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FINAL REPORT

LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

(LGCD)

EVALUATION

Nov 30, 2008 – Jan 17, 2009

This report was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and prepared under contract with Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc. and its Subcontractor the Louis Berger Group (LBG) through USAID's Afghanistan "Services Under Program and Project Offices for Results Tracking" (SUPPORT) Project. The report was prepared by Bradley Austin, Team Leader, Elizabeth Dvorak-Little, and Edward Joseph under contract with Checchi and Company.

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AND
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This evaluation was

Contracted under USAID Contract Number: GS-10F-0425M

Order Number: 306-M-00-07-00502-00; Task Order Number 2007-012

Afghanistan Services under Program and Project Offices for Results Tracking (SUPPORT)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Acronyms and Abbreviations 1
II. Executive Summary 2
III. Introduction 5
- Overview of Findings 5
- Purpose & Methodology of the Evaluation 7
- Brief description of ARD & DAI programs 8
- Branding 11

IV. Evaluation findings 12
- Component One: Local Governance Capacity Building 13
  - Recommendations 17
- Component Two: Community Development 17
  - Recommendations 22
- Component Three: Local Stability Initiatives 23
  - Recommendations 32
- Component Four: Support to PRTs 33
  - Recommendations 34

V. Analysis 34
- Project Implementation Progress 35
  - Late Start-up/ Decentralization and Lack of Organizational Blueprint 35
  - Office & Staffing Challenges 35
  - Challenges of the Operating Arena 35
  - Role of the FPO in Project Development/Implementation Progress 35
  - LGCD Program Achievement of Results 36
  - Monitoring and Evaluating Projects 36
  - Communications and Media Outreach 38
- Demonstrated Impacts From Each Implementer 39
  - Local Governance 39
  - Community Development 39
  - Local Stability Initiatives 39
  - Support to PRTS 40
- Lessons Learned 40
- How Have LGCD Projects Strengthened Stability in Afghanistan? 40
  - Synergies with USG's other efforts and other donor 41

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations 42
VII. Attachments 44

I. ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AOR	Area of Responsibility
ANA	Afghanistan National Army
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ARD	Associates for Rural Development
CAG	Community Action Group
CBSG	Community Base Small Grant
CD	Community Development
CDC	Community Development Committee
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CIMIC	Civil – Military Cooperation
COIN	Counter–Insurgency
CSC	Civil Service Commission
CTO	Cognizant Technical Officer
DAI	Development Alternatives Incorporated
DEVAD/SF	Development Advisor / Special Forces
DfID	Department for International Development
DFPO	Deputy Field Program Officer
FPO	Field Program Officer
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
ICA	Independent Consultant Agreement
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IP	Implementing Partner
LGCD	Local Governance and Community Development
LSI	Local Stability Initiatives
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
PMP	Performance Monitoring Plan
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
PSS	Provincial Stability Strategy
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
NSP	National Solidarity Program
SF	Special Forces
SIER	Security Initiative – Emergency Response
TA	Technical Advisor
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

EVALUATION OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
Implemented by ARD (Task Order #1 DFD-I-00-05-00248-00) &
DAI (Task Order #2 DFD-00-05-00250-00)

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The evaluation of the Local Governance Community Development (LGCD) program began in Washington, DC with the Team Leader, Mr. Bradley Austin and Community Development Specialist, Ms. Elizabeth Dvorak-Little, holding meetings with the two contracting firms: Development Alternatives International (DAI) and (via video conference call) Associates in Rural Development (ARD) in Burlington, VT. The team was then joined by Mr. Edward Joseph and arrived in Kabul on November 30th, 2008. The international team was augmented by 3 Afghan development consultants and began their in-country meetings with an in-depth briefing lasting the full day with USAID and ARD on December 1st, 2008.

This initial meeting with USAID also served to review the schedule of subsequent meetings and site visits outside of Kabul. Due to the complexity of the program as well security and weathers considerations, a detailed schedule had been determined by USAID/A PRT office prior to and without the evaluation teams' input. Given the unique structure of the LGCD program, with two contractors operating in two distinct geographical regions (ARD operates in the North and West [LGCD/NW] of Afghanistan and DAI operates in the South and East [LGCD/SE] of Afghanistan), USAID/A had decided to structure the evaluation into two separate and distinct parts, with ARD being the first component to be evaluated and DAI being the second. While this structure and process was, in the evaluation teams' perspective, less than optimal, the evaluation team understood that security restrictions; the onset of winter; the availability of key people over the holiday period along with several other factors severely limited alternative scheduling.

