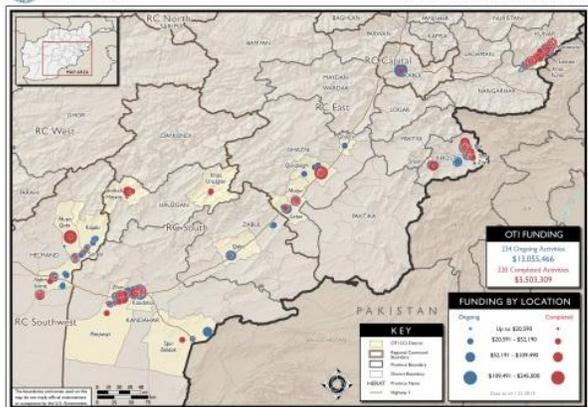




Office of Transition Initiatives **COMMUNITY COHESION INITIATIVE** **QUARTERLY REPORT, OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2013**



OTI COMMUNITY COHESION INITIATIVE
SOUTHEAST AFGHANISTAN



PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Through the Community Cohesion Initiative (CCI), USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) seeks to increase resilience in areas vulnerable to insurgent exploitation by (1) strengthening community capacities to promote a peaceful transition; (2) supporting peaceful electoral processes and outcomes; and (3) countering violent threats to a peaceful transition.

CCI is implemented by Creative Associates International, Inc. (Creative). This quarterly report covers the period of project performance for CCI’s activities from October 1, 2013 to December 31, 2013.

PROGRAM AREAS

CCI currently focuses on strategically important districts within Kandahar Province in the South, Helmand in the Southwest and Ghazni, Khost and Kunar in the East.

CCI implements clusters of community-focused small grants through a process-oriented approach with Afghan ownership of decisions and results. In CCI programming, the project processes are as important as project outputs in contributing to the program’s strategic goal of stabilization. CCI utilizes both "soft" (Community Cohesion Jirgas, outreach visits by district government) and "hard" (small-scale infrastructure) activities to strengthen community resiliencies and linkages between vulnerable communities and customary leadership – increasing community cohesion in the process.

In order to direct and improve programming, CCI relies on a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system in addition to a rolling assessment and workplan process. CCI’s M&E system gathers information, from multiple levels to include atmospheric and data from third parties (from activity outputs to the overall stability of an area), to assess programming success and provide the information necessary to improve activities and inform district assessments. CCI also conducts ongoing assessments that provide situational awareness and a strategic analysis of CCI’s areas of operations, in order to inform the development of provincial work plans, which guide programming.

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.

COUNTRY SITUATION:

Security Transition

During the last quarter of 2013, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have taken over full control of the security operations countrywide, with support being provided by the ISAF/NATO in various forms. Varied success rates have been reported and overall ISAF/NATO is complimentary of the way the ANSF has been conducting these operations, and the successes they are achieving.

A number of search and seizure operations have been conducted, not only in Kabul, but across the country. This is an indication of the progress the ANSF has made. In some areas of CCI operations (provinces/districts), this transition has impacted staff's ability to travel and operate safely. While some areas have improved or remained the same, others have deteriorated. Anti-Government Elements (AGE) and criminal activity remain a great concern to CCI and the communities it serves, as many of them conduct illegal road blocks and searches. Statistically, and based on current reporting from ISAF and NPCC reports, the five provinces with ongoing programming in the South, Southeast and the East are the most dangerous areas and presents the most challenges to the program. Specifically provinces such as Khost and Ghazni have seen a deteriorating security situation, while Kunar has faced some difficulties at the district level which border the Pakistan area. Local politics, tribal affiliations and the upcoming elections are also shaping the security situation in the regions. When localized incidents have arisen, CCI has engaged the local shuras in almost all cases to help communities to come together to overcome security incidents.

Political Transition

Afghanistan's international relations have focused on the Bilateral Security Agreement with the United States. Initially Karzai said he would sign the agreement after a loya jirga, a traditional congregation of Afghan leaders, approved the pact. The loya jirga approved the deal in November, but Karzai demanded further concessions: an end to counterterrorism raids into Afghan homes at night, active U.S. support for the peace process with the Taliban, and non-interference in the April presidential election that will determine Karzai's successor. Lately, he has threatened to leave the matter to his successor. Many Afghans are concerned about the delays in signing the BSA, and have raised questions if the international community had been unable to protect Afghanistan's population against a violent insurgency.

Afghanistan is also in full swing preparing for its April 2014 presidential and provincial council elections. During the reporting period, presidential and provincial council candidates were nominated and candidate lists were finalized. There are few reasons to expect that the upcoming elections will be more transparent or less contested than past elections, given the widespread but unevenly distributed insecurity, which provides ample opportunities for manipulation of electoral outcomes. As a result, the electorate may not be able to tell whether the final results reflect how people voted. In acknowledgement of the existing realities and potential for volatility during the electoral cycle, the bulk of CCI's election programming is focused on promoting peaceful electoral processes and outcomes, linking peaceful elections with improved government service delivery, and greater economic opportunity.

