Office of Transition Initiatives

COMMUNITY COHESION INITIATIVE

FINAL REPORT

OTI Mission Statement
To support U.S. foreign policy objectives by helping local partners advance peace and democracy in priority countries in crisis. Seizing critical windows of opportunity, OTI works on the ground to provide fast, flexible, short-term assistance targeted at key political transition and stabilization needs.

INTRODUCTION

Following three and a half decades of conflict, Afghanistan continues to face significant security, economic development, and governance challenges. In 2011, U.S. President Barack Obama announced plans to make large scale reductions in civilian and military presence across the country by December 2014, leaving responsibility for security to the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) National Security Forces. At the same time, the country was preparing for presidential elections in 2014 and parliamentary elections in 2015, setting the stage for potential insecurity and volatility during this transition period. Afghanistan is further plagued by economic instability and widespread poverty. Afghanistan's per capital GDP is one of the lowest in the world, and reductions in U.S. military and aid spending in correlation with the troop drawdown is expected to significantly reduce GDP. Unemployment is pervasive, especially among youth. Natural disasters, such as flooding, landslides, or earthquakes, threaten food security and take a significant toll on human life.

Communities in Afghanistan often lack faith in both the capacity and willingness of their local governing structures to address these pressing needs. Local leaders are perceived as corrupt and self-serving, and there is little expectation for things to improve. GIRoA has been largely characterized by internal divisions, lack of capacity, and corruption. State institutions at the national and local level are fragile and unable to deliver good governance nor basic services to the majority of the population. Particularly among youth, lack of opportunities for licit employment and income generation creates a sense of economic desperation and isolation. This leads to feelings of disaffection and often hopelessness: there is no one to listen to our problems or provide support. With few alternatives, large portions of the population feel marginalized and become extremely vulnerable to insurgent exploitation.

At the same time, lack of cohesion due to longstanding grievances between different political, tribal, or religious groups threaten stability, as groups lack trust and become unwilling to cooperate around issues of mutual concern. This can lead to conflict, particularly around natural resources, and creates a sense of isolation as communities do not perceive each other as allies as they work toward their respective goals. Coupled with the lack of economic opportunities, this sense of isolation leaves communities open to further exploitation by Anti-Government Elements (AGE) especially as they provide financial incentives and offer feelings of belonging and self-reliance. As Afghanistan continued through its transition period toward the 2014 and 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections, communities required assistance in building linkages both with government entities and among themselves to strengthen resilience to this kind of exploitation. At the same time, GIRoA required support to understand its role in understanding and responding to the complex needs of its constituents at the district, provincial, and national levels.

Within this context, through the Afghanistan Community Cohesion Initiative (CCI), USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) sought to increase resilience in areas vulnerable to insurgent exploitation in support of the following objectives:

(1) strengthen community capacities to promote a peaceful transition;

(2) support peaceful electoral processes and outcomes; and

(3) counter violent threats to a peaceful transition.

CCI was implemented from March 1, 2012 through February 29, 2015, by Creative Associates International, Inc. (Creative) with a broad range of activities in the east, south and southwest, as well as national level activities implemented from Kabul.

CCI APPROACH

In response to these challenges and to contribute to increased community resilience, OTI through Creative implemented a program to strengthen community capacities to promote a peaceful transition, support peaceful electoral processes and outcomes, and counter violent threats to a peaceful transition. At project start-up, the program aimed to increase resilience in areas vulnerable to insurgent exploitation by (1) strengthening ties between local actors, customary governance structures, and GIRoA and (2) increasing cohesion among and between communities. In the early stages of the program, CCI primarily focused on small scale infrastructure activities, such as school rehabilitation, along with skills building and vocational activities, like carpentry and tailoring training. These were implemented primarily through Cohesion jirgas, with local government officials providing valuable input.

Creative-CCI's experience during initial implementation demonstrated that a bottom-up approach (working with communities, schools, and representative associations at the local level) yielded more successful activity outcomes than top-down. In some districts, it was a challenge to secure genuine government buy-in to the CCI program, although community leaders often proved to be enthusiastic supporters and prominent drivers of activities. Project shuras were formed to cooperatively partner and engage through formal CCI project maintenance agreements, overseeing ownership obligations, monitoring timelines, and encouraging grassroots support. These were viewed by communities as influential in securing local employment and demonstrated to be very effective implementation partners.

Initially, some local governments were more comfortable working in areas in which they already held influence and were reluctant to expand to more remote areas. CCI teams strove to overcome this reluctance by jointly developing communications and branding strategies with provincial and district governors, advocating the public perception advantages and political capital associated with engaging more neglected communities. Proactive direct and broader media communications around program activities allowed the government to be seen as taking the lead in community development efforts by explaining reasons for supporting particular civic projects and justifying support from communities as well. These communications additionally assisted in countering adverse or incorrect information in the public domain. For example, during an opening ceremony in Khost community members expressed concern and confusion after a local radio station alleged illegal building of a boundary wall funded by Creative-CCI around the municipal museum. The appearance of high-ranking government officials accompanied by the project shura and community elders built credibility for the project and clarified questions; ultimately the project was unanimously supported.

Following initial implementation, it became clear that while CCI's original goal and objectives provided a broad scope under which to implement activities, a more defined strategy would enable the project to have greater impact. The freedom provided by the original objectives became burdensome, and without a more detailed strategy the program struggled to define specific aims. Creative-CCI and OTI further identified the need to begin programming around the upcoming 2014 presidential elections, yet these activities did not fit well on the objectives as-written. Informed by the experiences detailed above, Creative-CCI and OTI engaged in discussions to revisit the program strategy. Demonstrating flexibility and a collaborative, one-team approach, in mid-2013 Creative-CCI and OTI revised the national objectives and developed a more clearly defined set of intermediate objectives based upon experience in implementation to enhance impact.

CCI Revised Objectives

National Objective 1: To strengthen community capacities to promote a peaceful transition.

Intermediate Objectives:

1. *To demonstrate the value of inclusion, peaceful co-existence and/or collaboration between different communities or groups.*
2. *To support the legitimacy of the local government and/or community leaders.*
3. *To strengthen communities' desire and ability to resolve disputes peacefully.*
4. *To build community capacity to engage in civic advocacy in pursuit of greater transparency and accountability.*
5. *To establish local relationships and/or situational awareness to enable further program engagement.*

National Objective 2: To support peaceful electoral processes and outcomes.

Intermediate Objectives:

1. *To support community-driven efforts to prevent or mitigate electoral conflict or violence.*
2. *To enable community-level stakeholders to identify, report, and manage electoral conflict or violence.*
3. *To develop or promote non-violent means of mediating disputed campaign or electoral practices.*

National Objective 3: To counter violent threats to a peaceful transition.