This report is part of the contractually required evaluation to assess the performances of DAI and ARD. It examines how the contracted firms are meeting the programmatic goals and objectives outlined in their Task Orders within the context of Afghanistan's development, political, military, social, and economic environments. The evaluation team's scope of work (SOW) is included in the appendix. The LGCD program was designed to build the capacity of local governments, both through direct capacity building and by providing opportunities to engage communities and local government to work together for the implementation of community-development projects. The program's over-arching aims are to strengthen the legitimacy of the Government of Afghanistan, increase constituent confidence in the Government and promote stability. The LGCD program has four components, identified in the Task Order as:

1) Strengthening Local Governance (LG),
2) Promoting Community Development (CD),
3) Implementing Local Stability Initiatives (LSI),
4) Providing Support to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs).

After more that 250 interviews with various stakeholders, beneficiaries, implementers and PRT offices as well as conducting more than 50 project site visits, the evaluation team reached the conclusion that the program has not met its overarching goal of extending the legitimacy of the Afghan government nor has it brought government closer to the people or fostered stability. The report will go into greater details to substantiate these conclusions in subsequent sections, but, in summary, the evaluation team found that:

- Contractors and USAID personnel did not have a shared understanding of program goals or a shared, unified strategy, which, in turn, slowed and/or deterred program implementation. Even within USAID, there was lack of coherence about the goals and strategies for all program components;
- Contractors took a long time to set up operations, causing what USAID personnel referred to as "a lost year";
- There were significant delays on the part of the contracting firms to decentralize and establish regional offices;
- Management changes within the contracting firms and USAID itself harmed the program continuity and focus;
- Acute delays by the contracting firms to create an operational plan by which Task Order objectives could be achieved further deterred implementation and goal achievement;
- There has been only limited effort to integrate LGCD within the context of national Afghanistan development strategies and to coordinate implementation with national ministries, policy bodies and structures.

While the program did not meet its overarching objectives or outcomes, the evaluation team *did* feel that there were pockets of success by both contractors within each of the four program components' outputs, but there were also considerable variations across the four components and, as such, the evaluators felt that the outputs were, at best, mixed.

The first component – Local Governance Capacity-Building (LG) – has, in the evaluators' opinion, seen the most success. Here we find noticeable impacts in raising the capacity of provincial and district government officials through a multi-faceted package of capacity–building initiatives. Indeed, during interviews a number of stakeholders praised the excellence of the managerial, technical and administrative support and benefits provided to Afghan government officials offered through this component.

The second component – Community Development (CD) – has had intermittent success. While several CD projects have helped foster links between community and government, a significant number of community development projects have neither achieved their intended objectives nor have they furthered the program's ultimate goals of bringing communities closer to government and introducing stability.

The third and fourth components – Local Stability Initiatives (LSI) and assistance to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) – also had a mixed record of success, due, in large part, to confusion regarding the true purpose of LSI and an apparent lack of understanding and agreement on the aim of assistance to PRTs from USAID. Both contractors and USAID personnel interpreted LSI to suit objectives external to its core purpose which, simply put, frustrated staff.