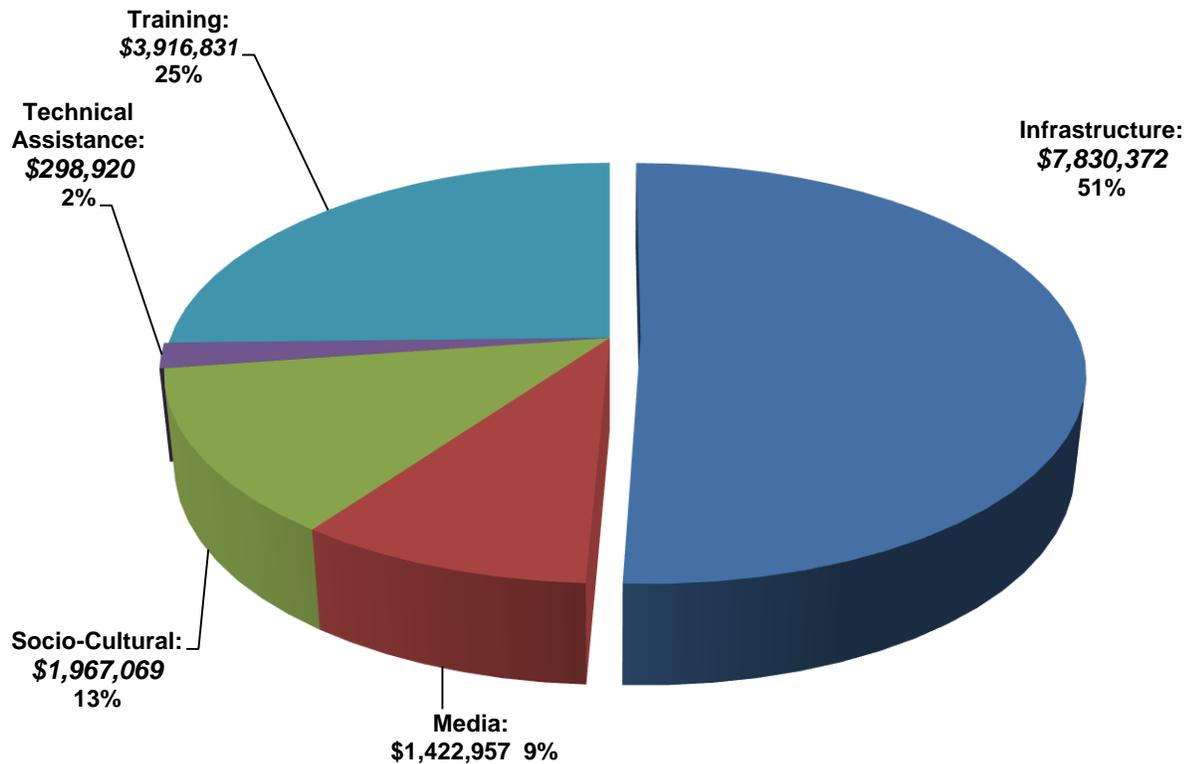
GIRoA Engagement

In October, CCI commenced its first activity in Kajaki district, working in close partnership with the Kajaki district government. Through meetings with the District Governor (DG) and village elders, by December CCI developed 8 concepts for its first round of programming in the district. These activities are focusing on consolidating GIRoA-community engagement in the district center, and helping the DG outreach to elders in Zamindawar community and respond to their concerns.

Throughout the entire quarter, Sangin has been a kinetic area, requiring high levels of coordination with Sangin DG in responding to population movements, violence and community needs. The DG left his post in late November. Since that time, CCI has engaged with the Sangin sector services manager to coordinate and continue with CCI activities.

In Panjwai, the environment has been volatile starting in July through December. Throughout this period, CCI has coordinated with provincial governments and community leaders to support populations in the most volatile regions of Panjwai. In the Taloqan community, CCI was able to start reconstruction activities within 2 weeks after the area was cleared by Afghan local police.

OTI Afghanistan - Activities by Sector



GRANTS SUMMARY

Since March 2012, OTI, through its implementing partner, Creative Associates, has cleared, completed, closed, or cancelled 462 small grants; totaling \$ 15,436,149. The breakdown by sector is as follows: Infrastructure 174 grants \$7,830,372 (51%), Media 25 grants \$1,422,957 (9%), Socio Cultural 123 grants \$1,967,069 (13%), Technical Assistance 6 grants \$298,920 (2%) and Training 134 grants \$3,916,831 (25%).

