



Office of Transition Initiatives **COMMUNITY COHESION INITIATIVE** **ANNUAL REPORT MARCH – SEPTEMBER 2012**



PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) and Creative Associates International, Inc. (Creative) launched the Community Cohesion Initiative (CCI) in March 2012. CCI follows from and builds upon OTI’s previous program, the Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative (ASI). CCI operates at the district level in Regional Command East (RC-E), Regional Command South (RC-S), and Regional Command Southwest (RC-SW) and seeks to increase resilience in areas vulnerable to insurgent exploitation by:

- (1) Strengthening ties between local actors, customary governance structures, and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA)
- (2) Increasing cohesion among and between communities.

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.

PROGRAM AREAS

The program focuses on strategically important districts within Kandahar, Zabul and Uruzgan provinces in the South, Helmand in the Southwest and Ghazni, Khost, Kunar and Paktika in the East.

Creative works with the OTI country team under a ‘one-team’ approach. OTI Senior Field Program Managers (SFPMs) and OTI Field Officers (FOs) based in the field (PRTs, DSTs, etc.), in collaboration with Creative Regional, Provincial, and District teams, create regional strategies and district work plans to guide CCI activities. These strategies are based on CCI’s national strategy, goal, and objectives; as well as the strategic and operational objectives of civil efforts in the areas of operation. CCI activities are multi-sectoral and aim to achieve national objectives by addressing specific priorities, problems and grievances of local communities and supporting community-based resiliencies. Activities center upon the implementation of clusters of small grants projects, examples include: stabilization/cohesion jirgas, strategic communications support to GIRoA to improve and extend its messaging, networking and media activities, capacity building and skills training, small infrastructure rehabilitation, equipment procurements, and cultural events. CCI’s objectives will be met through a collaborative management process that brings communities together with GIRoA to realize the project’s goals. Under CCI, the process by which a community implements a project, in coordination with their GIRoA representatives, is equally valuable to the end products in contributing to the program’s strategic goals of producing linkages and cohesion. The relationship and coordination aspect that CCI facilitates between district-level GIRoA and communities plays an equal role in increasing community resiliencies and communication as the end product of the grant activity.

FAST FACTS

Start Date: March 2012
Budget: \$161 million (ceiling)
\$ 67,853,208 (to date)

USAID/OTI

<http://www.usaid.gov>

COUNTRY SITUATION

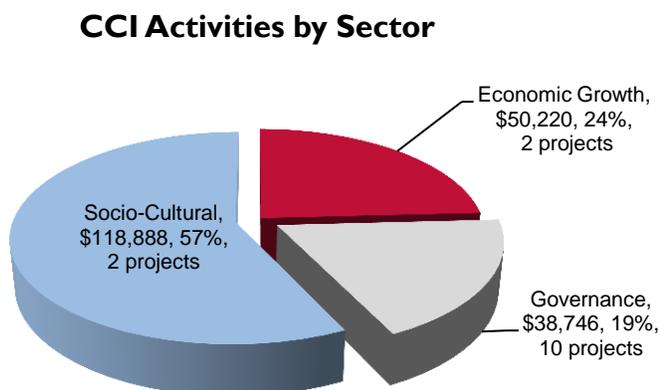
Programmatic Landscape

During 2012, in addition to the shrinking international military presence, a spate of Afghan police and military attacks on foreign trainers/military mentors, known as “green-on-blue” attacks, led to increased security on military bases. While the attacks were primarily clustered around military installations in Helmand and Kandahar, other attacks in CCI’s area of geographic focus occurred in the Kunar, Uruzgan and Khost provinces. The Taliban claimed responsibility for coordinating these attacks. As a result, in September, General John Allen suspended joint ISAF-Afghan patrols and increased restrictions on local national movement in and around military bases or FOBs. As an Afghan-first program with a small security footprint, operating outside of military installations and operations, CCI is designed to work out of provincial and district centers and thus, program operations were relatively unaffected by this spate of attacks.

On 20 September, as a part of a series of sweeping political changes, President Karzai ordered the replacement of nine Provincial Governors (PGs), including Governor Mangal of Helmand. Prior to this date, Creative and OTI had already introduced CCI to Governor Mangal and were moving forward with the design of district strategies. Until the new PG is fully established in his role, CCI will be unlikely to establish a significant program presence in its districts of operation. The Regional Director-South and SFPM-Southwest have engaged and are adapting the district strategies to meet the new realities/situation in Helmand Province.