Intermediate Objectives:

1. *To increase educational opportunities.*
2. *To increase opportunities for licit employment and income generation.*
3. *To increase opportunities that build a sense of belonging and self-esteem based on non-violent characteristics.*
4. *To increase the exposure of individuals and institutions which reject violence as an acceptable way of achieving goals.*
5. *To foster tolerance and trust among different identity groups.*

Resilient communities, defined as those able to withstand and resist adverse influences, are one of the factors that contribute to achieving sufficient stability in transition counties. In order to build resilience, communities must be cohesive, or able to come together around goals and to solve problems, and must create strong linkages with existing governing institutions. CCI aimed to support community-level civil society, leaders, and governing bodies to prioritize and discuss community needs and grievances, work toward common goals, engage in cooperative problem solving, and manage common resources. CCI helped to support more effective communication with governing bodies and improved community perception of existing institutions; at the same time, the program helped to empower these institutions to understand and respond to the needs of their communities.

At the heart of Creative-CCI's approach is the focus on community and citizen engagement, and strengthening ties between and among local actors, customary governance structures, and GIRoA. Grounded in the principle that durable resilience and cohesion is a result of local will, initiative, and leadership, Creative-CCI designed and implemented small grants through a process-oriented, community driven approach. This approach seeks to strengthen linkages between vulnerable communities and positive influencers - both GIRoA and other actors. At a regional level, Creative-CCI integrated "soft" (Community Cohesion jirgas, outreach visits by district government) with "hard" (small-scale infrastructure) activities to strengthen community resiliencies and linkages between vulnerable communities and customary leadership, increasing community cohesion in the process. The Program Development Unit (PDU) supported innovative and proof-of-concept initiatives both nationally and at the local level. These activities sought to connect the bottom-up regional activities with the top-down national-level initiatives

by bringing to scale demonstrably successful regional activities and by designing and testing new approaches to advancing CCI's national objectives.

To identify and prioritize activities, CCI conducted initial engagement and information gathering within communities, engaging in dialogue at the district and community level, usually through a community cohesion jirga. As needs and priorities were identified within communities, these were discussed and developed at the district, regional, and provincial levels in consultation with CCI and OTI. By working within communities and engaging local stakeholders, such as local community leaders, religious leaders, shura heads, and GIRoA representatives, activity identification and development reflected the needs and priorities of the community. This approach centered on cooperation and inclusion as critical to ensuring local ownership and community buy-in, as well as contributing to program objectives by providing space for multiple stakeholders to work together around common problems.

Utilizing an "ink blot" expansion approach, CCI conducted initial activities in areas in which there had been previous donor work before expanding to more remote districts and villages. In many cases, CCI represented the first engagement between the international development community and citizens in these villages. In many districts, participants expressed that CCI activities also represented the only instances of GIRoA community engagement in their region.

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Headquartered in Kabul with an office in AMTEX village in Kandahar, CCI undertook operations in seven non-permissive provinces in the East, South East and South (Kunar, Khost, Ghazni, Zabul, Uruzghan, Kandahar and Helmand).[1] Due to the nature of the operating environment in these provinces, the program employed a unique "Afghan-first" approach to ensure the safety and security of all national staff. Creative-CCI's security team established strong channels of communication with its local national security staff to build trust, and worked with an informative local national contact system. Coupled with robust analysis, this approach was instrumental in maintaining security throughout the program.

Security concerns impacted program implementation across all districts and at the national level. The security situation delayed delivery of goods, increased the prices of commodities, and prevented people from attending trainings and opening and closing events. For example, in Kandahar, one of CCI's first activities constructed a school in Spin Boldak district. Within six weeks, the school was targeted by an improvised explosive device (IED). Security concerns became more pronounced across all districts in direct correlation with the draw down and reduction of International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) in late 2014 and early 2015. Still, in spite of this complex and volatile operating environment, over the course of the three-year program, there was not one major security incident impacting CCI's staff, a milestone achievement for the program. CCI attributes this to a combination of well-thought out processes and strategic security planning, as well as maintaining strong and positive working relationships with local government and security actors.

In addition to security, potential for corruption and nepotism presented significant threats the legitimacy of the program in the eyes of citizens by undermining cohesion within communities, as well as created financial risk to both Creative and OTI. Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index places Afghanistan 175 out of 177 countries in the grading of corruption in the public sectors. Given the volatile security environment, CCI was unable to deploy expatriate staff to provincial and district offices, creating remote management challenges and exposing the program to substantial financial risk. Creative-CCI worked to identify trustworthy and capable local staff to lead activities in these areas, and put in place robust management practices to limit potential for corruption. CCI identified primary risks of corruption in the interactions between the program staff, government counterparts and service providers. CCI established robust practices to mitigate these risks. Activity management systems were designed to promote transparency and trust, both among stakeholders and between Creative-CCI and stakeholders. Project shuras, GIRoA representatives and community leaders were publicly bonded to ensure maximum beneficiary understanding and respect for the engagement process. Commitments made in the presence of their constituency made it difficult for GIRoA grantees to ask for special favors, and also contributed to

[1] Offices in Zabul and Uruzghan closed mid-2012; the Kandahar AMTEX office closed in mid-2013. The remaining provincial offices closed in November and December 2014, and the Kabul headquarters closed in February 2015.

greater accountability. In the same way, community elders were limited in asking for exceptional favors for their members, as all elders were represented equally in project shuras. When special requests persisted, local staff presented the situation to senior management who assumed the responsibility and intervened to diplomatically deny the associated request. These inclusive and transparent practices not only mitigated financial risk and prevented nepotism and favoritism, but also contributed to CCI's goal of community cohesion.

As an internal control, CCI established an Internal Verification Unit (IVU), reporting to and serving an Investigation Committee staffed by senior management and, as needed, regional program managers. Allegations of impropriety or management findings could be referred to the internal investigation team who, from a neutral position, could travel to project offices and sites to further investigate claims, evidence, and possible causes. The existence of an internal, mobile, and unbiased team ensured that staff time and effort was not lost to issues that might derail the program.

ANALYSIS OF PROGRESS TOWARD OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: Strengthen community capacities to promote a peaceful transition.

Demonstrate the value of inclusion, peaceful coexistence, and/or collaboration between different groups or communities

Under this intermediate objective, CCI worked to demonstrate to disputing communities the benefits that can result when they are able to work together, in an effort to create greater stability and cooperation. Activities included small infrastructure projects that provided an opportunity for different communities to work together or collaborate. Other activities shared messages that encouraged the idea of peaceful coexistence or collaboration, emphasizing that all people have a stake in the future of the country. For example, Creative-CCI created and produced *Innocent Heart*, a six-party weekly Pashto drama serial focuses on community and citizen engagement (NAT0040, NAT0041, NAT0042). Written and produced in-house by a team of experienced Afghan drama writers and producers, with on-location recording and post-production completed in partnership with Tolo (a local television company), the concept was also adapted for radio to broadcast nationally in a 10-part series. *Innocent Heart* demonstrated how strengthened ties between local actors and customary governance structures deliver tangible personal, family and community benefits.

***Crew observing filming of* Innocent Heart**

Innocent Heart centered on Kabir, a 12-year-old boy naively manipulated by insurgents into planting an improvised explosive device (IED) that kills three people, including his best friend and his brother-in-law. While the attack itself is visually and emotionally confronting, episodes leading to the tragic event portray a cast of fundamentally good, although sometimes deeply flawed individuals, striving for a better life. Drawn from different ages, genders, educational backgrounds and societal roles, they are all individually and devastatingly affected by the explosion, only heightening the senselessness of Kabir's actions and the unforeseen sequential chain of events that follows.

