, and impact of women leaders during a critical subnational governance process.

VOICE, REPRESENTATION, AND LEADERSHIP

The planning process proved a valuable platform for women leaders to represent district perspectives and expand leadership beyond their traditional local domain, including to provincial level. Without such representation, women's voices were effectively silenced.

When given the opportunity (typically requiring endorsement of male elders), women eagerly contributed to district planning. In all, 17 of 22 districts involved women – including four where the

[9] *USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy*. Washington, DC (March 2012) p. 1, http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/GenderEqualityPolicy.pdf.
[10] *Gender Mainstreaming at SIKA-East: A Synopsis*. (June 2014), p. 1.

number of women equaled or exceeded the number of male participants. Women represented a wide leadership spectrum, encompassing DDA and DCC members, GIRoA officials, CDC members, community elders, civil society representatives, health and education professionals, and other influential figures. This rich mix enabled a collection of voices and perspectives to contribute to identifying issues and solutions that, beyond parochial interests, represented larger cultural, political, and economic challenges in the districts.

The women participants also succeeded in expanding their leadership standing beyond the traditional spheres of neighborhood and village. They effectively represented issues at the district level; gained concurrence from influential male tribal, religious, and other leaders as well as GIRoA authorities; and then conveyed constituents' interests and concerns to provincial authorities and service providers. This representative role was a significant broadening of women's customary authority.

In contrast, in districts without female representatives at the table, women's voices were effectively silenced and women's interests and concerns were virtually absent in final district plans. Recognizing this gap, SIKA-East redoubled efforts to create space for women leaders from 100% of districts to represent the views of their constituents. As a result, elders from four of the five districts previously excluding women have now agreed to female representation. Women in Laja Ahmad Khail and Laja Mangal districts have already shown leadership: When they recently learned their district plans fundamentally neglected women's perspectives, they drew up a petition to redress the issue. Moreover, all of SIKA-East's eight new districts[11] have named women DDA+ representatives.

INFLUENCE AND DECISION-MAKING

Women wielded decisive influence in defining issues and solutions in the districts in which they participated. However, they were largely unsuccessful in transforming influence into equitable representation on the final plans and ensuring women's priorities were fast-tracked for action and resourcing.

Representation alone is insufficient to ensure women's equitable access to resources, opportunities, and services. Female leaders must have the skills to shape and influence an understanding of problems and solutions as well as acquire the standing to become integral actors in decision-making processes. They also must have access to the male-dominated networks and forums where ideas and dialogues are transformed into decisions, control over resources, and tangible results.

SHAPING DISTRICT AGENDAS

Women promoted a female-focused perspective during the planning process, highlighting critical issues that constrain girls' and women's aspirations, opportunities, and contributions. Their influence is evident in their success in placing gender-based violence on district agendas. In nine of the 17 districts, such issues ranked among the top three concerns, with six districts citing these themes as the most important issue. Their influence is also evident in the final plans' inclusion of the distinctive array of initiatives they advocated, such as midwifery courses; health clinic improvements; girls' educa-

[11] These include Muqur District in Ghazni Province; Nadir Shah Kot District in Khost Province; Maydan Shahr District in Maydan Wardak Province; Sharana District and Yosuf Khel District in Paktika Province; Ali Khail District, Mirzaka District, and Sayed Karam District in Paktya Province.

tion; construction of girls' school boundary walls; literacy courses; vocational training for women; public awareness campaigns on social themes, such as harmful traditional practices and drug abuse; and dialogues with tribal and religious elders on women's rights.

It is important to note that men also supported such initiatives, but by and large only in those districts where women played a role in planning. In fact, in districts where women did not participate and their views were not similarly represented, such initiatives were notably absent from the analytic process that informed the DPPs. Again, Paktya Province is a case in point: Ahmad Abad is the only district of six in which women were included in planning, and it is the only district in which women's governance, gender-based violence, and economic issues and proposed solutions are markedly represented. Similarly, concern for female health and education is evident in all 17 district plans where women participated, but such concerns are strikingly absent in the five districts where women played no role.

RECOGNIZING DISPARITIES

In each district where women took part in the planning process, the male leaders reviewed and integrated women's inputs, creating one unified district strategic plan. Through this process, the men explicitly acknowledged the importance of women's perspectives. (There is no reported instance where the men rejected women's inputs.) In certain districts, it was not uncommon for the men themselves to propose solutions that responded to needs and concerns highlighted by women. In districts where women did not participate, men representing women generally translated this into the minimal inclusion of a tailoring or embroidery course in the DPP.