Recommendations

- Local Governance and Community Development programs will be better served and more successful if they are designed and implemented as decentralized, field-based programs from the start of the program.
- Local governance capacity-building programs can be most effective if clearly defined by an operational plan that serves as a blueprint for how the program will accomplish its goals.
- Future local governance programming needs to be integrated within the framework of national governance development strategies.
- Greater cooperation needed for local government programs from the relevant national Ministries and Departments connecting to the local government with on-going and future assistance programs to reinforce programs and secure sustainability.
- Capacity-building initiatives need to have a clearly defined commitments of how these commodities will be utilized and maintained by implementers and/or benefactors, during the life of the project and thereafter.
- Maintenance commitments and handover plans for community development projects should define how, by whom, by when, and anticipated costs of post-construction maintenance of projects, particularly those involving engineering expertise. These should be added into the program and contracts as deliverables.
- More accurate project monitoring and evaluation must be done, particularly in less-permissive areas, by an independent, locally based or locally aware contractor or NGO. Additionally, there must be comprehensive training for locally based NGOs on M&E methodology then utilizing them for M&E throughout the lifecycle of the program. USAID needs to examine how their staff can better monitor projects, taking into consideration the differing roles, lines of communications and perspectives that the CTOs, FPOs and D-FPOs possess.
- A comprehensive community needs assessment should be the basis for the development of community projects. (The tool utilized by ARD, the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) mechanism, has been very effective in identifying projects that reflect the needs and the priorities of the community.)
- Greater focus on development initiative in agricultural will provide greater positive impact on Afghan livelihood since 80% of the people living in Afghanistan depend on this sector.
- USAID should carefully and clearly define LSI, accepting that in a conflict-plagued setting like Afghanistan, the intent of LSI is to build counterinsurgency support while applying Community Development principles. (As opposed to merely the attempt to perform Community Development in insecure areas.) The ultimate goal can remain to transition LSI interventions into community development projects, but the immediate focus and goals of LSI should be to bring a modicum of stability to volatile areas, followed by development objectives.
- LSI projects should be implemented on the basis of acute selection criteria; seasoned USAID personnel and contractors who have access to and can understand reports about local security developments should manage such projects – and who are willing to travel to sites to verify the suitability of areas for LSI.
- Livelihoods projects are effective if they provide skills for which there is a local market and the appropriate tools by which the beneficiaries can begin applying their skills to generate income following the training. Carpentry training, for

example, should be offered in areas where construction skills are in demand and adequate carpentry tools and/or small capital is provided for the graduating beneficiaries to start businesses.

III. INTRODUCTION

Overview of Findings

The Local Governance Community Development (LGCD) program, funded by USAID/Afghanistan through the Provincial Reconstruction Team Office, was launched in October 2006 as a three year comprehensive initiative to extend the reach of the Afghan government into underserved, insecure and hard-to-access communities.

The program was designed to build the capacity of local governments, both through direct capacity building and by providing opportunities to engage the community and local government to work together for the implementation of community-development projects. The program's over-arching aims are to strengthen the legitimacy of the Government of Afghanistan, increase constituent confidence in the Government and promote stability. The LGCD program has four components, identified in the Task Order as: i) strengthening local governance; ii) promoting community development; iii) implementing local stability initiatives; and iv) providing support to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams.

The LGCD program is enormous in scope and coverage, expensive, complicated and diverse. The program requires a great many staff with varied expertise. To properly implement and manage a development program of this nature in a country with as many challenges as Afghanistan requires long-term dedication by both the contracting firms and by the donor, a clear operational strategy, a high degree of shared focus and comprehension of program goals and strategy, a consistent management structure, a mutually-understood program methodology and rigorous accountability mechanisms.

While some individual projects have been successful, these accomplishments are dispersed, inconsistent, and seemingly independent of each other and independent of an overarching blueprint or operational plan. The preponderance of evidence uncovered by the Evaluation Team indicates that the program is not achieving its main goals.

Some of the key factors which have affected program performance include: significant delays by the contracting organizations to decentralize and establish regional offices; lack of a strategy for program operations; management changes within the contracting firms and USAID itself; and delays by the contracting firms to create a plan by which the Task Order objectives could be achieved. This made LGCD vulnerable to the taskings and requests of various USAID program managers, USAID Field Program Officers, US Embassy representatives and military personnel.

In the last year, there have been significant improvements seen in the operational efficiency of the contracting firms, resulting from improved management of the contracting firms, improved coordination between USAID and the firms and from incorporating lessons learned during the programs' previous two years. Now, programmatic strategies are better formulated and projects are being more effectively introduced. However, because most components of the program took eighteen months to two years to become fully operational, many of the positive impacts have been realized

only in last six months. With the program coming to an end in October 2009 (and with the need to close-out projects in advance of program end), LGCD will have achieved far less than its full potential. Given the central role that development at the provincial and local play in Afghanistan's stability, it is essential that follow-on programming be designed and implemented to deliver results throughout program life cycle, not just in the last one-half or one-third.

After nearly two years of delays to becoming fully operational, the LGCD program has recently achieved successful programmatic impacts. Currently, the majority of the projects are being implemented through regional offices (ARD's offices in Herat, Mazar-e-Sarif and Char-e-Khar and DAI's in Jalalabad, Gardez and Kandahar.) The two program areas achieving the greatest impacts are the capacity building for provincial and district government officials under Component One and the community-based small grants (CBSG) mechanism to deliver community development projects which is being implemented through Components Two and Three.