The story is set in the lead up to fictitious presidential and provincial council elections, and storylines focus on the importance of a peaceful electoral process (parliamentary elections are in 2015). Other themes include promoting the rights and roles of women within society, fostering positive self-images for young Afghans, and strengthening linkages between the community and GIRoA. The series discreetly references Creative-CCI project outcomes,

such as road rehabilitation, tailoring courses for women and basketball training camps for girls, and how these contribute to improved community resilience.

Innocent Heart's veracious messaging offers pathways where viewers can recognize how communities come together to foster a better future for themselves and their families. *Innocent Heart* represents a better future for Afghanistan, with innovative scripts showing how community led advocacy for local and broader governance organizations, recognition that democratic rule of law and improved cohesive structures can effectively resist insurgent activity, promote peace and stability and lead to better opportunities. Drama is an effective medium to share these messages, because it provides entertainment and captures the imagination, all while tapping into emotion by developing characters with which people can identify. Television and radio helped ensure the program had a broad reach, especially given low literacy rates across the country.

Director and Art Director review footage during production

CCI expanded the reach of the production by adapting the series for radio broadcast. CCI also aired a series of innovative radio roundtable discussions to further explore themes highlighted in the drama, such as the benefits of peace, the responsibility of parents and communities with regards to children, and the importance of countering and resisting insurgent influences. Representatives from the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and the Peace Council, writers and actors from the series, academics, educators, and leaders in the business community, all took part in the discussion series.

As noted above, other activities under this intermediate objective included small infrastructure projects that provided two or more different communities or groups an opportunity to work together toward mutually beneficial outcomes. After issue identification, CCI award in-kind grants to support projects such as rehabilitating roads, constructing water gates and culverts, or enhancing security at schools. For example, in Shamal River Valley, perpetual flooding destroys crops, and damages clinics, schools, shops and homes. This has a devastating effect upon livelihoods and the tenuous infrastructure that supports these riverside rural communities. Historically, communities living along the Shamal River worked together to prepare their villages for the wet months, but that cooperation has all but disappeared over the past three and half decades of armed conflict. Local disputes over resources, such as timber, have also undermined cooperation between flood-prone communities, leaving many villages more vulnerable than before. In response, Creative-CCI partnered with the Shamal district governor's office to bring communities together to help vulnerable villages prepare for and respond to the threat of flooding. Through a grant, the district government hosted a flood preparedness and response training course for 40 elders and 20 youth, from Khalwati, Doya Khail, Anar Bagh, Laki Khail, Domando, and Zakara villages. District officials regularly visited these training sessions to monitor the instruction quality and progress. It was the first activity of this kind ever implemented in Shamal.

At a community event marking the launch of the course, the district governor emphasized the value this training can bring to affected villages and encouraged participants to learn as much as possible from the training, for the sake of their families and neighbors. "Unfortunately, deforestation has caused the flooding in our district to worsen over the past few years," he said. "It is important for our communities that you attend every session." Following the training, the 60 participants formalized linkages developed during the activity by establishing the Shamal flood prevention shura. The shura went on to develop a comprehensive, cooperative flood preparedness and response plan, to be implemented ahead of the next wet season.

Support the legitimacy of the local government and/or community leaders

Local governance mechanisms, both formal and informal, that are perceived as legitimate can help to facilitate a peaceful political transition. If governing structures are not perceived as responsive to the needs of its citizens, or they are viewed as corrupt and self-serving, citizens are unlikely to view these structures as legitimate. This creates an opportunity for insurgent groups to operate as an alternative, especially if these groups provide economic incentives or appear responsive to service delivery needs. Local officials are often unaware of the major problems facing their districts and provinces, and are out of touch with the needs of their communities. GIRoA offices often lack the resources, capacity, and at times political will to address needs even if they are aware of these.

In response, CCI worked extensively with local government officials throughout the project to enable them to identify priorities within communities and respond effectively. Activities included numerous small-scale infrastructure and development projects requested by constituents to their government, such as construction and/or rehabilitation of roads, canals, schools, culverts, flood walls, and other infrastructure. For example, in Kunar's Sarkani district, CCI was able to support the Sarkani Public Health Department to upgrade the Sarkani Markazi Clinic, from Basic Health Center status to a Comprehensive Health Center (SAR0037). For years Sarkani residents had highlighted the need for government to provide better public healthcare. Therefore the announcement that the clinic's interior rooms would be substantially renovated, along with the site's surrounding wall, was met with wide-spread approval.

Like many of CCI's activities, the Sarkani Markazi Clinic represented the first point of interaction between residents of remote villages and the government. It helped to foster belief that the government is interested and willing to work towards providing better public services. In the early stages of the rehabilitation project, the Kunar Director of Public Health reiterated this with a public statement announcing that, when the facility reopened, clinic staff would include a female nurse to increase accessibility for women and girls. Before an audience of community elders and government officials, the public health official also acknowledged the significance of the activity in transforming an important public facility, in order to offer such a vital community service. A prominent religious cleric and member of the Ulema shura formally thanked the district government for taking an important step toward enhancing healthcare for so many residents. He continued by saying community-driven rehabilitation projects not only improve public services but also "reconcile broken hearts and minds in communities weakened by poverty and violence."

Director of Public Health opening the clinic

CCI also provided assistance to GIRoA in conducting outreach with constituents through dialogue and outreach sessions. Community members were invited to participate in sessions and share a meal with their government officials, providing the opportunity to build relationships and share concerns and priorities. Other activities included outreach activities such as public service announcements to expand awareness of the role of the local government. Finally, throughout the program, CCI also provided training to 745 GIRoA officials in areas such as strategic communications, management, or budgeting, to strengthen the capacity of the government to respond to needs of citizens.

As noted above, many of CCI's activities represented the first engagement between local communities and their governments, particularly as the project expanded from district centers out to more remote villages. Communities primarily demanded infrastructure projects, such as constructing culverts and schools, as well as vocational trainings and security improvements. Through the project, not only were these demands met, but communities began to see their local government as an entity that could effectively see and respond to requests. This leads to increasing numbers of citizens reaching out to their local governments with concerns. As CCI prepared to depart from Kunar province, one of the district governors remarked that previously he rarely came to his office and his engagement with his district was extremely limited. As CCI expanded in his district more and more people come to visit the office, the district governor began to see how he could respond to their needs. Through CCI, he was empowered to be active in promoting development in the district, and explained that the program had helped him to step fully into his role as district governor.

Strengthen communities' desire and ability to resolve disputes peacefully

Afghanistan has a history of utilizing traditional localized, dispute resolution (TDR) mechanisms to resolve local conflicts in the absence of effective government mechanisms. These informal bodies may resolve land disputes, reintegrate former insurgents into society, and lend legitimacy to local governance structures. Dispute resolution is critical to both the transition and sustainable development, as issues like land disputes can cause instability over a large area, leave land undeveloped, undermine livelihoods and create opportunities for those interested in destabilizing the country. Since these TDR bodies are community-based, they are often times highly effective at analyzing the conflict and coming to a resolution that is beneficial to the entire community.