While women shaped the contours of 17 district agendas and had their viewpoints embedded in final district plans, their influence nevertheless was dwarfed by men's interests and concerns. Among women-identified solutions, women's top four DPP project sectors constituted a healthy 79%. However, when assessing these in the context of all DPP solutions (not restricted to women-identified solutions), women's priorities plummeted to 21%. In comparison, men's top four project sectors constituted 87% of male-identified solutions and 76% of all DPP solutions.

This acute disparity in the proportion of male- and female-identified projects becomes particularly important when considering Cycle 1, which represents the fast-tracking of specific initiatives for grant funding and implementation. In women's top four Cycle 1 project sectors, their identified projects constitute 80% of the total of women-identified solutions on the Cycle 1 lists, but women's priorities constitute only 22% of all DPP solutions. In comparison, men's top four project sectors constituted 88% of all male-identified solutions and 75% of the total body of Cycle 1 solutions. These disparities are illustrated below for each project sector.

Table 4: Sex-Disaggregated Top Project Sectors, by Percent

DPPs						
#	Women's Top Project Sectors	As % of women's identified projects*	As % of all projects	Men's Top Project Sectors	As % of men's identified projects**	As % of all projects
1	Education	42%	11%	Irrigation	49%	42%
2	Governance	21%	6%	Education	15%	13%
3	Water/sanitation	9%	3%	Governance	14%	12%
4	Irrigation	7%	2%	Transport	9%	8%
	Total	**79%**	**22%**	**Total**	**87%**	**75%**
Cycle 1s						
#	Women's Top Project Sectors	As % of women's identified projects*	As % of all projects	Men's Top Project Sectors	As % of men's identified projects**	As % of all projects
1	Education	52%	14%	Irrigation	56%	48%
2	Water/sanitation	14%	4%	Education	15%	13%
3	Irrigation	8%	2%	Transport	9%	7%
4	Health	6%	2%	Water/sanitation	8%	7%
	Total	**80%**	**22%**	**Total**	**88%**	**75%**

** Includes solutions identified solely by women and those identified by both women and men*
*** Includes solutions identified solely by men and those identified by both men and women*

In reality, the sum of women's solutions equals only 27% of all DPP solutions – a conspicuously small proportion. A district-by-district DPP and Cycle 1 comparison shows that women attained parity in only a few districts, where women-identified projects exceeded 50% of all initiatives, as detailed in Annex D: Sex-Disaggregated Projects, by District. As SIKA-East has a minimum set-aside of $500,000 in grant funds to address each district's priorities (in practice, this approaches $1,000,000 in some districts), the discrepancy in the proportion of women's preferred solutions on the Cycle 1 priority lists suggests significant consequences in lower resourcing of women's priorities from funds that are relatively easily accessible. SIKA-East is in the process of analyzing grant allocations to quantify this impact.

Several factors contributed to the disparity. Women in all or most SIKA-East areas hold subordinate positions in family and society and are generally marginalized, with limited access to opportunities, control of resources, and influence over decisions – even those decisions that directly define their lives. As succinctly stated by MRRD, "…[I]n a context where poverty and conflict are experienced by both men and women, women face fewer opportunities, lower status, lesser power, and [lesser] influence than men and boys in every sphere of life."[12]

Deeply ingrained gender dynamics also affected the district planning process, in many of the ways these processes might impact participants' public and private lives. Such dynamics contribute to distinctions in how men and women exercise authority, communicate and interact, perceive problems, pursue solutions, access opportunities and benefits, and confront barriers.

[12] Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, August 2011. *Gender Policy*, p. 9, http://mrrd.gov.af/Content/files/English%20Gender%20Policy%20Final(2).pdf.