The trainings, commodities and capacity building provided to selected provincial and district offices have allowed government officials to conduct business more efficiently and effectively, begin to identify community needs and to liaise more regularly and effectively with their constituencies. The CBSG projects, where grants of $10,000 or less are distributed directly to various types of community groups, have helped communities and NGOs to identify community needs and effectively develop programs to address these needs.

It is unclear the extent to which these projects – even those with positive impact – have extended the reach of the Afghan government and fostering stability. The government-strengthening initiatives, for example, may have helped government offices procure funding for their operations and projects from the donor community rather than facilitate line ministries access funding from the central government, a key component of government capacity building. Community development projects have brought needed infrastructure and livelihoods projects to underserved communities. However, in constituencies where these projects are being implemented, the evaluation team generally found that the constituents do not perceive that these projects represent efforts from the local government to the people. In almost 100% of the interviews conducted, constituent beneficiaries of projects saw the initiatives as welcome assistance from the international donor community, the US Government and/or Afghan non-governmental organizations. The same perception extended to LSI programming, with beneficiaries attributing projects to international donors, Afghan NGOs or Coalition forces. Ultimately, unrealistic program goals for the current Afghan government's capacity, the political / security situation and the implementation methods undermine accomplishing program goals.

The very limited and low capacity of government officials in the districts and provinces must be taken into consideration. Many are not only illiterate, but they have no background in public service; further, given Afghanistan's recent history of no governance, warfare and 'warlordism', many government officials do not have even the most basic understanding of what is involved in holding public post, running an office or serving their constituents. The challenges of building the capacity of government officials, in this context, cannot be underestimated. While the program does provide extensive capacity-building to individual governmental offices, it is unrealistic to imagine that this assistance, limited as it is to individual offices within particular districts can produce

qualitative, comprehensive changes to the Afghan government's legitimacy, let alone to promote stability. The LGCD program is making a positive contribution to help raise the capacities of selected governmental beneficiaries to serve more effectively as public servants. Continued and persistent engagement can achieve sustainable results over a significant period of time.

The LGCD program itself hinders the Afghan Government's capacity by strengthening the government's capacity to work with international donors and the NGO community, rather than within the Afghan government structure itself. By providing assistance on proposal writing, English language classes and grants management, they are learning to perpetuate the donor assistance not their own system of governance.

The community development programming has similar weaknesses affecting the program's achievement. Under component two, programs are to create activities for local government in Afghanistan to work more closely with their own constituents. Some positive outcomes of this collaboration have brought community development projects, needed infrastructure, and livelihoods projects to underserved communities. However, it is naïve to assume that the people of Afghanistan see these efforts as originating from their own government. There is almost no connection made between Afghan government and these projects. Every time credit for the projects is given to international donors, Afghan NGOs or Coalition forces.

Purpose & Methodology of the Evaluation

This evaluation as mandated by the Task Orders, is to assess the progress made by LGCD's two contracted firms towards achieving the goals of the LGCD program as set forth in their contracts. At the time of the evaluation, the LGCD program was into the final ten months of its three-year life span, USAID/Afghanistan has consistently stressed that the results of the evaluation will not be used to refocus the work remaining in the contracts. However, it is envisioned by the Mission that the results of this report will help define future strategy development, generate lessons-learned and assist the PRT Office in the design of a new stability project

An optimal approach for such an evaluation would have involved interviews with program benefactors, implementers, direct and indirect recipients, as well as with random constituents not involved in the program in order to receive impartial feedback from a variety of sources about the program's impact. In the event, the evaluation team conducted extensive interviews. However, limitations of time, travel, security and operating considerations imposed constraints. A number of stakeholders, by definition, have an interest in conveying a positive image of the program.

Three international consultants and three national consultants (CCN) conducted the evaluation. The evaluation team reviewed materials provided: Task Orders, contract amendments, work plans, PMPs, some quarterly and annual reports, provincial strategies, project reports and other supporting documents within the time constraints. The evaluation team engaged in extensive interviews of relevant key programmatic implementers, USAID Cognizant Technical Officers (CTOs) (current and previous CTOs), other USAID support personnel, USAID FPOs who are stationed on PRTs, government officials, participating provincial and district offices, program benefactors, program stakeholders, implementing partners and various constituent groups. The Evaluation

Team also met military representatives from a variety of PRTs in LGCD operating areas and convened focus groups with implementing partners to discuss their experiences with the program. The evaluation team visited eleven LGCD offices across Afghanistan (attachment 3), nine PRTs, interviewed more than 70 regional LGCD staff and visited twenty-three LGCD projects (attachment 4). In total, the team interviewed more than 250 program stakeholders and involved parties about the LGCD program.