TDR mechanisms have occasionally been threatened by insurgent activity, but in other instances they have actually grown in importance due to the lack of predictable, stable state justice institutions. Yet their connections to existing Afghan government institutions are weak, particularly in areas where insurgent activity has frustrated traditional state-building approaches. Building off strong relationships built with local elders who are key components of the TDR process, CCI worked with a local civil society organization and three existing provincial-level traditional leader networks to provide increased dispute resolution support to provincial and district GIRoA as well as community shuras and jirgas. CCI's TDR activities sought to establish linkages between official legal structures and traditional mechanisms through the inclusion of traditional leaders, community elders, district GIRoA and provincial GIRoA. By doing so, the program aimed to strengthen communities' desire and capacity to resolve disputes peacefully and thereby promote a peaceful transition. Activities included providing training to TDR leaders, establishing legal resource centers, training justice support workers, and supporting case referral activities.

For example, Creative-CCI partnered with a local civil society group to strengthen existing provincial-level traditional leader networks to provide increased dispute resolution support to provincial and district GIRoA as well as community shuras and jirgas (NAT0043). NECDO utilized a training of trainers (TOT) model to educate Imams, community shura leaders, activists, and teachers, on peace, conflict resolution, dispute resolution, human rights, women's rights, and the role of religious leaders in supporting a peaceful transition in Afghanistan. When selecting trainees, Creative-CCI made special efforts to ensure women shura leaders and activists were represented in the training efforts. After developing a training manual, NECDO conducted four rounds of TOT workshops in three target provinces (Kandahar, Kabul, and Kunar), training a total of 124 men and 138 women. NECDO further established three provincial Community Working Groups (CWGs), comprised of the trainees, to engage in community advocacy and conflict management.

NECDO organized a three-day dispute resolution and capacity building workshop with 46 representatives from Kandahar, Kabul and Kunar CWGs. The sessions encouraged sharing experiences from different provinces to develop best practices and skill sets in key areas relating to dispute resolution, human rights advocacy, and negotiating tactics. Discussions focused on how best practices and lessons learned from the respective provinces can be integrated into future activities to promote the value of dispute resolution and encourage a peaceful transition. The workshop was an excellent opportunity to bring different groups together, including ulumas, women, youth and tribal elders, and represented the first occasion ulumas and imams from Kandahar had sat together with women in such a forum. Participants expressed that the project had helped strengthen their understanding of the value of community dispute resolution mechanisms, and that it had enhance their knowledge of human rights issues in Afghanistan, including those of women. A mullah who came from Kandahar said, "The CWGs are a good idea and more effective because this is a volunteer approach to dispute resolution at the community level."

Another TDR activity involved training justice support workers (NAT0036). Many citizens find it difficult to address legal concerns because they do not have the requisite knowledge of the law and their rights. A justice support worker can help guide people through the legal aspects of presenting their cases. CCI partnered with a local civil society organization to recruit and train justice support workers on Afghan legal frameworks. Each worker was responsible for a cluster of villages in one district. Each district contained multiple clusters, also referred to as a 'Hawza', served by two male and one female justice support workers. In order to improve the coordination between formal and informal justice actors, the JSWs and trainers organized two-day discussion jirga meetings with district judges, prosecutors, and legal representatives to establish working relations between them and communities. This component strengthened and linked formal and community-based justice institutions to allow for a form of mutual assurance. By doing so, it allowed less space for competing justice actors such as the Taliban. As part of this

activity, CCI through its partner further established legal resource centers with packages of laws and relevant books to provide resources to people at the district level.

Build community capacity to engage in civic advocacy in pursuit of greater transparency and accountability

The ability of civil society and community groups to articulate community needs and grievances to governing institutions is necessary for stability. Civil society plays a key role in ensuring communities are able to come together around common issues, fostering a sense of shared purpose and cooperation. Creative-CCI undertook activities to strengthen the capacity of Afghan civil society organizations and community groups to engage in civic advocacy around priority issues, such as infrastructure development or enhanced service delivery.

For example, urban growth in Kabul province has far outpaced the ability of its municipal and district governments to deliver services. With the province's population rapidly growing, peripheral districts are now physically merging with Kabul City, bringing the problems of the countryside, including the influence of anti-government elements (AGEs), ever closer to the capital itself. Common problems in the slums of Kabul include limited access to social services, such as education and health care, as well as water access, poverty, unemployment, and land and property rights issues. If communities and government institutions in these areas cannot mitigate the harmful effects of urbanization, they will become increasingly restive vectors for extremism, organized crime, and violent anti-government activities. In response, CCI supported Equality for Peace and Democracy (EPD) to formally establish youth networks in three districts in Kabul province to identify community priorities, develop advocacy action plans, and implement community improvement projects (NAT0031).

Typically, these communities expected the government and the international aid community to come in, identify priorities, and implement projects to address these issues. CCI's urbanization activities sought to adjust these expectations by helping participates to identify their own priorities and come together to advocate for support in addressing their concerns. Through the creation of formalized networks, youth began to recognize the value of their own voices in demanding enhanced service delivery and strengthened their understanding of their legal rights and responsibilities. The youth networks demonstrated to youth participants the value of bringing people together around common issues. The youth networks used EPD's Afghan Coalition for Transparency and Accountability (ACTA) platform and provided resources and support to implement six small community improvement activities. The youth networks provided a safe space for communities to come together and share ideas before the association would bring these ideas to line ministries and GIRoA officials. By formalizing the associations into structures recognized by the ministries and the government, the activity created a link between the communities GIRoA.

> We have had a lot of problems in terms of fighting crop disease and were thoroughly incapable of finding solutions to prevent the losses we had. However, the training provided us with the kinds of help we were looking for. Now, people from different parts of the district including the DAIL come up with ideas at the Association that others could use to prevent crops from natural disasters. – *Farmer from Sarkani*

CCI also provided support to informal civil society institutions. For example, in Marawara (MRW0010), an insecure border district in Kunar, CCI helped the district governor establish an association of farmers to discuss shared interests, such as improving crop yields or protecting the region from floods. Members of the association benefitted from training in seasonal crop planning and bookkeeping during the activity. Where there had previously existed unorganized cooperatives in the region, the activity brought these together into one umbrella organization. The group was formally registered in Kunar province with the Ministry of Justice and Directorate of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (DAIL) officials and continued to meet following the close of the activity. A similar activity in Sarkani (SAR0015) empowered local farmers by providing them a networking space where people from different parts of the district could come together and exchange ideas about challenges faced in the agriculture sector. By gathering farmers from different communities together around topics of common interest, this activity demonstrated how cooperation can strengthen communal voices and built the foundation for stronger relationships among the agricultural community. Further, activities were led by district government officials, creating a sense of trust in the local government and building its legitimacy.

Establish relationships or situational awareness to enable further engagement

Under this intermediate objective, Creative-CCI utilized community cohesion jirgas to begin the process of community engagement between CCI, the district governor, and local stakeholders. These activities worked to strengthen cohesion among stakeholders by supporting regular meetings that would engage GIRoA officials, Wakeels,[2] and community leaders on sources of instability, resiliencies and community priorities. Discussions also focused on the current state and importance of district government relationship with the community, introduction of CCI program, community actors, leaders, and organizations, impact of this project on the community's relationship with GIRoA, sources of instability in the community, potential community solutions, outcomes of community support to GIRoA, and vice versa. Over the course of the program, Creative-CCI implemented 15 Jirga activities to commence its engagement in a district.

