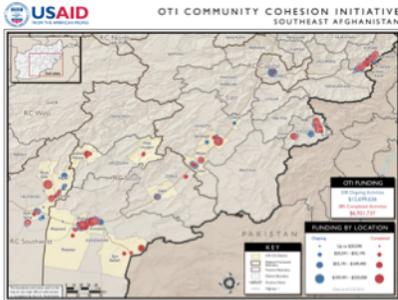


# Office of Transition Initiatives

## COMMUNITY COHESION INITIATIVE

### QUARTERLY REPORT, JANUARY - MARCH 2014



**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 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) in the east, south and southwest. This quarterly report covers the period of project performance for CCI's activities from January 1, 2014 to March 31, 2014.

## PROGRAM AREAS

CCI-Creative currently focuses on strategically important districts within Kandahar Province in the South, Helmand in the Southwest and Ghazni, Khost and Kunar in the East. At the end of Quarter 2, March 2014, CCI concluded programming in Zabul province.

At the heart of CCI's approach is the focus on community and citizen engagement, and strengthening ties between and among local actors, customary governance structures, and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). Grounded in the principle that durable resilience and cohesion is a result of local will, empowerment, initiative, and leadership, CCI designs and implements small grants through a process-oriented, community driven approach to strengthen linkages between communities vulnerable to insurgent exploitation and positive influencers, both GIROA and other actors. At regional level, 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. At the national level, the Program Development Unit (PDU) supports innovative and proof-of-concept initiatives, together with robust analytics to inform CCI-Creative programming.

To direct and improve programming, CCI relies on a comprehensive 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 (spanning activity outputs to the overall stability of an area), to assessing programming success and providing information necessary to improve activities and inform district appraisals. 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 that guide programming.

## **COUNTRY SITUATION**

### **Security Transition**

During Q2 of FY 2014, January to March 2014, the Program has witnessed a marked increase in Security incidents, with the weeks spanning end of February and early March being statistically the highest recorded in Afghanistan since 2010. According to the Afghan NPCC security reports and other INGO and UN statistics, provinces in the east, south-east and the south, have been areas with the highest increase of insurgent activity. While having submitted numerous Serious Incident Reports from our areas of operations, these incidents have not directly impacted the program and have been focused generally against GIRoA, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), or personal disputes involving sub-contractors. Election related violence activity has also seen a significant increase, as the Presidential Elections approach, with specific polling centers targeted in CCI areas of operation, as well as targeting of prominent Presidential candidates and their campaign workers. Up to this reporting period, there has not been a significant impact on the program.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troop drawdown continues and the closure of Forward Operating Bases and Provincial Reconstruction Teams across the country seems to have a direct correlation with the upswing in incidents, with the ANSF assuming full responsibility for security nationwide. The ongoing situation surrounding the non-signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) does not appear to have affected the program directly at this time. Should that issue remain an impasse and the election results not definitive or widely accepted, an increase in security related incidents around CCI programmatic activities is expected.

The bombing of La Taverna restaurant, murder of a western journalist and the insider attacks at the Serena Hotel in Kabul, have all been complicit in changing the atmospherics and perception of safety of internationals in Afghanistan. Sustained threat warnings associated with social venues and other frequented locations have drastically reduced freedom of movement, placing the program on a continued restricted Alert State with instances of Mission Essential and complete Lock down.

The mooted changeover of the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) to the Ministry of Information (MOI) has been confirmed, with a grace period of four months approved. It is expected that the new administration will implement whatever course of action is finalized. However, if GIRoA moves forward with the changeover of APPF into the MOI it is certain to impact on the way Implementing Partners (IPs) and other international organizations operate, in terms of their security footprints in Afghanistan.

Future projections indicate there will be no reduction in risk in the coming quarters of FY14, with an expectation of election related violence to continue through April, and especially leading into Election Day. Continued vigilance of the situation will be required, with frequent risk assessments to support continued programming and the safety of CCI staff. Incidents within the provinces directly associated with CCI activities have been minimal over the reporting period.

### **Political Transition**

Q2 of FY14 was dominated by preparations for the presidential and provincial council elections. During the reporting period the number of presidential candidates dropped from 11 to 8, with public interest increasing markedly as Election Day nears. Robust security and transparency preparations became more evident throughout March. Proclamations of the importance of fair elections, increased public awareness, more domestic observers, better mentoring of the IEC and ECC and increased attention from youth and media strongly suggest that the upcoming elections will be more transparent and less contested than previous contests. However, it is widely assumed that the first voting round will not end in a clear frontrunner, necessitating a runoff election on May 28. Acknowledging 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. These in turn link peaceful elections with improved government service delivery and greater economic opportunity. CCI's national programming in the second quarter of 2014 has reflected the tone of the country in the lead up to Election Day.