Having Afghan nationals on the evaluation team provided a 'local perspective' and ease of communications. The CCNs contribution was enhanced the Evaluation Team with their high caliber of skills, extensive NGO and M & E backgrounds and expert analytical skills. Their participations also facilitated visits to project sites to places where U.S. nationals would not be secure. Such site visits required LGCD staff to accompany the CCN members of the evaluation team; the LGCD staff was asked to step away from the conversation to ensure an open discussion as possible. These requests were rarely honored and affected the implementers' ability to talk objectively.

The team sought to visit project sites affording adequate security and, as well, reflecting the broad aims of the LGCD program. The fact that the team found irregularities in projects was not due to any effort to focus on poorly executed projects. In most cases, the team suggested that they would like to see projects representative of positive programmatic implementation, focusing on on-going projects but also seeing ones that were just started and complete. Generally, the contractor provided suggestions of which projects the Team should visit.

The circumstances for the evaluation were difficult. The evaluation team had to contend with a highly compressed schedule, where no time was allotted for proper research and preparation, followed by immediate and extensive meetings, then by field travel. Because of the constant travel schedule, there was virtually no time for reflection or review, even as the Team had to shift from focusing on one contractor to another along to their numerous implementing partners. The Level of Effort for the evaluation was too short (42 days) to adequately cover such an extensive program that operates in so much of Afghanistan. This is especially true during this time of year when weather affects travel, as it did prevent the Team's ability to get to Gardez. The calendar posed some difficulties: having several Afghan and US national holidays at the same time limited program stakeholders' availability. The evaluation team was resourceful and pleased with the flexibility of DAI, ARD, USAID, PRTs, implementing partners and others to conduct interviews in person, using e-mail, phone and Skype interviews with more than 250 people currently and previously associated with LGCD.

The Evaluation was further limited by poor coordination, when Field Offices were unaware of the Evaluators visits and thus staff were unavailable to brief the Team. This was the case in DAI/ East and ARD's operations on Pul-e-Khumri. The assessment was also hampered by inaccurate travel expectations; often trips that were initially said to take an hour, took three or more. Also, agreement on safe site visits was contentious, local staff often expressed confidence to safely visit a site to the international staff, while saying that the trip was dangerous to the CCNs.

Brief description of ARD & DAI programs

The ARD and DAI programs are operating in thirty provinces across Afghanistan, with a focus on targeted districts within these provinces. Both programs have mandates to provide similar services, but have devised differing processes to achieve service delivery based on the distinct characteristics of their areas of responsibility. ARD's area of responsibility (AOR) is generally more permissive than DAI's AOR. However, since there are a few high-risk areas in ARD's area such as Kapisa, Farah and Badghis provinces, and some relatively permissive areas in DAI's operational area, such as in/around Jalalabad. The difficulties posed by the program's mandate of operating in under-served, insecure and hard-to-access areas cannot be understated. The security situation of the program's operating arena has posed one of the more critical challenges in achieving programmatic goals.

Both ARD and DAI programs provide governance capacity-development to provincial and district governors' offices, selected line ministries, directorates and Provincial Development Councils (PDCs) within the contractors' targeted provinces and districts. This capacity building is facilitated through the provision of a broad range of technical assistance initiatives, including office refurbishment, the provision of commodities/furniture, technical equipment, training and management, and advisory assistance.

The capacity building provided to government officials is offered via three modalities. First, both contractors assist the Afghan government by providing a series of formal training sessions. DAI provides the Civil Service Commission (CSC) training, which has been mandated by the GIRoA in order for government office holders to improve their professional competencies. This training, provided by sub-contracted NGOs, is envisioned to help the government of Afghanistan achieve its goals of providing professional training to its employees in those areas where such training is difficult to conduct due to the security environment. ARD is not providing the CSC training but is implementing a series of management, administrative and in-service training modules that are designed to complement and expand upon the CSC training. ARD is using its organization's own training team for implementing these trainings. This modality was selected in response to the fact that ARD's working areas is generally more permissive and more secure than that of the DAI AoR.