GRANTS SUMMARY

From March to September 2012, OTI and Creative, cleared 14 small grants totaling \$207,854. The breakdown by sector is as follows:



Activity Summary

- During the 2012 fiscal year, CCI cleared fourteen grants activities, worth \$207,854.
- During the 2012 fiscal year, CCI has disbursed \$22,359 for project activities.
- During the 2012 fiscal year, CCI completed seven activities.
- During the 2012 fiscal year, CCI did not close any activities.

ACTIVITIES

Community Representatives Discuss Their Role

In Kandahar City, Kandahar Province, the expansion of the city’s population had led to the establishment of wakeels, community-selected representatives that represent their neighborhoods, villages, and communities to municipal government. As the primary link to municipal government, wakeels play a critical role in building and strengthening critical community linkages. Between 10-12 September, CCI funded a Wakeel’s Advocacy Training (KAN-0001) to improve the wakeels’ advocacy skills and abilities and build their organizational capacity to represent community priorities.

The training was led by four Short Term Technical Assistance (STTA) facilitators, in coordination with the Kandahar City Municipal Government and the Mayor's Office. A total of 79 wakeels from all ten sub-districts in Kandahar City were trained. Training exercises focused on the wakeel's role in their community and within GIROA as legitimate community representatives to municipal government. A local television station televised the training, allowing community members to feel a greater connection to and better understand the role of their representatives and municipal government. This activity is the first in a cluster of activities focused on strengthening the wakeels as a key link between communities and the Kandahar City Municipal Government.



The Kandahar City Mayor discusses the role of wakeels in GIROA.

Community Cohesion Jirgas Build Key GIROA Linkages

In Eastern Afghanistan, communities have been historically governed by tribal leaders, but insurgent influence has weakened those structures and eroded links between communities and the government. CCI developed Cohesion Jirgas, as a part of the process of entering new communities. The purpose of the Jirga is to introduce the program and allow the district governor to initiate a discussion with district residents on cohesion and instability. During the reporting period, CCI facilitated five Community Cohesions Jirga grants in Sarkani (SAR-0001) and Marawara (MRW-0001) districts of Kunar Province, Muqur (MQR-0001) and Qarabagh (QBG-0001) districts of Ghazni Province and Terrezai (TRZ-0001) District of Khost Province.

The Jirgas were organized by community members, in coordination with their District Governor's office, which allowed community members to directly work with and engage their government representatives. The Jirgas were conducted across a one week period and engaged 100 shura leaders each, in order to: 1) introduce the program and CCI's programming approach, 2) collect information and provide situational awareness that will contribute to building community cohesion and linkages between governance structures and communities and 3) identify or discuss initial program activities and sub-district geographic areas of focus.

These jirgas demonstrated to community representatives that GIROA has the ability to provide stability in their communities through the encouragement of peaceful negotiations and conflict resolution. The jirgas also served to reinforce local leadership and strengthen ties between customary governance structures and GIROA. As a result of the success of the first Jirgas, Jirgas will be utilized as part of the entry process into new communities in both the East and the South.



A shura member discusses the role that GIROA services play in his community.

Poetry Contest Empowers Youth in Kandahar

Poetry has always been an important cultural touchstone and unifier within Pashto culture. As a means of engaging communities, CCI organized a Youth Poetry Contest (SPI-0001), in coordination with the District Department of Education (DDoE), in Spin Boldak, Kandahar Province on 12 September. The one day contest was held at a local high school and attended by 160 community members, including teachers, poets, youth, district government officials, CDC/DDA members and community elders. A total of 22 poets competed and the winner received a certification of recognition from the District Governor.

While most youth in Spin Boldak are not engaged in insurgent activity, many simply feel disenfranchised, lack educational and employment opportunities, and are disillusioned with GIROA. The project both engaged youth and built a link amongst poets, artists and vocal, engaged community members. In addition, the activity provided the District Government with the opportunity to connect with community members demonstrating that social and cultural events that represent community interests are important to GIROA and that there is a community alternative to extremist behavior. Walid Dada Kamran, a poetry contest participant stated, “This is the first time we has (*sic*) such a poetry contest in Spin Boldak. It was not only a good opportunity for young poets to get together and read their poems but a chance for all of us to meet the District Governor, whom we had never met in person. Now that I know the District Governor and other officials, I would be able to go and meet with them and share my problems with them.” The activity successfully connected youth to their local government representatives, which will help support both youth and government as a resiliency against insurgent targeting and influence.