## **GIRoA Engagement**

### **South**

Hilmand: New district governors who arrived in Sangin and Musa Qala districts of Hilmand province in December 2013 relied heavily on CCI programming to raise their profiles in the districts. The appointment of the new Sangin District Governor happened the same month as the transfer of security management from British forces to ANSF. CCI activities as far north as Bostanzai have given GIRoA officials, community elders and the ANSF opportunities to cooperate and strengthen working relations.

Kandahar: In Kandahar, CCI continues to play a vital role between provincial and district government. Recently completed school renovations in Zhari District saw a 30% increase in student attendance, while the conclusion of clearing operations in Panjwai District enable CCI to support infrastructure activities that required exceptional and sometime complex ALP, ANP, GIROA and community cooperation. CCI efforts to assess programming opportunities in Kandahar's Maiwand District have been affected by the District Governor's arrest on corruption charges in March 2014. While CCI originally assumed the Maiwand District Governor would be a substantial partner for entry, CCI will shift its efforts to work primarily with the District Development Assembly. CCI believes the district assessment planned for April 2014 will be a beneficial tool for the next District Governor.

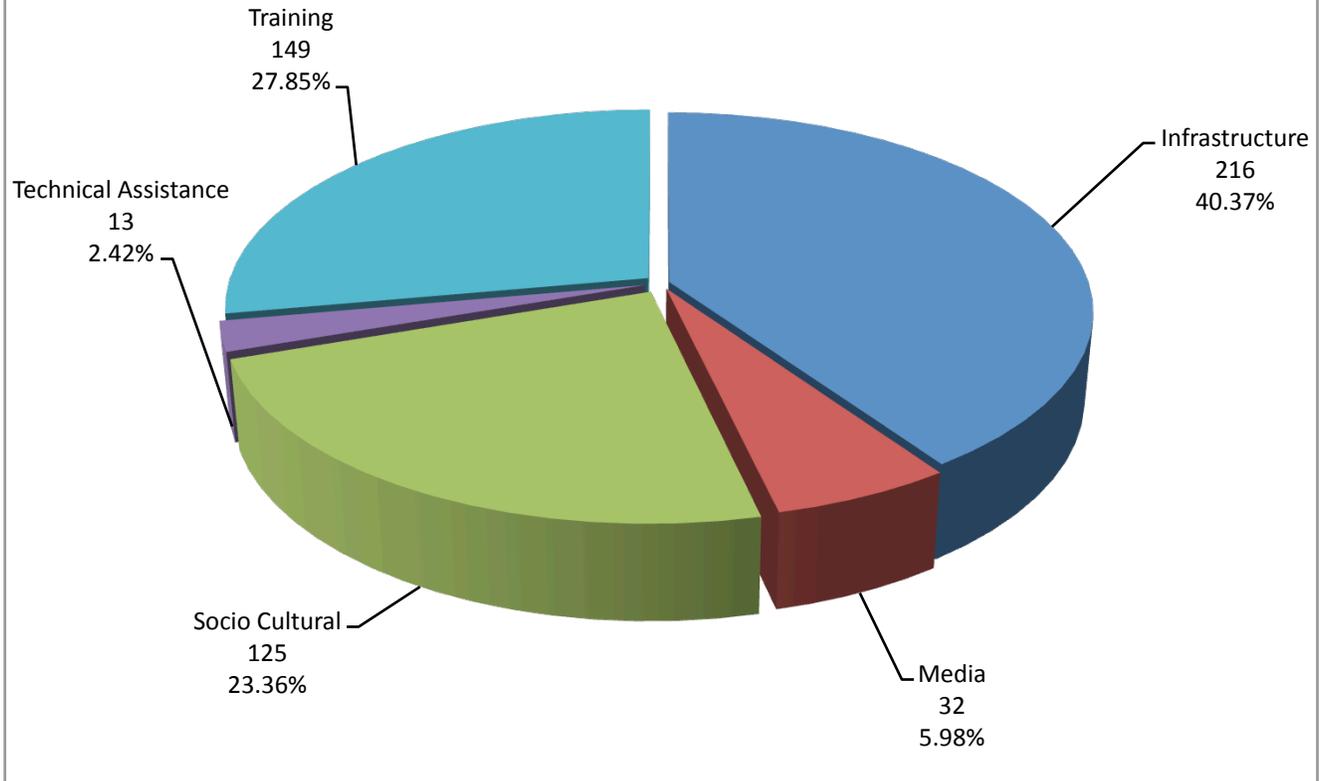
### **East**

Kunar: The remote area of Bahrabad in Kunar's Sarkani District saw substantial road rehabilitation work occur, despite increased threats and security issues. The District Governor played a pivotal role to motivate activity during the reporting period, facilitating productive interaction and coordination with CCI teams and communities. Furthermore, the District