Objective 2: Support peaceful electoral processes and outcomes.

Afghanistan's 2014 presidential and 2015 parliamentary elections are critical to a peaceful and legitimate political transition. In 2013, in consultation with OTI, Creative-CCI began exploring potential areas of engagement surrounding the 2014 electoral process. Creative-CCI and OTI identified numerous threats to the electoral process: clashes between political factions, sectarian or tribal political infighting during campaigns, opportunistic violence to close the voting or monitoring process in key districts, voter intimidation (either from AGE or rival parties), and post-election violence related to electoral outcomes. Creative-CCI's electoral support strategy therefore aimed to address violent threats to and around the electoral process, both before and after the elections.

In an effort to better inform programming choices to prevent electoral conflict, Creative-CCI worked to complete a mapping exercise to inform predictive analysis of electoral violence, and action research to better understand how Afghans define credibility in electoral processes. Creative-CCI also implemented a targeted election message campaign in the lead up to, on, and after Election Day. Following the announcement of a presidential run-off election, Creative-CCI disseminated additional messages to encourage peaceful voting in the second round. Finally, from July through September, 2014, Creative-CCI rapidly mobilized 40 international election observers to participate in an audit of the second-round election ballots. The audit, led by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and observed by international and national observers, intended to review 100 percent of ballots in the highly contested run-off. Activities were developed and implemented at the national level with significant technical oversight by the CCI Program Development Unit (PDU).

Support community-driven efforts to prevent or mitigate electoral conflict or violence

Creative-CCI's Peaceful Election Advocacy Campaign developed and disseminated messages to counter electoral violence and support peaceful behavior through the entire electoral cycle. These peaceful election messages were designed and validated in focus groups which involved representatives from multiple areas of Afghan society and key electoral stakeholders, such as the IEC and observer groups. The pre-election and Election Day focus groups were meant to design different messages to correspond to the local context and that were appropriate for that phase. For example, while pre-election day messages focused on importance of participation in elections, Election Day messages included a message calling voters to wait for the results peacefully.

Creative-CCI disseminated its messages in print format and through various media, such as radio, television, and social media, in provincial level dialogues, and in stakeholder meetings with the IEC, Afghan National Police (ANP), provincial governors, and district governors. Over the entire electoral period, more than 285,000 printed materials were distributed with the CCI-developed messages (including approximately 101,397 printed by the IEC). As of September 16, 2014, there were a total of 14,959 radio PSAs and 1,001 television PSAs. In October 2014, the project broadcast two new "The future of Afghanistan is in our hands" public service announcements on the radio.

[2] Wakeels are local government officials which work for a local mayor by overseeing a sub-district.

Sample posted developed under the Peaceful Election Advocacy Campaign

The campaign was implemented by Afghanistan Amputee Bicyclists Recreation and Rehabilitation (AABRAR) in Ghazni, Kunar and Kandahar, and by AidTrends in Hilmand and Khost. These provinces were targeted as those more susceptible to electoral violence. Alongside the AABRAR and AidTrends activities, most of the media campaign was CCI-led using messages/themes from the AABRAR and AidTrends focus groups. This project component also sought to build these civil society partners' capacity to design and disseminate peaceful messages in the future and build relationships among them and the government stakeholders. In so doing, it created a sustainable electoral peace infrastructure in place to de-conflict future electoral cycles—beginning with the 2015 process.

Creative-CCI maintained close and positive working relationships with members of the IEC throughout the election messaging activities. The IEC public outreach managers reviewed messages developed by CCI's electoral conflict prevention advisors and provided feedback and suggestions, which was utilized to strengthen messages prior to dissemination. CCI also worked with IEC provincial election offices to ensure that materials developed under this activity were distributed in the provinces.

Enable community-level stakeholders to identify, report, and manage electoral conflict or violence

Alongside the Peaceful Election Advocacy Campaign, Creative-CCI also conducted Action Research activities to better understand the Afghan elections landscape. The purpose of this component was two-fold. First, it was to conduct a series of predictive analyses of electoral violence and elections dynamics based on past elections, and second, to conduct research to understand what Afghans mean by credible and legitimate elections. The main goal was to produce analysis that would inform CCI programming choices for preventing electoral conflict around the 2014 elections.

For geospatial analysis, Creative-CCI contracted DigitalGlobe (DG) which drew on a wide range of open-source databases and accompanying narrative analysis. The analyses started at a national level covering a range of previous election dynamics, identified 13 target provinces as high-risk for electoral violence which catalyzed a more detailed analysis of the risk characteristics of these provinces. Finally, DG analyzed the actual electoral dynamics of the 2014 April 4 election across the 13 at-risk provinces (the data for the second round and audit, i.e. 'through to the transition of power' per NAT0011C (procurement clearance form) was not made available for this assessment report).

In parallel to the predictive analysis, Creative-CCI conducted targeted small action research activities in Uruzgan, Khost, Kandahar, Kabul, Hilman, Ghazni, and Kunar, addressing the longstanding lack of understanding of the different localized Afghan perspectives on elections. The research covered the evolving local narratives and community perspectives on credible electoral processes and legitimate electoral outcomes over the course of the presidential election, from round one through to the audit and post-audit climate. Three service providers prepared methodological approaches and completed two research reports, one for each phase. For each phase, the service providers facilitated 10 semi-structured individual interviews per province and 12 focus group discussions per province, totaling 75 semi-structured interviews and 166 focus group discussions. Samples were structured to capture a cross section of society including ethnic/tribal variations, urban and rural population, as well as the role of gender, literacy and wealth in attitudes on elections.

Creative-CCI conducted research to explore generation- and ethnic/tribe-specific patterns, differences between urban and rural population, as well as the role of gender, literacy and wealth in attitudes on elections. The main criteria for inviting participants for focus groups were urban/rural, gender and ethnicity/tribe. Literacy and wealth were considered a sub-criteria to invite participants through random and diverse recruitment of participants for each of the focus groups.

Develop or promote non-violent means of mediating disputed campaign or electoral processes

Following the announcement of an IEC-led audit of second-round election ballots, Creative-CCI joined an international election observation effort to monitor the audit process. The audit was part of a July 12 agreement brokered by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and required the quick mobilization of both national and international observers. The election audit sought to alleviate the political deadlock between the two presidential candidates, which was raising political tensions and threatening to devolve into violence. The presence of both international and national observers aimed to bolster confidence in the IEC election results.

Creative-CCI deployed 40 international election observers[3] from July through September. Approximately 200 international observers from Creative-CCI, the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and other USAID implementing partners participated in the audit. Creative-CCI's observers traveled daily to the audit center to observe the IEC audit of individual ballot boxes. Both international and national observers observed auditors using a checklist developed by the IEC with support from the UN. The Creative team observed 2,625 ballot boxes, approximately 12 percent of the 22,828 polling stations subject to the audit. Despite substantial procedural and operational challenges, the IEC auditors and UNDP advisors performed well during an operation that was hastily assembled.