Strengthening the link between GIROA and youth, a GIROA representative reiterates his support of the poetry competition.

PROGRAM OPERATIONS

CCI Strategic Review Session

Held between 25-27 June, the CCI Strategic Review Session (SRS) played a key role in facilitating communication between OTI and Creative and updating staff members on new activities and program systems. Trainings on grant mechanisms and the activity cycle were used as both a training and as a discussion of practical applications and implementation methods. As a planning mechanism, the SRS played a critical role in building relationships, updating systems and providing a forum for the discussion of key programmatic challenges. During the SRS, OTI and Creative worked to synch expectations and goals for program activities and operations for the next six months. Through the use of outside facilitators, Scott Loomis and Rachel Karioki, Creative and OTI were able to reinforce the “one-team approach” through an open and honest conversation of programmatic strengths and weakness during the two-day conference.



OTI and CCI representatives discuss and brainstorm strategies for Helmand

Program Operations Update-East

During this fiscal year, CCI completed the handover of equipment from ASI-East. Three CCI provincial offices, Kunar, Ghazni, and Khost provinces, are fully operational and fully staffed, including district personnel. Applications for the Paktika staff provincial and district offices have been received and the positions will be filled before November 2012.

Program Operations Update-South

During this fiscal year, CCI completed the equipment disposition from ASI-South and opened provincial offices in Helmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan. Operationally, starting-up and staffing offices required a great deal of staff attention and resources. The opening of provincial offices was staggered so operations staff resources could be fully utilized; the Kandahar office was operational in late May, the Helmand office was fully operational in August, and the Uruzgan office was finished in September. The Zabul Provincial Office will be fully functional during the first quarter of the 2013 fiscal year.

Staffing for offices in the South was a challenge as scores of candidates were shortlisted, interviewed, vetted, and hired for regional, provincial, and district posts. At the end of this fiscal year, provincial managers were hired for all of the offices; the only office with significant vacancies remaining is Zabul. It should be noted that it was extremely difficult to find qualified staff for many posts and numerous staff throughout the south resigned or were terminated before the end of their probationary period, as competition for competent staff is intense in many Southern provinces.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

During its first fiscal year, CCI made significant progress in setting up its provincial office platforms and those district offices where the security situation and geographic distance necessitated the opening of an office; not originally envisaged for the program. At the same time, CCI started developing activities in both the East and South. CCI has hired more than 200 staff and the organizational chart is nearly fully staffed.

In September 2012, CCI began implementing grants in the East and the South. The challenges of program implementation in the South were expounded by limited staff experience and past responsibility, only one permanent Creative expat without sustained surge support and OTI staffing changes. Prior to program implementation, CCI overestimated the level of managerial and technical capacity of its regional and provincial teams to undertake their tasks with a reasonable amount of independence. In order to support the regional and provincial teams, CCI's Kabul Headquarters had to direct and devote more HQ staff time to support regional program development than was originally planned. CCI's immediate focus was to build the capacity and ability for regional staff to take charge of concept and activity development, which delayed activity implementation. A further challenge to CCI implementation in the South was frequent OTI staff turnover and change as OTI's profile and footprint in the South evolved, both at the national and regional level. This was exacerbated by CCI's small expat footprint, which made managing the demands of start-up exceptionally challenging and left gaps when the CCI expatriate went on leave. To further support the South in the face of these challenges, the Internal Systems and Compliance Director provided additional short-term support to Kandahar, where he focused on implementation and operations support, as well as training and capacity building. CCI plans to formalize this position during the next fiscal year.

To address the capacity and training deficits identified across the entire program, CCI placed a greater emphasis on the orientation, training and mentoring of staff. This shift was made towards the end of the fiscal year; the upcoming year will see a significant increase in planning for staff training and skills development through a more deliberate and rigorous approach.

Between August-September 2012, there were significant leadership changes in the senior management of Creative and OTI. The OTI Country Representative, OTI Deputy Country Representative, Creative Chief of Party (CoP) and Creative Deputy Chief of Party for Programs (DCoP-Programs) all changed. Under this new leadership, and as the program approaches the end of the start-up phase, significant changes in program structure put into place in to facilitate activity development and implementation, including a re-evaluation of its organizational chart. Additionally under the leadership of the DCoP-Programs, a position left vacant for several months, CCI saw significant improvements to the systems and processes of program implementation. These processes will culminate in a program-wide reorganization in the early part of the next fiscal year.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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