Governor and other GIRoA officials met regularly with community leaders and frequently visited the site to inspect progress. This both promoted a sense of community ownership and government leadership around the project, while laying the foundations for additional activities in the area.

Ghazni: The renovation of the dilapidated Janda Clinic also opened dialogue between local communities and GIRoA in Ghazni province's extremely insecure Gelan District, while improving essential services demanded by the public.

Khost: In Shamal District of Khost province where insecurity had reduced the GIRoA footprint, CCI was able to conduct opening ceremonies for several projects with attendees and speakers from the district government. This extended Shamal residents the reportedly rare opportunity to interact with local officials. During the reporting period CCI staff also increased their coordination with the provincial government in Khost, involving the Provincial Governor and several provincial directors in the planning of upcoming socio-cultural activities. These include the Chinar Poetry Festival and an internship program that will bring high-performing male youth from Shamal, Tere Zayi and Bak District to Khost City to experience first-hand the workings of the provincial government while being mentored by pre-identified provincial civil servants.

## OTI Afghanistan - Activities by Sector



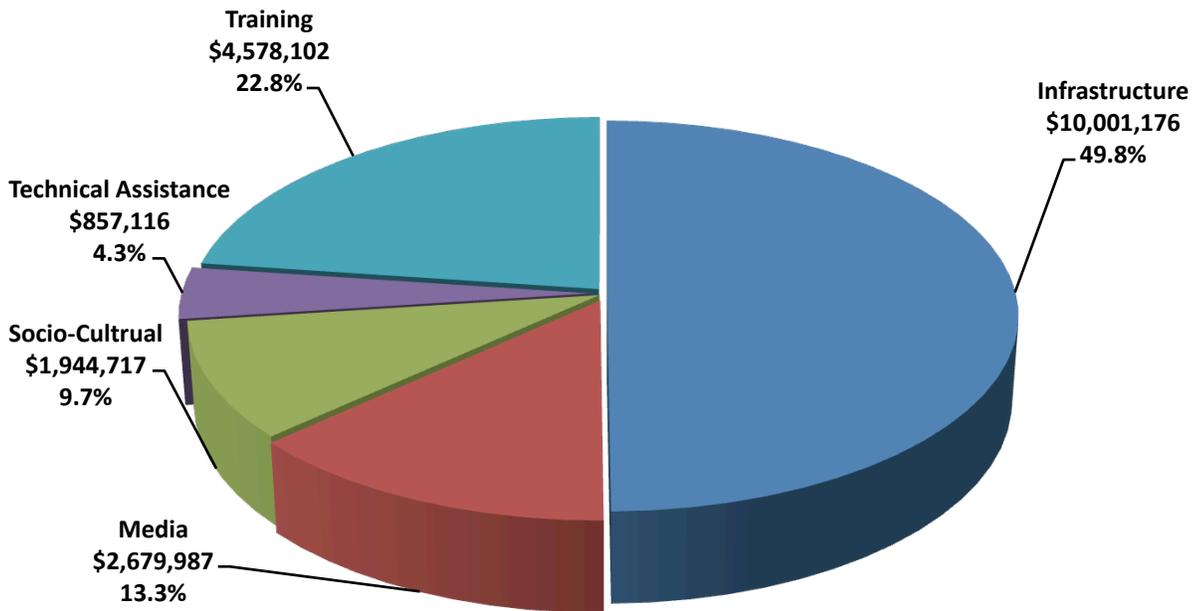
### GRANTS SUMMARY BY SECTOR

Since March 2012, OTI, through its implementing partner, Creative Associates, has cleared, completed, closed, or cancelled 535 small grants. The breakdown by sector is as follows: Infrastructure 216 grants (40.37%), Media 32 grants (5.98%), Socio Cultural 125 grants (23.36%), Technical Assistance 13 grants (2.42%) and Training 149 grants (27.85%).