The second capacity building modality is through the provision of workshops and management seminars. These are generally organized 'as needed'. Third, both ARD and DAI provide Technical Advisors (TAs), who are located in and work fulltime in government offices. These Technical Advisors provide management assistance, organizational/structural assistance and capacity building to senior officials. The function of the TAs is also to serve as mentors and trainers for government employees and to work with the staff of the relevant offices to provide basic office managerial skills, development and organizational assistance. (The Evaluation Team found that some TAs have been asked to and have exceeded their Scope of Work by providing substantive policy guidance or carry out official functions, which should be monitored and addressed by the Contractors.)

Under the Community Development Component (Component 2) of the LGCD program, ARD and DAI are working to implement Community Development projects in unstable, under-served areas. The objective of the community development work is to help the IRGoA foster linkages with constituents by working in partnerships with communities at

the grass-roots level. Through this partnership, community development projects are developed and implemented through processes that are supposed to involve a close collaboration between local government representatives and community representatives. As mentioned, the intention of the collaboration is to promote the understanding by constituents that their local government assists to deliver community development projects.

Both ARD and DAI implement community development projects through sub-contracts, grants and community-based small grants. Through these mechanisms, the contractors have implemented a broad range of projects, from targeted community-based small grants to large projects in excess of one million dollars. The results of these interventions have varied significantly both to the extent to which the projects have addressed and responded to community needs and, correspondingly, the degree to which these impacts have been successful. The varying levels of success achieved through community development projects is relate to degrees of community involvement and monitoring and evaluation, with successful projects having a greater degree of community involvement and better monitoring and evaluation systems in place. Additionally – and as one might expect – more permissive security conditions also correlated with increased project success.

Component 3 projects are particularly challenging to execute as they are designed for unstable areas. The intent of LSI programming is to establish a means of engaging and stabilizing the community in order to lay the foundation for future community development work. Primarily implemented in *post-kinetic* situations, these initiatives are designed to respond to a community's needs in an environment fraught by conflict in order to influence 'the hearts and minds' of these communities.

Both ARD and DAI implemented projects under Component 3, Local Stability Initiatives, with varying degrees of commitment and success. Current senior ARD in-country program managers claim that their program predecessors were initially instructed by USAID "not to do LSI" during the program's initial launching period. According to ARD senior staff, the Mission then queried them in early 2008 about why they were not conducting LSI initiative and they were then re-directed to implement LSI. This apparent misunderstanding indicates a lack of cohesive vision and oversight between managing partners as well as lack of shared vision and understanding of what an entire program component was meant to achieve.

Following the resolution of this misunderstanding in early 2008, ARD hired a Director of Local Stability Initiatives and proceeded to conduct LSI activities. Since then, ARD has completed 33 LSI projects. According to the figures provided on 14 January, 2009 ARD is currently implementing nine LSI initiatives and have an additional 31 LSI projects in the planning stage, which are intended to be completed prior to the program's completion in October 2009.

DAI understood from the onset that LSI was part of its portfolio and was engaged to some degree in implementation of LSI initiatives. According to USAID staff, LSI projects were pushed by USAID in order to build its relationship with the military. They were also often undertaken on the behest of FPOs who saw LSI initiatives as ways to access a quick source of project funding – regardless of whether LSI was an appropriate intervention for the community and the locale. Given the limitations on DAI's ability to carry out projects effectively, many of the planned interventions simply could not be completed. It would

appear that feasibility was not properly factored into the equation, resulting in LSI being over-promised and under-delivered.

USAID responded with a strict new policy of approving LSI projects exclusively through the Development Adviser to Special Forces Combined Joint Task Force. A newly created mechanism of community-based small grants was a primary mechanism to effect LSI projects. Likewise, DAI – with the arrival of a new Chief of Party in 2008 – completely revamped its approach towards LSI, setting a detailed explanation of LSI (distinguishing between sub-components), and as well a step-by-step procedure for the identification and approval of projects.

Neither contractor has systematically attempted to implement Component 4 initiatives, supporting Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Nor is it clear that USAID ever made this component a priority. As such, it is the weakest component of LGCD. DAI has performed a number of surveys that have been of some use in helping PRTs make more informed decisions on potential projects.[1] DAI's stance towards the implementation of Component 4 has been to provide the assistance to the PRTs themselves, rather than procure outside experts as envisioned by the task order. ARD attempted to reinvigorate Component 4 in 2008 by hiring a specialist to liaise with the PRTs to help ascertain the types of support they needed and procure it for them. However, misunderstandings regarding how this person's duties would be executed and challenges in gaining joint support for his position from the PRT offices resulted in the termination of this position. Following this, ARD indicates that they were directed by USAID in the third quarter of 2008 to not budget in further funds for Component 4 activities since it was no longer deemed a priority. Since that time, there has been almost a complete cessation of efforts under this component.