FOSTERING EQUITY

Helping to create an enabling environment for women's participation, SIKA-East is playing a role in introducing gender concepts and promoting dialogue on equity throughout the district implementation cycle. In coordination with partners, the program has also reshaped processes to equalize women's involvement in key decisions and made other technical corrections to mitigate disadvantages. While dramatically imbalanced male- and female-identified project lists contributed to the problem, perhaps a bigger issue was the want of a robust role for women during finalization of the documents. This problem was exacerbated by the lack of a clear method to adequately link sessions to ensure ongoing consultation, sharing of information, and agreement on key points, such as developing criteria to prioritize projects and reviewing the final, consolidated DPP before submittal to GIRoA authorities for endorsement. Thus, there was no opportunity to build consensus around important issues and ways to tackle them. Indeed, SIKA-East staff found it challenging to envision how these interactions might be managed, although MRRD's National Solidarity Program had success with developing practices in some of the same, as well as other, provinces, offering field-tested options to consider.

In addition, male participants exhibited a strong preference for infrastructure solutions, while women were significantly more likely to focus on non-infrastructure solutions. In general, women promoted advocacy, skill development, communication, and coordination over the infrastructure construction, maintenance, and repairs that men often promoted. In a number of districts, SIKA-East played an early, misguided role in cultivating this preference, advising women to focus on "soft" initiatives in an attempt to balance infrastructure-heavy DPPs. In any case, many women held traditional views that males were responsible for communal infrastructure. Furthermore, SIKA-East had its engineering team standing by to rapidly design infrastructure projects and move these into the grants pipeline because these projects were tangible initiatives and therefore considered particularly beneficial to demonstrate visible change and results. Thus, women-identified initiatives were not only smaller in number, but they also received less attention from SIKA-East, contributing to a sense of neglect among some women participants.

In conjunction with GIRoA partners and DoWA representatives, SIKA-East has brought several changes to the planning process to address many of these issues. In each district, the participating women and men will decide how to unify their disparate DPPs and Cycle 1 lists, respectively. They will also identify mutually acceptable criteria to guide prioritization of Cycle 1 solutions. Solutions that have been identified as shared priorities will be placed at the top of the lists. When reviewing the Cycle 1 documents, SIKA-East will ensure that women-identified priorities comprise at least 25% of the included solutions. Both women and men will then take part in a follow-up discussion on the finalized documents, with the opportunity to share comments and make amendments before endorsing the final version. Both women and men will endorse the final versions before these are submitted to GIRoA for endorsement.

The requirement for a minimum of 25% of women-identified projects to be included on the Cycle 1 lists might seem to suggest no change in the status quo. However, SIKA-East and the partners who participated in the workshop where the process was reshaped believe that enhanced consultation and joint decision-making will result in a greater proportion of shared projects among men and women. Consensus on the final DPPs and Cycle 1s is also likely to ensure that these are genuinely

representative of both groups, with greater transparency and accountability for each. As illustrated in Annex D: Sex-Disaggregated Projects, by District, this policy would have impacted nearly 65% of all districts (14 of 22) during prior rounds of district planning.

PARTICIPATION

During 2012-2013, women participated in planning sessions in most districts. During 2014-2015, SIKA-East expects women to participate in planning activities in 100% of districts, which is being achieved through enhanced engagement with male allies, influential women, and GIRoA.

Women's ability to participate in public affairs is usually regulated by male relatives and perceived as a sensitive issue. Yet despite the conservative environment in many SIKA-East areas, women succeeded in participating in planning sessions in more than 75% of the districts. In some cases, their participation was postponed, due to ongoing negotiations with male elders. Regardless of delays, however, women ultimately were active contributors to the process. Paktya Province was the singular exception. Local concerns prohibiting women's involvement ranged from Taliban threats to fears that strict cultural traditions would be violated. SIKA-East staff also made erroneous assumptions about the permissiveness of the environment and were reluctant to pursue wider involvement, despite indications of entry points among elders in some of the districts.

With enhanced dialogue and outreach, this scenario shows promising signs of change. During April 2014 provincial gatherings of female leaders to review district planning and progress, two of the five districts excluding women sent delegates. Another two districts compiled lists of women participants for future activities. Elders often set conditions, such as specifying acceptable event locations, using only female facilitators, ensuring *parda*[13], requiring the presence of *mahrams*[14], and insisting on a low-profile approach, with no photos or publicity. Women themselves are often fierce protectors of these conditions.

SIKA-East views these imposed conditions as reasonable and manageable, given the local context. Complementing such measures, SIKA-East has enhanced the gender-sensitivity of its stakeholder engagement process (launched in the early stages of district entry), with the result that all of the program's eight new districts are poised to include a significant number of women in planning and other activities. Thus, attaining the goal of women's participation in 100% of districts (30 of 30) appears feasible.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Women DDA+ members and DDA+ Communication Committees served as essential conduits for women's perspectives, with information deftly used to mobilize action. But insufficient coordination between men and women at times hampered progress.