Between January and March 2014, Creative Associates, has cleared, completed, closed, or cancelled 71 small grants:

- Infrastructure: 42 grants
- Media: 7 grants
- Socio-Cultural: 2 grants
- Technical Assistance: 6 grants
- Training: 14 grants

## OTI Afghanistan - Activities by Value



### GRANTS SUMMARY BY VALUE

Since March 2012, OTI, through its implementing partner, Creative Associates, has cleared, completed, closed, or cancelled 535 small grants; totaling \$20,061,098. The breakdown by value is as follows: Infrastructure \$10,001,176 (49.8%), Media \$2,679,987 (13.3%), Socio Cultural \$1,944,717 (9.7%), Technical Assistance \$857,116 (4.3%) and Training \$4,578,102 (22.8%).

Between January and March 2014, CCI:

- Cleared: 71 Grants worth \$5,065,079.84
- Disbursed: \$3,267,319.10
- Completed: 59 activities
- Closed: 118 Activities

## ACTIVITIES

### Presidential and Provincial Council Elections

During the reporting period CCI implemented a number of activities ahead of the April 5 elections. For the purpose of reporting, elections related activities are grouped as; election action research, peaceful elections advocacy and technical assistance.

**Election action research:** Building upon an earlier geospatial analytical product started in December, CCI is working with Digital Globe to produce rapid predictive geospatial analysis that will inform CCI's and USAID's programming choices for preventing electoral conflict around the upcoming 2014 Presidential and Provincial Council elections. The analytical products examine electoral violence and other indicators of electoral dissonance from the pre-election period through to Election Day and the transition of power across 13 provinces - Zabul, Khost, Uruzgan, Wardak, Kunar, Kapisa, Ghazni, Hilmand, Paktika, Kandahar, Nangahar, Herat, and Kunduz. CCI also launched its Uruzgan elections action research activity with the development of a brief outline by the end of the quarter.

**Peaceful elections advocacy:** CCI continues to work closely in a series of activities with two local NGOs, to properly inform the population of five provinces regarding peaceful elections. As part of these efforts, CCI and its local partners organized and conducted a series of comprehensive focus groups, aimed at identifying key peaceful elections messages to effectively inform the population. The conclusions and information garnered from this activity were then used to formulate a communication strategy to implement via media and peaceful messengers.

CCI is working closely with AABRAR and Aidtrends, providing tailored support. As preparations for the April 5 general elections continue, CCI remains a dependable source of support, guidance, advice, expertise and technical assistance. This quarter CCI has undertaken activities aimed at implementing the program's principal objective, which is to "support peaceful electoral processes and outcomes." Within this objective CCI continues to organize and implement its activities in the key areas:

- Enhance the capacity of AABRAR and Aidtrends to administer focus groups and define a communication strategy
- Provide additional peaceful election messages to the Afghan population in targeted provinces

During this quarter, CCI held 18 focus groups in Kunar, Khost, Ghazni, Kandahar and Hilmand, where more than 350 people participated in discussions and the development of peaceful messages, relevant to those provinces. A primary aim was these would be developed and implemented by communities reaching deep in to their own ideas and thinking, to produce outcomes resonating directly back to their communities.

A total of 32 messages were identified for the pre-election phase that will be carried across 57,000 posters, 33 radio spots, 4 TV spots and 800 community outreach events. Alongside the peaceful election advocacy messages, AidTrends and AABRAR are also supporting the reach of the IEC voter and civic education program, by distributing education material during their community outreach activities. It is anticipated that AidTrends and AABRAR will distribute 1,700,000 materials over the course of their activities. These provincial and district specific peaceful messages were then converted into posters, radio ads and television spots. The purpose of these communications was to inform the population that by participating peacefully in the elections, Afghans can have a brighter future.



**Posters translation (L to R)**

- *Your participation in a peaceful election ensures a bright future.*
- *By using your vote, you will fulfill an Islamic decree.*
- *Peaceful elections mirror a peaceful life.*

AABRAR and AidTrends continued their community-based work by scheduling radio and television advertising on influential provincial and district radio and television outlets in two phases; lead in to Election Day, then Election Day only, each different narratives. AABRAR utilized radio in Kunar, Kandahar and Ghazni, while AidTrends adopted radio and television in Khost and Hilmand.