Branding

USAID's Branding Policy requires the USAID logo and the logo of the Government of Afghanistan to be placed on all deliverables supplied by the project to beneficiaries. This Branding is supposed to be applied to all projects implemented by LGCD's third party sub-contractors or NGOs as well. USAID's Branding policy also provides clear directives for signage, which is to accompany all infrastructure and construction projects. The Branding Policy also allows IPs to apply for a waiver of the USAID Branding policy if sufficient justification can be provided that the required Branding could pose harmful consequences to the aims of the project or to the safety/ security of its IPs.

When evaluating if DAI and ARD implementers comply with USAID's branding requirements the team discovered that the policy is not being applied consistently. The evaluators examined if and how branding extended the project goals they spoke with more than 100 people involved with projects, generally they did not believe that the current USAID branding policy serves to extend program objectives. In fact, it they often expressed that branding is antithetical to programmatic goals. Having an American flag tells Afghans that their government (local or otherwise) did not have the capacity to implement the project themselves, which is contrary to the goal of extending the reach and legitimacy of the Afghan government. Several of the government officials interviewed indicated that they found that branding diminishes their authority. While they are pleased

[1] While these surveys have reportedly been of use to the PRTs, some of these surveys have been conducted *ab initio* and not at the request of the PRT, hence the surveys' utility to the PRT is unknown.

with the assistance from USAID, having their emblem on so many items in their offices undermines their credibility and the symbolism of their office as part of Afghan legitimacy. In short, branding often serves to build a psychological wall between the people and the government instead of a bridge.

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

As discussed LGCD has several design and execution flaws which affect the program effectiveness, including the lack of operational blueprint, lack of integration/ harmonization with Afghan national strategies and institutions, and the bottom-up methodology.

The LGCD Task Orders do not provide sufficient operational direction for how to achieve the programmatic objectives. Nor do the Task Orders indicate how the components are to be integrated to achieve these goals. The Task Order fails even to clarify the terms defining the operating area, such as 'insecure' and 'under-served;' nor is there criteria provided for how to make such determinations. This has resulted in the loss of time and program traction as the parties spent an inordinate amount of time trying to figure out how to accomplish project objectives. For example, because the programmatic AoR was so loosely defined, it took several weeks for all relevant program stakeholders to work together and mutually decide on which areas (provinces and districts) would be best for the program to work in, given that virtually all of Afghanistan can be considered under-served and insecure. Similarly, both contracts mandate a decentralized approach, yet these terms were neither defined in the Task Orders, nor was there subsequent guidance provided in the work plan or directives provided from USAID for how this should take place. Lacking an operational plan or blueprint and lacking consistent directives from USAID office on how to accomplish programmatic goals, the LGCD program was implemented in an ad-hoc manner, with individual Chiefs of Parties, Regional Directors, USAID FPOs and military personnel conceptualizing and implementing program plans.

Another factor contributing to LGCD's difficulties is the way in which it works within Afghanistan's government structure. Afghanistan's highly centralized government works from the top, down to the lower levels. The LGCD program works at the local level, the gulf between the two is being addressed by other programs, but can be assisted by LGCD. LGCD identifies community needs and can help local officials to develop plans that respond to these needs; the LGCD program needs to address how these plans can be actualized within the Afghan government structures. Instead, LGCD has only served to develop the capacity of local governance to conceptualize and implement community development plans that are implemented and funded through the International Community and donors.

The centralized feature of the Afghanistan government dictates that community development is not decided upon nor funded on a provincial level. All financing for provincial development comes from central ministries in Kabul. LGCD is not designed to provide any mechanism for the community plans to receive funds through their local directorates/ministries from their centralized government but the need for funds from Centralized government sources will greatly facilitate local government capacity to deliver needed development.

Component One: Local Governance Capacity Building

The LCDG implemented support to local governance is designed to build the capacity of local governance through three types of initiatives:

1. The provision of commodities to various targeted government officials' offices.
2. The provision of formal capacity-building/ managerial and public service trainings to government officials and their staff, and
3. The provision of ongoing technical assistance, capacity building and development advice through the placement of full-time national technical and development advisors within selected targeted ministries.