[13] *Parda* in practice in SIKA-East's areas includes women's physical segregation from unrelated men, limited public visibility, and covering of the body.
[14] A *mahram* is a (usually) male escort from a woman's immediate family who generally accompanies her during travel and events outside her community.

Issues of transparency and accountability in government are positively correlated with information access and equitable gender participation. During district planning, women DDA+ members and other influential female figures not only voiced constituent perspectives, but also amplified and broadcast these across decision-making platforms. They served as essential conduits for women's perspectives vertically from village to district and from district to province as well as laterally among district GIRoA authorities and non-government male leaders. These women also expanded their own access to information as they interacted with GIRoA authorities at the planning sessions and related events. They effectively conveyed grassroots perspectives based on local consultations and knowledge, integrating these perspectives into the district leadership dialogue. They also transmitted progress and results back to communities, using established social networks to communicate.

SIKA-East also facilitated establishment of DDA+ Communications Committees to harness leadership capacity of both men and women to address priorities and concerns through local governance institutions. In the 17 districts with such committees[15], more than 100 women advocate on key interests, and in some districts men and women serve on committees together. These committees act as coordinating bodies for communication and outreach on behalf of the larger DDA+, working in close cooperation with the District Governor. Each committee drafts and enacts a plan to advocate needs, raise awareness, and negotiate solutions in line with local priorities. The committees became critical action platforms for women, increasing the flow of information about women's concerns as well as drawing attention to priorities, lobbying for resources, and in many cases negotiating solutions to identified issues.

During the planning process in Khoshi District in Logar Province, for example, women raised concerns about violence against women and deprivation of their rights, linking these concerns to low levels of public awareness. They were confident that "When people become literate and learn about women's rights, problems among households that have caused mistrust…will be solved, and women who access computer skills can solve their problems and get their favorite jobs right away." They further noted that "Social resiliencies among people are bolstered when their problems are solved by themselves in close cooperation with relevant entities." Acting upon this resolve, male and female members of Khoshi's Communications Committee recently succeeded in acquiring private donations to establish a girls' computer center in the district. The committee not only effectively conveyed this local demand to a prominent private-sector company, they also dramatically enhanced girls' access to information by delivering these services.

Still, during recent SIKA-East–facilitated provincial gatherings for women leaders, participants expressed concerns that they were left largely uninformed by male leaders about important decisions on priorities, resourcing, and implementation and that there was little coordination between male and female leadership. The provincial forums served to expose such gaps in a number of districts and enabled women to share valuable information with each other that they were otherwise lacking. As one woman leader from Mohammad Agha stated, "For two years, SIKA-East has been working [here] and the women's DPP has been completed. But, until now, there have not been any projects

[15] The districts without female members of Communications Committees correspond to the five districts in Paktya Province that excluded women from the planning process.

directed towards women in the district." Following the provincial gathering, a delegation of women organized a meeting with the Logar Province Deputy Governor to communicate the negative impact resulting from ignoring women's concerns and demanding action to redress the balance.

BENEFIT FROM SERVICES

While women and girls will clearly benefit from many of the communal services delivered in response to male demands, they are not as likely to experience a proportional benefit in response to their own demands, which have not always been prioritized and resourced.

The measure of women's benefit from services must be assessed in two ways: the benefit they gain from services delivered in response to their specific priorities and the overall benefit they gain from services delivered as a result of the planning process in general.

The delivery of basic services is especially important for women in SIKA-East districts, given that their primary roles as homemakers, mothers, and caregivers depend significantly on services such as health care, water supply, and education for children. However, as women signaled during the planning process and other consultative sessions in the same districts, they often felt marginalized when it came to identifying needed services and overlooked or discounted when it came to delivery.

On the other hand, when women participated in SIKA-East–facilitated district planning, women's perspectives were clearly evident, their views were not discounted, and the resulting district plans were richly informed by their particular wisdom and experience, which distinctively shaped district problems and solutions. Nevertheless, their solutions were not prioritized for action and resourcing, and they were not well-positioned to benefit from services delivered in response to their demands.