To support and reinforce the partners' campaigns, CCI collaborated using the same province-specific themes and scheduled radio campaigns on alternate popular nationally recognized radio networks, with the ability to transmit directly into targeted provinces. The add-on benefit was the ability to reach beyond these core areas and broadcast messages across the greater east and south. CCI advertising reached Kunar, Kandahar, Ghazni, Khost and Hilmand, as well as Laghman, Nangarhar, Logar, Paktia, Paktika and Zabul.

**Technical Assistance:** During this quarter, CCI's capacity was strengthened by the arrival of three Afghan National Peaceful Election Advocacy Advisors and the deployment of two international senior Electoral Conflict Prevention Advisors. The Afghan National Peaceful Election Advocacy Advisors provided first-hand knowledge and understanding of local politics and contributed greatly by traveling to all five provinces to be present at the focus groups and trainer of trainers. The international Electoral Conflict Prevention Advisors supported the Chief of Party and Program Development Unit on electoral conflict prevention matters. The international Electoral Conflict Prevention Advisors worked closely with the three Afghan National Peaceful Election Advocacy Advisors, preparing the strategy for implemented by the local NGOs, following up on workplans, conducting trainings in terms of how to conduct a focus group and training trainers. They also developed post-election strategies to complement those for the pre-election and Election Day periods to be rolled out in FYQ3.

## Fix It: Bringing communities and governments together to resolve community grievances

A common complaint from communities across Afghanistan is that government does not effectively address their basic needs and requests. This is particularly evident in Kunar, Ghazni, Khost, Kandahar and Hilmand provinces, which also suffer from high levels of insurgent activity. CCI provided a grant to a national radio network, Salam Watandar (“Hello Countrymen”), to produce 24 episodes of its “Fix It” program over 12 weeks. Running 15 minutes in duration, “Fix It” establishes a two-way communication between communities and the government. Communities are able to present their grievances and government officials respond to them by making a commitment to fix the problem. This activity is contributing to strengthening ties between local actors, customary governance structures, and GIRoA.

The first episode of “Fix It” aired on March 19 nationally on more than fifty radio stations. There was a repeat broadcast the following day to maximize potential listenership and ensure a wide audience. It highlighted a grievance from Ghazni, where community members including local school teachers and students complained about the state of disrepair of the wall surrounding the Syed Ahmad Makai High School. The community complained that unknown people would frequently enter the school premises during school hours and disturb the students, and that this also posed security threats. The Salam Watandar reporter shared this with the Directorate of Education, Ghazni, in an interview, where the government representative made a commitment. Later the Salam Watandar reporter will visit the school and talk to the community, teachers and students, to gather their feedback on whether the Directorate of Education in Ghazni was able to resolve the problem. The second part of the radio program is based on this feedback and will again be broadcast via fifty radio stations across Afghanistan.

## Multifaceted Activities to Support Community-driven Peaceful Elections

In support of PDU’s election programming, CCI is working with AidTrends and Afghan Amputee Bicyclists for Rehabilitation and Recreation (AABRAR) to implement two peaceful elections advocacy campaign activities across Kandahar, Hilmand, Khost, Kunar and Ghazni provinces. The two activities support the development of community-driven and locally resonant peaceful election advocacy messaging that covers the pre-election, Election Day and post-election phases. Alongside the peaceful election advocacy messages, AidTrends and AABRAR are also supporting the reach of the IEC’s voter and civic education programs, by distributing the education material during the daytime for people entering the premises without permission.

## Sustainable Livelihoods for Women

March 2014 – Supporting women’s roles in Afghan societal and economic progress is becoming increasingly important, as the drawdown of foreign troops forecasts a decrease in foreign direct investment and aid that has supported communities for more than a decade. Women in even the most conservative of Afghanistan’s provinces have expressed eagerness to learn marketable skills that can improve their livelihoods. The District Governor of Nahri Sarraj, Mohammad Fahim Musazi, responded to this when he approached CCI to facilitate the provision a handicraft training course for 30 women in Tajekan Village.

The grant provided a rare opportunity for Tajekan women to interact with local officials and elders from various communities, and undertake to learn viable skills. One trainee, Shahnaz, noted, “The women in our community were very interested to learn new skills and to engage in training like this, but no one has ever organized anything for us. Now we have been trained to practice embroidery within our community and our households. I am giving a hand to my father by earning income, and have been able to pass on this learning to my younger sisters, who now work with me.”