In light of these limitations, international and national observers determined that the IEC conducted a credible but imperfect audit operation. The IEC could have benefitted from additional planning and preparation time before starting to design an audit system that properly sequenced ballot box review, sub-quarantined suspect boxes based on initial irregularity criteria, and maintained a more technical exercise (versus one influenced by political interests and social incentives for expedited audit results decisions). Creative-CCI's conclusions are supported by data collected during the audit operations and analysis of the legal and policy frameworks empowering the audit and the key operational periods in which the process was conducted.

Given that the audit observation was largely financed and led by the international community, the process may have detracted from the perceived capacity of existing electoral institutions to manage a disputed electoral process. It is widely maintained that without the international community's involvement, the two candidates would have been unable to find a compromise. This was underscored by the fact that the audit both commenced and halted following the negotiations brokered by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. Still, the audit process and subsequent power-sharing agreement was instrumental in relieving the deadlock and potential conflict that threatened the country in the weeks following the second round election. As such, the election audit proved critical as a nonviolent means to mediate the disputed electoral process.

Creative-CCI international observer team, Kabul, 2014

[3] Creative-CCI recruited and deployed 40 observers plus one team lead; of these, one observer was repatriated due to injury.

Objective 3: Counter violent threats to a peaceful transition

Increasing educational opportunities

One potential driver of violent behavior, particularly among youth, is a lack of educational opportunities, which tends to push them into other activities both out of boredom and a sense of hopelessness about their opportunities for building a fulfilling life. Attaining a higher education remains a challenge for many Afghan high school graduates, creating a youth demographic that is increasingly frustrated, vulnerable to malign influence, and a threat to overall stability across the country. According to the Ministry of Education, 30,000 to 50,000 students graduate 12th grade across the country each year. Of this group, only a third gain entry into universities. Insurgent groups particularly target these idle youth for recruitment as they are often energetic, malleable, and have few alternative opportunities.

A female student receives a certificate for completing a university entrance exam prep course, Kandahar, 2013

Creative-CCI supported 53 activities focused on expanding educational opportunities available to youth. For example, Creative-CCI partnered with the Kandahar University Chancellor's Office and the provincial governor of Kandahar to develop an internship opportunity to provide youth with an opportunity to work within Afghan civil service, gaining new and practical skills, enhancing networks and establishing mentoring relationships. In total, the program hired 85 interns, of which more than 60 were offered permanent employment within various GIRoA ministerial departments. Mohammad Omar was an under-graduate engineering faculty student who through his internship was introduced to work experience at the Directorate of Urban Development Affairs. "This is a huge achievement for me, as I am able to draft plans, maps and apply budget analysis on real projects, under the supervision of experienced engineers," he said.

Other activities included infrastructure projects primarily focused on building and refurbishing schools, often building new gates or security walls to enhance safety for schoolchildren. Creative-CCI rehabilitated 77 schools, providing access to new or rehabilitated educational facilities for more than 99,000 people. In remote areas particularly susceptible to insurgent activity, young students are taught by poorly qualified teachers because educated teachers are unwilling to work in isolated and insecure communities. As a result, students are ill-prepared for higher level education. In 11 districts, Creative-CCI provided grants to local education leaders to provide preparation courses for university entrance exams or lead literacy tutoring courses.

Increase opportunities for licit employment and income generation

Women participate in tailoring training in Muqur district, Ghazni, 2014

As with lack of education, lack of opportunity to make a living and establish a respectable family life is another factor which can push youth into violent extremist activities as a way of generating income and respect for themselves in certain communities. While unemployment rates in Afghanistan are unreliable, recent estimates from the International Labor Organization (ILO) indicate that as many as 8 in 10 Afghan youth desiring full-time employment are unskilled day laborers without access to steady and licit income. Further, unemployment disproportionately impacts youth, which represent an estimated 68 percent of the population. Lack of economic opportunity makes this demographic

particularly susceptible to insurgent recruitment efforts and threatens stability in communities.

In response to growing economic vulnerability, Creative-CCI supported 80 activities reaching 7,171 beneficiaries with vocational trainings, internship or scholarship programs, and support to business associations aimed at increasing youth employment. Vocational trainings focused on building skills, such as tailoring, beautician skills, carpentry, masonry, plumbing, or carpet-weaving. Trainings encouraged attendees to consider starting their own small businesses and included sessions on financial and business management practices. For example, women in tailoring trainings were given advice on how to begin sewing clothes for members of their extended families in the privacy and security of their own homes, as employment opportunities outside of the home are virtually nonexistent for women. In addition to providing valuable skills, trainings provided a unique opportunity for women to come together in a safe and culturally acceptable manner.

Creative-CCI conducted mobile phone technician training in Marawara, an unsecure district in the eastern province of Kunar. Mobile phone usage in Afghanistan exceeds 20 million individuals according to USAID's *A Survey of Afghanistan Women's Access to Mobile Technology: May 2013*, with mobile coverage around 88 percent of the country's population of 30 million. This sector is a major driver of the Afghan economy and the biggest non-government employer, aside from subsistence agriculture. In collaboration with the district governor, the 8-week intensive training program reached 50 male youth, followed by a month long apprenticeship period overseen by a project monitoring shura that reported back to the wider community. Qualified technicians from existing mobile phone shops in Marawara and nearby Asadabad conducted the training sessions, providing practical knowledge through first hand sector experience, together with possible links to future employment opportunities. "This is a golden opportunity for our youth to obtain valuable insight into a rapidly expanding business area and learn what is required to become part of it; and even how to start a small business with very little investment," the district governor explained to attendees at the closing ceremony. One trainee added, "[m]any youth are uneducated in our community, but they still need to support their families. This training is a chance for us to fulfill this."

Youth participate in mobile phone technician training, Marawara district, Kunar

In addition to specific training and income-generation activities, over the course of the three-year program, Creative-CCI's activities combined created more than 700,000 days of employment for over 15,000 people.

Increase opportunities that build sense of belonging and self-esteem based on non-violent characteristics

For youth, a lack of access to normal recreational activities, such as parks, playgrounds, sports leagues, etc. inhibits the development of positive social values and leaves them open to enticement by violent extremist elements. Building a sense of belonging and self-esteem that is based on non-violence will help bolster them against any future attraction to violence. Creative-CCI undertook activities to rehabilitate recreational areas such as parks and playgrounds or support sports tournaments, youth associations, and other social activities aimed at youth.

In Bak district, a remote area in Khost province, Creative-CCI worked with the district governor to bring 156 youth together for a 14-team volleyball tournament. The tournament consisted of a series of matches designed to create opportunities for youth from remote villages to meet GIRoA and local officials in a positive recreational setting. The tournament aimed to foster a sense of belonging and motivation for youth to play a more supportive and inclusive role within their communities. Facilitating pathways to advance affirmative social values that counter violence as an acceptable way of achieving goals, and the peaceful participation of civic advocacy engagement can contribute significantly towards a peaceful transition. This activity offered the prospect for sports enthusiasts to get to better know each other, along with the chance to interact directly with community and government officials, who participated in welcome presentations and winners ceremonies after each game. Such interaction provided a forum where youth were able informally discuss and hear first-hand about government plans either underway or being developed that positively affect them and their respective villages. The tournament overall attracted more than 1,000 spectators and regular media coverage at the Bak Central Sports Field, where weekly matches were played. One of the participants,

Hafiz Mohammad, remarked, "I have never before seen such an exciting volleyball tournament in the whole of Bak District. I made new friends here and there was trust in bringing together people from different villages to meet district government officials." Hafiz added, “Previously residents of Bak did not have any connection with the district governor, and I personally also had not seen him or the District Police Commander. This tournament allowed us to meet them and we now recognize who they are." Hafiz continued, "Before the tournament, many youth were arguing with each other. They enjoyed themselves during the tournament and I think engaging on the sports field helped form better friendships and understandings.”