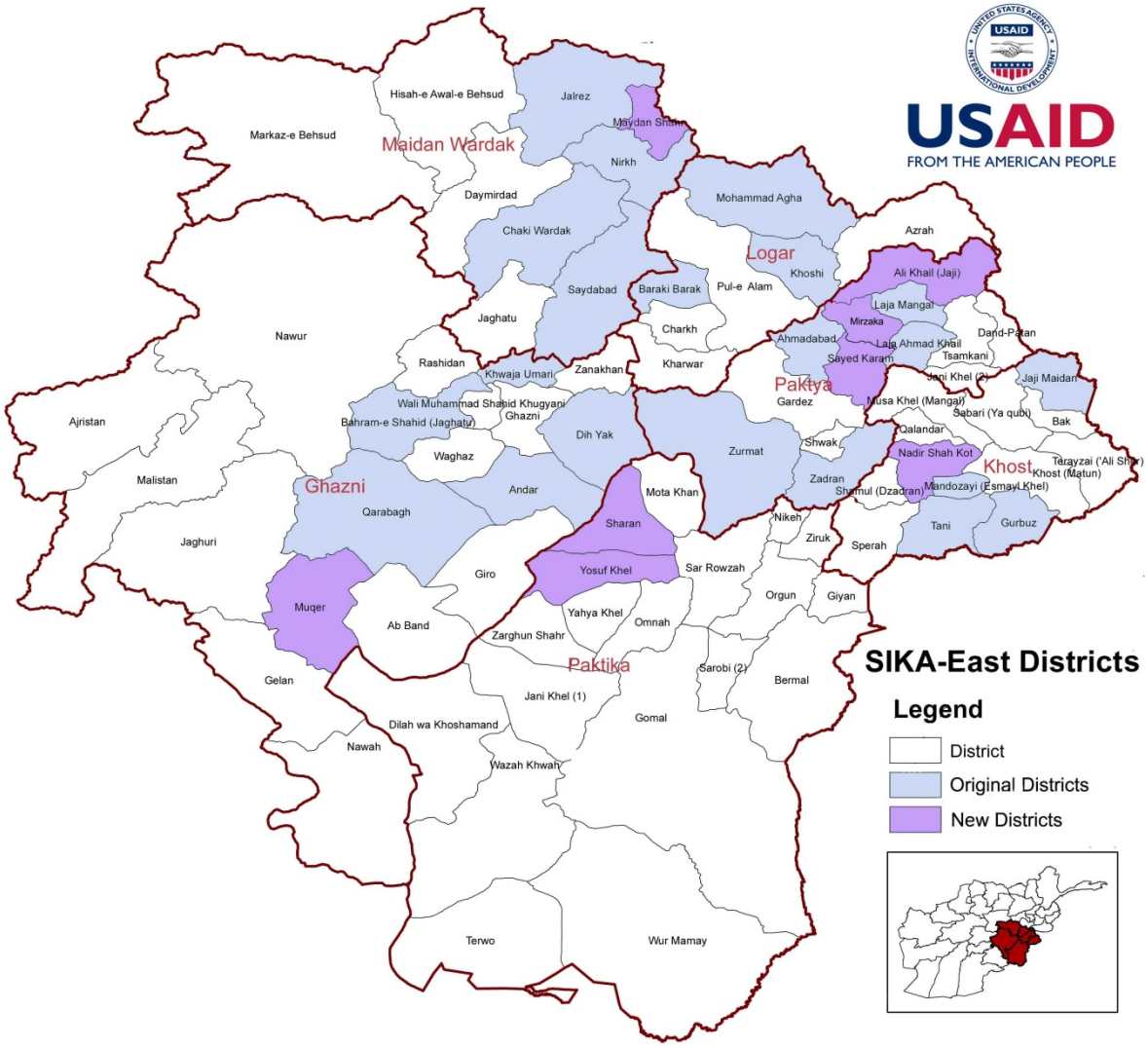
This limitation does not imply that women do not perceive value in the issues raised and initiatives promoted by men. Women and girls will clearly benefit from many of the services delivered in response to male demands, as these address communal needs. But absent equitable action on their own demands – and their own strenuous advocacy to facilitate this – they will remain passive recipients, rather than empowered contributors to shaping a better future for themselves, their families, communities, and districts.