Parween embroiders cloth for a customer in her home as part of the business she runs with her husband in Nahri Sarraj.

Another trainee, Parween, said she has been searching for an opportunity like this, and has subsequently taught her husband how to embroider. “Together we now take orders from customers from our community and are happy we can work together in this small business”, she said.

The training originally included assistance for placement and recruitment from local embroidery shops, but many of the women believed this would not be necessary. Preferring to run the business out of their homes, they stated this was safer and a more socially accepted option, as services could be advertised to the community through word-of-mouth. The local government’s open support of women’s based activities represents an important milestone, and a practical way to communicate directly with women in these conservative provinces.

### Providing Educational Facilities in Vulnerable Environments

February 2014 – Low government staffing capacity, poor service delivery and disconnect between municipal leadership and its constituency, prevents GIRoA from governing responsively and effectively. Youth in Sub-District 9 of Kandahar City have much to lose from this disparity, as educational opportunities are severely reduced by lack of funding and under representation by local officials. Many families have also been internally displaced, resulting in lost opportunities to educate children, who through education can attain skills and generate family income.

Shaheed Akram School in Sub-District 9 is one of the few high schools in Kandahar City that teaches boys and girls, was not an appealing or safe environment to attend. Parents were reluctant to enroll their children, due to it being so dilapidated. Classrooms lacked teaching facilities, administrative offices were derelict, furniture was scarce, and amenities barely functioned. Until recently the school did not have a boundary wall, which was viewed as essential for operations in an insecure environment. As a result the school struggled to retain qualified teachers and student attendance was very low.



Construction workers finishing the rehabilitation of the Shaheed Akram School in Sub-District 9, Kandahar City.

In June 2013, CCI earmarked funds to construct a boundary wall around the school, and arranged to augment community support for education, by making an in-kind grant to the Shaheed Akram School Principal’s Office. The grant assisted the school to renovate and furnish 40 classrooms and offices, and upgrade much needed bathroom amenities. Restoring 1,035 cubic meters of boundary wall renewed confidence in the security of the precinct.

At commencement of implementation in September 2013, 2,500 students were enrolled. Just two months after renovations were completed, the school principal reported enrolment increased by over 35% to 3,400 students; 2,700 boys and 700 girls. Parents and teachers now meet on a monthly basis to monitor progress and ensure the school continues to work towards meeting the needs of students.

GIRoA’s support of education for both boys and girls not only builds youth resiliency against insurgent recruitment, it also reinforces 12 years of gains made in human rights, including education, health care, and reduced gender-based violence.

## Tailoring Training Facilitates Jobs for Female Youth

GIRoA and provincial government structures in the Muqur District remain underdeveloped at many levels, with impoverished rural villages being underserved and highly vulnerable to AGE's and insurgent infiltration.

Socially constrained from working outside of their homes, female youth from vulnerable households in Muqur have few options for earning the income to support themselves and their families. One of the few acceptable paths available is home-based tailoring. With proper training and tools these young women can receive the chance to start their own tailoring businesses, by sewing clothing for family members and the wider community, in the privacy and security of their own home.

To meet the needs of these young women, CCI provided a technical assistance and materials grant to teach 50 females basic and intermediate tailoring techniques over a period of 12 weeks. The District Governor and elders identified this activity as a community priority during the Muqur cohesion Jirga. Its primary aim was improve opportunities for youth by strengthening the income generation potential of women from vulnerable households.

From Muqur District and part of a large family with little income, Atifa was keen to participate in the skills training. "Previously, I had no tailoring skills but after attending this training for almost two months, I have learned how to sew clothes properly. The training will help me to offer tailoring services to my community, because I also received a sewing machine, sewing kit, and a tailoring table", she said.



Tailoring skills are taught to female youth to enable them to work from home and earn an income.



Women receiving practical tailoring training funded by CCI in Muqur District of Ghazni Province.

## Volleyball Connects Government and Youth

Links between GIRoA and youth in Bak District rural villages are not strong. Young men have few employment opportunities and rarely can engage in healthy interactive social activities. Insurgent groups and AGEs regularly target this vulnerable segment of the population, playing on men's disconnect and feelings of inadequacy regarding providing for their family. This in turn often results in estrangement from local officials.