Increase the exposure of individuals and institutions which reject violence as an acceptable way of achieving goals

Youth have been particularly susceptible to voices and narratives that focus on violence as an important method of achieving goals and that confers respect on those who perpetrate it. Countering those voices by increasing the exposure of those that reject violence is an important step in showing youth that there are non-violent paths to success. Creative-CCI undertook activities to disseminate themes of non-violence and expand the exposure of prominent individuals advocating peace, such as working with GIRoA to disseminate messages of peace through music festivals and theatre programs, radio talk shows, and television programs.

In 2014, Creative-CCI partnered with local civil society to produce and broadcast 24 talk shows as part of a Women and Politics radio series (NAT0027). The radio series featured experts discussing specific issues facing women and took questions from callers on topics such as women and education, elections, domestic violence, the role of women in the political sphere, legal rights of women, and women in the economy. The radio series intended to establish a platform on which experts on women’s issues could share information and messages with local communities, and in particular with women. These messages focused on explicit rejection of violence, discrimination, and oppression of women and girls. Each hour-long radio show included a lecture-style portion followed by a question-and-answer session. Following the programs, focus group discussions found that the discussions and messages resonated strongly with both men and women in the communities where the show was broadcast. The radio programs sparked dialogue about these issues in a way that allowed both males and females to take part in discussions. All key stakeholders asserted that activities like these should have a longer period of implementation and should establish listening groups for women where they listen to the broadcast, participate in the call-in, and discuss the content. All key stakeholders asserted that activities like these should have a longer period of implementation and should establish listening groups for women where they listen to the broadcast, participate in the call-in, and discuss the content.

> Once I went to a home where the husband and wife had a very happy life and, when I asked why, they responded that it was because both of them were educated. Then I realized that education truly had a positive impact on life. – *Male caller during the Women and Politics radio show.*

Creative-CCI also developed *Dream and Achieve*, or *Anad Aw Hasa* in Pashto, an 11-part television competitive reality series targeting the youth demographic (NAT0008). *Dream and Achieve* identified small civic projects or entrepreneurship activities run by local people within regular communities and evaluated these projects that have evolved to become valuable community assets and have the potential to grow or be emulated in other districts. The series identified a range of contestants, including some leading community initiatives, such as a person supervising a sports team that unites and motivates youth, as well as people establishing small businesses or providing employment generating opportunities to their community.

Contestants presented their respective visions for projects or businesses, and over the course of the program worked to further refine and articulate these plans while being assessed and guided by judges. A panel of experts provides mentoring and business advice to contestants, while the series is also supported through employers, universities and the GIRoA representation. In November, Sayed Aziz-ul-Haq Ezafmand was announced the winner and provided a cash prize to further his project, which sought to create employment opportunities in Kunar province by utilizing the areas plentiful yet unused forest resources to manufacture wood paneling used in construction.

During filming of Dream and Achieve

The format aimed to advance the legitimacy of government and the role it plays towards encouraging legitimate business or community project ideas, while countering negative perceptions and promoting opportunities for employment and income generation. *Dream and Achieve* sought to inform, educate, and inspire viewers to progress their own business concepts and to recognize that they have the ability to make a difference within their own communities. By highlighting positive interactions between provincial and district governments, and explaining government's role in assisting young entrepreneurs and civic leaders, the program intended to expose youth to the positive impact of stability and community cohesion.

Four radio interactive workshops were broadcast on the radio to align with the series, where contestants, judges, GIRoA officials and business leaders discussed topics from the television programs and provided advice to listeners who phoned in to ask related questions. In addition to the television program, the activity included three events in Kandahar, Kabul, and Kunar to further disseminate advice and business lessons learned through the television series. The events featured a panel of guest speakers from government and business sectors that led discussions on topics relating to how to start and manage a business. Speakers took questions from an audience of community elders, business leaders, economics students and young entrepreneurs.

Foster tolerance and trust among different identity groups

One key driver of violence is distrust between different identity groups. This distrust, when combined with political and economic uncertainty, creates situations where groups perceive each other's actions as existential threats. Building trust among different identify therefore reduces the likelihood they will perceive other groups' actions as threats that require a violent response. As described above, many of Creative-CCI's small-scale infrastructure projects made a tangible and immediate difference in the lives of the communities in which Creative-CCI worked, as activities like building water culverts or constructing a school wall helped to address issues of natural resource access, security, and income generation. However, Creative-CCI's approach looked beyond these tangible outcomes by focusing on bringing communities together in a way that could foster tolerance and trust among different groups.

For example, in District 8 of Kandahar City, community members identified the need to rehabilitate a section of road, drainage ditch, and water culverts that had been severely damaged by years of intense fighting during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The road and culverts had been affected by years of war, high use, erosion and lack of maintenance by GIRoA, limiting people's access to local markets and nearby communities. In urban settings, roads, ditches and culverts also provide necessary channeling of potentially disease-harboring waste and standing water away from a concentrated population, thus contributing to the health and safety of Kandahar City residents. This rehabilitation of was recommended by the communities of Sub-District 8 as a priority activity to improve sanitation and help alleviate transportation concerns in the city.

Community members come together in the project shura to discuss the rehabilitation project in Kandahar City, 2014

The project area was located on the outskirts of Kandahar City, bordering insecure Char Bagh and Arghandab district. Some of the communities living in the area are pro-AGEs, with direct/indirect links to AGEs. The GIRoA grantee preferred to minimize exposure to these communities, meaning that most of the work was done in the Sunni areas of the district, leading to a sense of discrimination from the Shi'a representatives. Creative-CCI included representatives of the Shia and Sunni communities on the project shura, which allowed members of both groups to participate in discussions about the project. During several of the meetings, members of the Shi'a community expressed their frustrations and the communities eventually agreed to expand the scope of the activity to rehabilitate the road in the Shi'a area as well. In this way, Creative-CCI provided a forum for members of these different communities to communicate and work together around a common goal, ultimately building greater trust and understanding and paving the way for future cooperation. During the closing ceremony, elders of these communities were cited saying that they are grateful for the patience, support and teamwork demonstrated during the bi-weekly project shuras and site visits. "This project has established a 'common ground' for these historically uneasy communities," said one elder.

CONCLUSION

Creative-CCI provided ample opportunities for communities to collectively voice their concerns and grievances in a constructive manner. With grants and technical assistance to enable governing bodies to respond to these concerns, the program was able to address both the supply and demand aspects of service delivery in areas such as health, agriculture, education, and income-generating activities. Data collected by M&E and IMU along with direct comments from beneficiaries and GIROA indicate the economic development successes of Creative-CCI. The program has dramatically improved water distribution and access, provided essential technical training in areas such as masonry, carpentry, and electricity to more than 13,000 people, improved higher education prospects, and provided access to new or rehabilitated facilities for public health or education for more than one million people.