Between October and December 2013, CCI:

Cleared: 117 Grants worth \$5,413,797.34
 Disbursed: \$2,169,430.24
 Completed: 32 activities
 Closed: 14 Activities

ACTIVITIES

Defying Vulnerability: Peace and stability community-government engagement

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

Quarterly Report, October-December, 2013

Poverty is widespread in Afghanistan, especially in the rural areas because of low economic activity, and lack of opportunities. Formal government structures remain weak due to decades of war and unrest and are mostly considered to be detached or ill-equipped to respond to communities' needs effectively. Such circumstances widen the existing gap between government and local communities, encouraging AGEs to exploit the situation by positioning themselves as the viable alternative for governance.

CCI is working closely with the government to design projects that demonstrate government's commitment to build stronger relations with communities. Twenty-one peace and stability events were immensely popular as 11,000 families in the southern and eastern regions of the country attended.

Peace and stability events were a series of activities supported by CCI to enable the district governments of target areas to engage directly with the most vulnerable and marginalized families, to listen to their grievances, and also to distribute food packages to temporarily ease the burden of poverty. The primary recipients of food packages were the poorest households, widows, and disabled, who were identified by local project shuras, made up of community elders and government officials. 5,500 food distribution packages were distributed in the South, and 4,500 in the East.

At one point, the situation became complicated in one district of the eastern region when the AGEs threatened the beneficiary communities to refrain from interacting with the government. Despite the warnings, hundreds of vulnerable families, led by community leaders traveled from remote villages to engage with government and discuss their grievances. Their defiance to AGE threats clearly displayed that communities have the potential to become resilient, given that the government becomes responsive to their needs and starts engaging with them on more regular basis.

The activity has generated good-will for the government among beneficiaries, who got the opportunity to engage with government officials directly and discuss their issues with them. Recipients like Khair Mohammed praised government's initiative, and said, "This was the first time that I met a District Governor and got the chance to discuss my problems with him. I have renewed hope that our government will help to change our situation."



Khair Mohammad was content to walk with the heavy food packages as they promised a comfortable month for him and his family.

Conflict Resolution: Customary leadership helps to resolve conflicts in isolated communities:

Fazal Mohammad from Ghra Tala village and Musa Aka from Chena Sofla village reside in a volatile Musa Qala District, about 165km north of Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand Province, which is prone to insurgent activity. These two villagers own agricultural lands -- a main source of income through which they feed their families and run their businesses.

Every year residents of Ghra Tala and Chena Sofla villages suffer from flood devastations caused by heavy rainfall. The river overflows to farm lands, destroys the communities' licit crops and irrigation system and demolishes the land structure, which results into soil erosion of agricultural fields.

During a recent flood in the area, water erosion devastated Fazal Mohammad and Musa Aka's farm lands. Their adjacent lands were eroded by river water. There is no established procedure in rural areas to determine who the real landowner is. Therefore these two villagers got into a land dispute, with both of them claiming to be the real owner of the land.

They talked to each other several times to resolve the conflict, but failed. Assumption of negative intent was a driving force between the two men and the conflict resulted in enmity and threats to their families.

After the district governor's office and 40 community leaders from five villages in Musa Qala attended a CCI conflict resolution training, which included three conflict-resolution jirgas and a 15-day conflict resolution training, they were able to resolve the dispute.

"The customary leadership handled background investigations, interviewed the two men disputing the land, neighbors, and local elders, and resolved the conflict after reviewing materials and witnesses provided by both sides. Finally Musa Aka retained the land and received justice", says Abdul Salam, a community leader.

Abdul Salam and two other community leaders, Abdul Hakim and Sayed Gull were participants in the conflict-resolution juries in the Jirga, who announced the case in favor of Musa Aka after studying the case and hearing suggestions from community leaders. He believes the conflicts can only be resolved within traditional leadership in rural areas like Musa Qala. However, the lack of capacity in conflict-resolution practices has limited the ability of customary leaders to serve as a source of justice for estimated 50,300 people of Musa Qala.

For Salam it was a revelation becoming an active part of the CCI's conflict resolution training. He stated, "This conflict-resolution training further enhanced our knowledge and capacity to fight for the rights of villagers, to provide justice and establish strong sources of legitimate rule of law."



The conflict-resolution practices improved the capacity of customary leaders to promote justice for the people of Musa Qala.

Enhancing Outreach: Community outreach activity provided an opportunity for Sarkani Government to demonstrate its legitimacy via media interaction: "I assure you that government is making all out efforts to bring peace, stability and development to the area and your cooperation will expedite the process." stated the Governor of Sarkani District, Kunar, in his first ever interview on local television, which was supported by CCI to improve government's engagement with its constituents.

The situation in the eastern province of Kunar remains instable due to security risks caused by AGEs and also because their active propaganda machinery tries to block community-government engagement at all levels to maintain their influence on communities. The government lacks the vision and resources to position itself as a strong and viable entity that has the ability to effectively address people's grievances, further isolating the communities.