CONCLUSION

In the majority of district planning processes facilitated by SIKA-East, women and men have effectively voiced interests and concerns and highlighted compelling needs. Their joint activism has resulted in gender-sensitive district plans that are driving significant investment at the local level in conflict-affected areas. Many of the district planning process improvements SIKA-East, IDLG, and MRRD are instituting will help to level the playing field for women, particularly during prioritization of projects and development of the design and resourcing pipeline for implementation. In addition, ensuring that both men and women assess problems and potential solutions through a gender-sensitive lens will assist them to apply newly sharpened understanding to formulate initiatives that can bring about mutually beneficial results. Such steps are essential precursors to responsive delivery of services.

However, these measures are part of a larger effort that must continue to effectively harness the vast potential of the emerging cadre of Afghanistan's female leaders to play meaningful roles in sub-national governance and development. As part of this journey, SIKA-East is sharing its experiences and analysis to inform the discourse and contribute to enriching inclusive practices and women's empowerment in Afghanistan.

ANNEX A – SIKA-EAST COVERAGE AREA



ANNEX B – DISTRICT PLANNING STATISTICS

Province	District	Planning Date	Participants Total	# Male	# Female	%Female
Ghazni	Andar	24-Feb-13	62	31	31	**50%**
	Dih Yak	9-Jan-12	56	33	23	**41%**
	Jaghatu	26-Sep-13	88	53	35	**40%**
	Khwaja Umari	19-May-13	95	40	55	**58%**
	Qarabagh*	26-Sep-13	86	53	33	**38%**
	Subtotal		**387**	**210**	**177**	**46%**
Khost	Gurbuz	30-Jun-13	102	61	41	**40%**
	Jaji Maydan*	17-Sep-13	100	55	45	**45%**
	Mando Zayi	24-Oct-13	101	63	38	**38%**
	Tani	21-Sep-13	100	61	39	**39%**
	Subtotal		**403**	**240**	**163**	**40%**
Logar	Baraki Barak	17-Jul-12	163	141	22	**13%**
	Khoshi	23-May-13	87	46	41	**47%**
	Mohammad Agha	2-Dec-12	76	49	27	**36%**
	Subtotal		**326**	**236**	**90**	**28%**
Maydan Wardak	Chaki Wardak	17-Feb-13	61	39	22	**36%**
	Jalrez	28-Sep-13	82	50	32	**39%**
	Nirkh	2-Dec-12	46	21	25	**54%**
	Sayedabad	8-Aug-12	79	67	12	**15%**
	Subtotal		**268**	**177**	**91**	**34%**
Paktya	Ahmad Abad	7-Oct-13	110	48	62	**56%**
	Subtotal		**110**	**48**	**62**	**56%**
	Total (17 districts)		**1,494**	**911**	**583**	**39%**
Paktya	Laja Ahmad Khail	N/A	49	49	0	**0%**
	Laja Mangal	N/A	46	46	0	**0%**
	Waza Zadran	N/A	42	42	0	**0%**
	Zadran Garda Serai	N/A	54	54	0	**0%**
	Zurmat	N/A	30	30	0	**0%**
	Subtotal		**221**	**221**	**0**	**0%**
	TOTAL (22 districts)		**1,715**	**1,132**	**583**	**34%**

ANNEX C – SEX-DISAGGREGATED ISSUES, BY DISTRICT

		PROVINCE																
		Ghazni						Khost				Logar			Maydan Wardak				Pakty
CATEGORY	SOURCE OF INSTABILITY*	Andar	Bahrami Shahid (Jaghatu)	Dih Yak	Khwaja Umari	Qarabagh		Gurbuz	Jaji Maidan	Mando Zayi	Tani	Baraki Barak	Khoshi	Mohammad Agha	Chaki Wardak	Jalrez	Nirkh	Saydabad	Ahmad Abad
Governance	1 Weak government-citizen relations																		
	Mistrust																		
	2 Deficient service delivery																		
	Social services (health, education)																		
Conflict	3 General social disunity																		
	Natural resource disputes																		
Economy	4 Dysfunctional agricultural institutions, systems																		
	5 Lack of livelihood, employment opportunities																		
Physical Insecurity	6 Low security force capacity																		
	7 Security force misconduct																		
Gender-Based Violence	8 Violence against women																		
	Harmful traditional practices																		

** Italicized entries represent a subset of emphasized issues that stand out by their frequent reference*

KEY: Women Women and Men Men

SOI CATEGORIES	# DISTRICTS Women	Men
Governance	15	17
Conflict	7	11
Economy	8	9
Physical Insecurity	4	7
Gender-Based Violence	13	5