CCI provided the Bak District Governor a grant to bring together 156 youth from 14 different teams to play in a volleyball tournament over the course of six weeks. Conducted at the Bak Central Sports field, this tournament consisted of 14 volleyball matches that presented an opportunity for youth from remote villages to meet with local and GIRoA officials in a positive structured setting. An important aim of bringing these young men together was to motivate them to play a more constructive role within their community. CCI provided uniforms and



equipment for practice sessions and official ceremonies. The activity offered an ideal forum for youth to connect with local government officials, who frequently attended many of the matches. The tournament overall attracted more than 1,000 enthusiastic spectators from different communities. The positive competitive atmosphere conveyed the importance of working as team, and how such collaborative interaction can bring constructive results. While the Jahan Team beat the Abdul Ameen Team in the final match and received a trophy, there was enthusiastic feedback from players and community organizers regarding new friendships forged, and the extent of positive social interaction generated during the tournament.

A 30 year-old and resident of Bak District, 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 residents 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 see them up close and we now recognize who they are." In supporting a question relating to the outcome, Hafiz said, "Before the tournament, many youth were fighting with each other. They enjoyed themselves during the tournament and I think engaging on the sports field helped form better friendships and understandings."



Player receives a trophy at the volleyball tournament completion ceremony in Bak District of Khost Province.

**Road Rehabilitation Improves GIRoA’s Influence:**

Government services are slow to reach villages outside of Sarkani District Center, and many rural communities have little confidence in the capacity of the District Governor’s Office to meet their basic needs, including their longstanding need for better roads. Linkages between government officials, local residents, and customary leadership remain underdeveloped due to decades of war and the local government’s inability to fulfill residents’ requests. The Sarkani District Governor recently committed to strengthening relationships between his office and residents, through public works projects that positively impact on quality of life. To support this, CCI funded the repair of a deteriorated section of the Ganjgal Road, which when complete will benefit 650 households.

The District Governor and elders from the Said Khail Village cluster identified the road rehabilitation as a priority during the Sarkani cohesion Jirga. It is a major access road almost one kilometer in length, connecting the remote Ganjgal Valley villages in Kunar (Ganjgal, Dam Dara, Sherogay and Shpelay), to each other and the district center. Another outcome from the Jirga was the formation of the Sarkani Peace Shura, which included 16 influential tribal elders whose role was to monitor the 27 week long project.

Sarkani’s head of District Development Assembly, Haji Medad stated, "Five roadside bombs have exploded recently, causing casualties and harm to elders and children. A new road helps improve security, as it will be



Tribal elders at the of Rehabilitating Ganjgal Road opening ceremony in Sarkani District of Kunar Province.



Laborers working on Ganjgal Road in Sarkani District of Kunar Province. Volleyball players during a competition in Bak District of Khost Province.

easier to see if someone has been digging to plant an IED.”

The activity created jobs for local residents and now provides easier access to clinics, markets and schools. It supports the legitimacy of community leaders in Sarkani District, by demonstrating a capacity to bring disconnected communities together through public works projects.

## PROGRAM EVALUATION

CCI built on the successful momentum of the previous quarter and continued to deliver increasing disbursements, more rapid procurement of goods and services through enhanced procurement mechanisms and a strengthening of systems by way of staff training. After exceeding disbursement targets at the end of Q2 by nearly 4%, CCI continued to expand programmatic targets month over month, with an increasing disbursement rate of \$801,172.07 in January. This was followed by sustained disbursement rates of more than \$1M in both February and March, exceeding target disbursement rates set for both months. The result was a total disbursement of \$3,264,367.18 in FY14 Q2, representing an overall increase of more than 50% from the previous quarter. At the January 2014 SRS, an activity development pipeline for new programming through April 2014 was agreed upon based on the recent disbursement rate.

January saw heavy snow in Hilmand and Kandahar, which consequently reduced attendance and activity participation, although the trainers and CCI staff were able to continue with planned program implementation. Rain affected Zahari District and outlying areas of the provincial capital in Kandahar, which are CCI areas of operation. Plans are underway in Hilmand to repair previously completed projects in Sangin and Musa Qala, after sustaining extensive flood damage.

Nowruz celebrations organized by the Kandahar government were shattered after a Bicycle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (BBIED) intended for the government delegation, took the life of the provincial governor's Chief of Staff, Dr. Najib Perwais. In late March the recently completed Zekrya School refurbishment under SPI0005, Improving GIROA Effectiveness, was damaged by an IED attack. There were no fatalities and the school remains closed.