USAID/OTI seeks to increase resilience in areas vulnerable to insurgent exploitation in Afghanistan and actively supports Sarkani district government to establish government legitimacy. To improve communication with constituents and counter AGEs propaganda, CCI organized strategic communication activities for key government officials that included media and outreach events for the DG. Part of the activity was a televised report on government's development activities that included the DG's interview to communicate government's stance on the development and security of the area to a wide audience of Kunar TV channel that has a viewership of about 60% of the population in the province. During the interview the DG urged the communities to continue to support development activities as they will result in stabilization and increased opportunities for communities. His address was immediately welcomed by the communities, and his office started receiving requests for support for development projects from the surrounding villages. The most significant was a



The Sarkani District Governor speaks to local media to update the constituents about the government's efforts to develop and stabilize the area.

visit from a member of the parliament Molvi Shahzada who requested that the DG to start Kankor exam preparatory trainings in his constituency, Chawki.

CCI's outreach activity has strengthened community-government connections. According to feedback, the constituents appreciated that the DG has reached out to them and have increased support to government initiatives and resistance to insurgents' influence, for the overall development and stability of their area.

Building Strong Foundations: School rehabilitation increased attendance of students and improved community perceptions of GIROA's effectiveness: There is only one boys' primary school in Marawara District's Hesara village, with 963 students enrolled in grades one to six. School attendance was dropping rapidly as families were reluctant to send their children to school due to the poor condition of the school building. The Marawara Department of Education was unable to repair the building due to the lack of funds, thus creating a perception that the local government couldn't respond to this isolated community's key grievance.

With the aim of improving local perceptions of the government's capacity to make the school a safe place for children, CCI supported the Marawara Department of Education to rehabilitate the school building.

16 local laborers were hired on a temporary basis to renovate school doors, windows, classroom walls, the school boundary wall and a surrounding sidewalk. Since completion of the project, there is a marked increase in students' attendance. An excited parent remarked, "We are grateful to our local government for rehabilitating the school building; it is better than new and we are no longer concerned about the safety of our children.

Since this activity was completed, CCI's district team in Marawara has reported that the relationship between local parents and the district government has improved. Parents are more willing to send their sons to school, an indication of increasing public confidence in the government's ability to provide for the education needs of school-age boys in Marawara. Local teachers have also reported that truancy among students at the Hesara Boys' School has dropped since the completion of MRW0017 because students are more comfortable in their classrooms during the school day.

BEFORE



BEFORE: Families were reluctant to send their children to school because of the poor condition of the building.

AFTER



AFTER: The rehabilitated school building provides a safe learning environment for students and improves community perceptions of their local government's effectiveness.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

In the period of October to December 2013, CCI has built on the successful momentum of the previous quarter and continued to deliver increasing disbursements, more rapid procurement of goods and services through an enhanced variety of procurement tools and a strengthening of systems through staff training. In this quarter, CCI continued to demonstrate programmatic progress and delivery through increased disbursement targets, which were both met and exceeded throughout the quarter. After exceeding disbursement targets at the end of FY Quarter 3 by nearly 5%, CCI continued to expand programmatic targets month over month with an increasing disbursement rate of \$664,899 in October, followed by sustained disbursement rates of more than \$750,000 in both November and December, exceeding target disbursement rates set for both months. This resulted in a total disbursement of \$2,169,430 in Quarter 4, representing an overall increase of more than 14% from the previous quarter.

With the Program Development Unit gaining additional staff and fortifying the PDU portfolio, CCI has responded by strengthening and streamlining procurement practices to rapidly award contracts and respond to programmatic needs. In this quarter, CCI has been able to streamline procurement practices through setting up Limited Procurement options by identifying pre-qualified bidders in all target provinces. Through procurement options such as limited competition and sole sourcing directly to qualified bidders, CCI can drastically reduce the time needed between concept approval of activities and the commencement of work on the ground.

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) unit, has been very active in the field. The M&E team has recently utilized the new Final Evaluation Report (FER) to report the outputs and intermediate level objectives of the funded grants. The team conducts frequent site visits across the five provinces, to monitor the progress and processes of the grants under implementation using new M&E approaches and site visit templates. The weekly activity progress notes, major findings, lessons learned, and the outputs produced through CCI funded grants are reported and incorporated into the OTI Database on a weekly basis. In spite of staff reductions, and the backlog in the production of FERs, M&E conducted on average one site visit per week.

Robust systems of fraud prevention and compliance are fully functional, and proving to be successful. Despite the constant stream of allegations that are evaluated and dealt with on a weekly basis, there have been no significant instances of corruption during the reporting period.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Andrew Sinclair
AFPAK
Contracting Officer's
Representative
Tel: 202 216 3377
E-mail: asinclair@usaid.gov

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