ANNEX D – SEX-DISAGGREGATED PROJECTS, BY DISTRICT

		DPP							Cycle 1						
Province	District	Total # DPP Projects	# Women	# Men	# Shared	Women + Shared	% Women	% Indicator 1.1.2	Total # Cycle 1 Projects	# Women	# Men	# Shared	Women + Shared	% Women	% Women + Both
Ghazni	Andar	93	30	51	12	42	32%	45%	33	13	15	5	18	39%	55%
	Bahrami Shahid (Jaghatu)	114	18	96	0	18	16%	16%	37	12	25	0	12	32%	32%
	Dih Yak	108	17	91	0	17	16%	16%	30	5	25	0	5	17%	17%
	Khwaja Omari	88	20	46	22	42	23%	48%	33	8	22	3	11	24%	33%
	Qarabagh	100	23	77	0	23	23%	23%	35	10	25	0	10	29%	29%
	Subtotal	**503**	**108**	**361**	**34**	**142**	**21%**	**28%**	**168**	**48**	**112**	**8**	**56**	**29%**	**33%**
Khost	Gurbuz	100	15	79	6	21	15%	21%	36	4	31	1	5	11%	14%
	Jaji Maidan	150	0	146	4	4	0%	3%	32	0	30	2	2	0%	6%
	Mandozay	150	9	135	6	15	6%	10%	34	5	29	0	5	15%	15%
	Tani	136	0	123	13	13	0%	10%	39	0	32	7	7	0%	18%
	Subtotal	**536**	**24**	**483**	**29**	**53**	**4%**	**10%**	**141**	**9**	**122**	**10**	**19**	**6%**	**13%**
Logar	Baraki Barak	147	24	55	68	92	16%	63%	46	12	16	18	30	26%	65%
	Khoshi	165	52	34	79	131	32%	79%	32	7	7	18	25	22%	78%
	Mohammad Agha	182	22	76	84	106	12%	58%	49	4	23	22	26	8%	53%
	Subtotal	**494**	**98**	**165**	**231**	**329**	**20%**	**67%**	**127**	**23**	**46**	**58**	**81**	**18%**	**64%**
Maydan Wardak	Chaki Wardak	131	22	106	3	25	17%	19%	28	5	23	0	5	18%	18%
	Jalrez	151	24	127	0	24	16%	16%	37	6	31	0	6	16%	16%
	Nirkh	114	29	66	19	48	25%	42%	39	6	29	4	10	15%	26%
	Saydabad	329	8	309	12	20	2%	6%	135	6	120	9	15	4%	11%
	Subtotal	**725**	**83**	**608**	**34**	**117**	**11%**	**16%**	**239**	**23**	**203**	**13**	**36**	**10%**	**15%**
Paktya	Ahmad Abad	137	6	131	0	6	4%	4%	30	2	28	0	2	7%	7%
	Subtotal	**137**	**6**	**131**	**0**	**6**	**4%**	**4%**	**30**	**2**	**28**	**0**	**2**	**7%**	**7%**
	TOTAL (17 districts)	**2,395**	**319**	**1,748**	**328**	**647**	**13%**	**27%**	**705**	**105**	**511**	**89**	**194**	**15%**	**28%**
	Laja Ahmad Khil	113	0	113	0	0	0%	0%	23	0	23	0	0	0%	0%
	Laja Mangal	95	0	95	0	0	0%	0%	23	0	23	0	0	0%	0%
	Zadran	65	0	65	0	0	0%	0%	22	0	22	0	0	0%	0%
	Zadran | Garda Serai	65	0	65	0	0	0%	0%	38	0	38	0	0	0%	0%
	Zurmat	69	0	69	0	0	0%	0%	20	0	20	0	0	0%	0%
	Subtotal	**407**	**0**	**407**	**0**	**0**	**0%**	**0%**	**126**	**0**	**126**	**0**	**0**	**0%**	**0%**
	TOTAL (22 districts)	**2,802**	**319**	**2,155**	**328**	**647**	**11%**	**23%**	**831**	**105**	**637**	**89**	**194**	**13%**	**23%**

U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20523
Tel: (202) 712-0000
Fax: (202) 216-3524
www.usaid.gov