In many cases, GIRoA presence through Creative-CCI activities was the only demonstration of government efficacy outside the district centers in the height of AGE activity. Creative-CCI activities enabled local governments to build legitimacy amongst constituents for the first time. Enhancements in service delivery and new opportunities in employment and income-generation helped to create a place from which communities could stand together against AGE threats. Reports from district and provincial staff consistently demonstrate that community members defied threats and participated in GIROA sponsored CCI activities because these activities put people to work, put money in their pockets, and put food on the table. They made life-threatening choices time and time again because GIRoA in these instances provided better opportunities and security than AGE.

Further, through bringing people together in project shuras to identify needs and forge consensus on how to address concerns, the project has created and strengthened linkages both between different groups and between communities and governing institutions. This builds a sense of trust in these institutions, believing them to be responsive and building optimism for the future. Overall, the project helped enhance citizen confidence in government capacity to be responsive to the needs of communities, and strengthened links between the community and government.

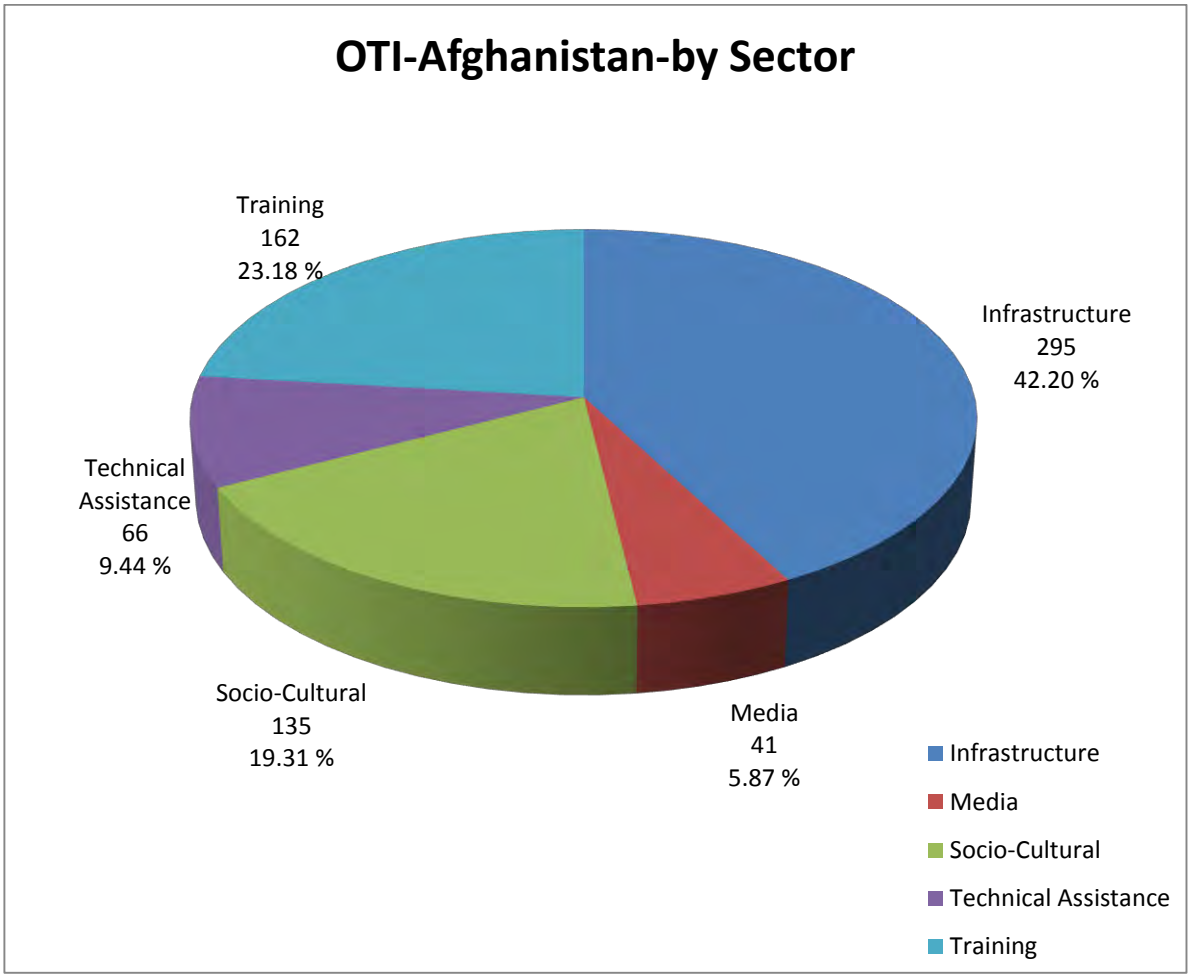
Reports from Creative-CCI staff indicate that overall conditions in the target districts have seen change during the course of the program, as more people have been coming to the district governments with requests and grievances, and governance bodies began addressing these issues with support from Creative-CCI. The formal and informal governance bodies of the districts owned all activities and took steps to ensure smooth implementation. Project shuras played a large role in activity implementation and acted as a bridge between the

community and the government. Influential elders participated heavily in the project shuras and worked closely with the district governments on activities, enhancing government credibility among the community. In 2014, as the program prepared for closeout, Creative-CCI consistently heard from government officials regarding their desire for continued engagement across all of the provinces in which it operated. Government officials demonstrated keen interest in continuing to work with Creative-CCI and made many requests for an extension of support.

The new government faces the challenge of governing with a focus on long-term development. While many of the provincial and district governments have both the political will to implement development programming demanded by their constituents, they lack the resources to do so. With the transfer of power to the National Unity Government, there exists now an opportunity for the national level government to play a substantive role in bolstering security and supporting community development at the provincial and district level by allocating more resources to these types of projects and devolving budget authority to local levels (the success of this would depend heavily on rooting out corruption at all levels).

Tentative optimism exists in the provinces that President Ghani will lead the government and his new cabinet in pursuing and funding development strategies to continue the work begun by Creative-CCI. President Ghani has made public commitments to eliminate corruption and to replace ineffective senior government and military officials, especially in the more violent and volatile provinces. Yet sustained development at all levels will require continued interventions at the provincial and district level, coupled with strategic support to national-level institutions to enhance its capacity to deliver on development promises. If the national government is unable to demonstrate its responsiveness to the needs and priorities of citizens at the local level, what little confidence exists in government institutions may crumble and have a mitigating effect on the resiliency of communities nationwide.

GRANTS SUMMARY



Between March 2012 and February 2015, OTI through its implementing partner Creative-CCI cleared 699 small grants. The breakdown by sector is as follows: Infrastructure 295 grants (42.20%), Media 41 grants (5.87%), Socio Cultural 135 grants (19.31%), Technical Assistance 66 grants (9.44%) and Training 162 grants (23.18%).

Between March 2012 and February 2015, Creative-CCI cleared 699 small Grants:

- Infrastructure: 295 Grants
- Media: 41 Grants
- Socio-Cultural: 135 Grants
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- Training: 162 Grants