Due to high levels of insurgent activities, CCI is the only international development assistance working with the new Musa Qala District Governor, to maintain GIROA's presence across the district and respond to recent flooding. In Kajaki District CCI has 16 activities under implementation or in development. KJK0005 Tailoring Training in Bazar of Kajaki: Improving Opportunities for Male Youth was the first vocational opportunity in recent times in the district center. The training afforded Kajaki youth an opportunity to engage with their district government and brought much needed skills to the recently refurbished bazaar. KJK00007 Kajaki Olia Canal Cleaning: Extending the reach of district government was the first GIROA presence in the Zamindawar community in recently memory. The activity attracted unprecedented community support and exceeded the standard 10% contribution of unskilled labor. In March CCI supported a Farmer's Day activity in the Kajaki District center, which offered opportunities for the newly arrived Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock extension agents to demonstrate their expertise and establish valuable relationships with local farmers.

The January arrival of the PDU Manager increased the performance of the Program Development Unit (PDU), with eleven new activities cleared (USD 1.9 million), and an additional five activities in development. This coincided with the Strategic Review Session (SRS) that lead the way for the development and finalization of the PDU Strategy. The PDU Strategy outlines three thematic areas of engagement: *Political Transition*, including Elections and Supporting the Interim Transition of New Government; *Non-Violent Dispute Resolution*; and *Analytics*. In addition, the PDU Strategy outlines a geographic expansion to the urban fringes of Kabul where urbanization pressures have created increasingly restive vectors for extremism, organized crime, and violent anti-government activities. At the time of reporting, the rollout plan for the PDU was being finalized and working towards start date of end of May, to capitalize on the political transition. During the reporting quarter the most significant area of work in the PDU was elections programming, which constituted ten activities ranging from technical assistance (3 activities, 5 persons), geospatial analytics (2 activities), action research (1 activity) and peaceful elections advocacy campaigns (4 activities).

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) was able to work through the pending FER backlog and send a total of 141 FERs to OTI for approval during this reporting quarter. The M&E team conducts frequent site visits across the five provinces to monitor the progress and processes of various grants. The weekly activity progress notes major

findings, lessons learned and outputs generated through CCI funded grants. These are reported and incorporated into the OTI Database on a weekly basis. Provincial and district M&E teams conducted on average one site visit per week, per activity. During this quarter the team worked with Implementing Monitoring Unit (IMU) findings, taking them into consideration while drafting FERs, corrective actions and follow-ups to address possible reporting discrepancies. Collaboration with the IMU has supported CCI programmatic successes such as that of the conflict resolution training provided to community elders in Shamal District, Khost (SHM0001). Identified by the IMU in February, this programmatic achievement was highlighted though a Success Story the same month and is illustrative of the strong working relationship between CCI and the IMU. Conversely, regarding (SHM0001) IMU noted that trainees received certificates for 90 days of conflict resolution training, when in fact the program was a month long. This prompted CCI provincial team to revise the certificates and print new ones. Previously distributed certificates were retrieved and replaced, with the updated certificates now utilized by the District Governor.

In this quarter, the Operations team took significant steps to streamline procedures in response to increased programming. At the senior management level, this reporting quarter saw the recruitment of five (5) key staff, including the Procurement Director, Human Resources Director, Media and Strategic Communications Director, M&E Manager and PDU Manager, completing the senior management team. The impact of these recruitments was immediate: the Procurement Director bringing to bear the revised Procurement Manual; the Human Resources Director driving changes to recruitment efficiencies; the Media and Strategic Communications Director instrumental to the swift and effective rollout of the elections messaging; the M&E Manager overseeing the completion of FER backlog and development of new M&E tools; and the PDU Manager energizing the strategic focus and performance of the PDU. At regional level, in January a total of 19 national staff appointments occurred (South 11; East 2 and Kabul 6), with February 6 appointments (South 1, East 1 and Kabul 4), and March recruiting 17 new staff (South 9, East 6 and Kabul 2). In this quarter, CCI has recruited 41 staff for new positions, in an average period of 36 days; this is an increase from 38 staff recruited in an average period of 59 days in the immediate preceding quarter, a seven percent increase in the number of positions, and more than a 64% decrease in time required to recruit staff.

CCI Procurement Department has significantly ramped up the execution of purchase orders, exceeding more than \$1.4 Million in new POs and POAs for program-related goods and services. Also during this reporting period the Procurement Department authored and implemented a revised Procurement Manual. This new manual has formalized the use of updated templates and procedures, and enabled a raft of revised procurement policies training being rolled out to all staff in the month of March.