While the local governance program is now achieving limited but distinct positive impacts, the program has only become fully operational within the second and third quarter of calendar year 2008. Hence, the impacts have been manifest largely in just the last 6 months. The fact that the governance-building component took one and a half years to become fully operational and functional is due to a lack of shared programmatic vision in conceptualizing how to best implement local governance programming.

ARD's LGCD program was designed to impact governance on the provincial, district and community levels with the program initially conceptualized as operating from a single, centrally located hub. As a result of this centralized approach, impacts of programmatic initiatives were severely mitigated – if not mostly lost during these first two years.

At the start of the program, DAI conducted analyses and assessments of local government institutions in order to analyze their capacity and target effective assistance and capacity-building accordingly. These assessments began in September 2007 and were part of an ongoing process, which was conducted throughout 2008. LGCD governance advisors (national Afghan staff) conducted the assessments, under the oversight of senior governance ex-patriot staff. These assessments were combined with the local institutions' baseline surveys of service delivery performance, particularly the Provincial Governors' offices, Provincial Development Committees, their secretariats and selected provincial line ministry departments. The selected line ministry departments included the MAIL, MRRD Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Health, and Ministry of Women's Affairs, among others. From September through November 2007, DAI had completed analyses of all governors' offices, all of the Provincial Development Committees and all of the Ministry of Agriculture departments as well as for several other selected line ministry departments. In 2008, another 30-40 ministries were assessed and targeted assistance provided accordingly as the program rolled the assistance out to an increasing number of ministries.

Because many of the governance capacity-building initiatives have only recently been implemented and have now been running for such a short period of time, their impact(s) is challenging to assess. Provincial and District officials interviewed about the impact of the ARD and DAI- assistance they were receiving identified the significant benefits provided by the commodities provided, examples being furniture and technical equipment. The majority of officials interviewed were very appreciative of the program and cited a positive impact of these commodities in improving their performance as civil servants.

Regarding IT equipment, almost none of the officials interviewed could point to any specific ways in which they were currently using the computers as a tool for conducting official business. When queried specifically, only one official said he was using the PC to write reports in his local language, instead of English, which is the default language for most of the machines, making them almost useless to people who don't speak English, as is the case for the large majority of local officials and staff.

Many offices have received computers in the last several months, and most officials are currently participating in some form of computer skills training provided by LGCD. Prior to this training, many officials had no previous knowledge or experience with computers. LGCD's computer training includes formal lessons and informal coaching/guidance, provided by the Technical Advisors (TAs). The training is being offered to all interested staff working in Government line Ministries.

Many officials have expressed interest to participate in this training, but the extent to which they will apply their newly acquired computer skills to conduct official duties remains to be seen. Since electricity is not always available in these offices, using the machines as wanted may be frustrating. Since IT and communications are part of Component one the evaluation did inquire how the two could work together. None of the Government officials indicated that they had Internet access in their offices. However, the team visited mostly line ministries and not governors' offices. One government office in Laghman Province indicated that, through the support of the US PRT Office, they expected soon to be online, via solar technology and they were very excited about this cutting edge technology.

Other commodities that LGCD provides for the offices include furniture, which is second in popularity to the computers. Many officials indicated that the national ministries had only previously provided them with broken or used furniture. Before receiving basic office equipment from LGCD their offices were not places where work could be conducted in a dignified or organized fashion.

The assistance provided by the TAs, was difficult to assess due to a variety of factors. Some of these are directly attributed to culture and the fact that Afghanistan's top-heavy governance structure imbues respect for the office holder, irrespective of actual abilities and/or demonstrated proof of good governance. These cultural issues present challenges for officials with less skills to accept assistance from persons who are most likely younger and more knowledgeable. Such assistance is often seen as threatening the power and/or authority of the official. The assessment team found that many of the Government officials accepted the assistance of the Technical Advisors because it was offered as part of a larger package that also included computers, furniture and in some cases refurbishment.

Many of the TAs the team interviewed were young men with significant NGO program management experience and some also had Government experience. While many TAs may have experience that might be valuable for helping Government officials, many have been relegated into the role of providing administrative assistance to the general office not the official in particular. Often the officials cited the value of the TA for their help in creating filing systems, formulating agendas for meetings, providing ESL training to other office staff, proposal writing and computer skills. While these skills may be helpful, because the TAs are being asked to complete other tasks such as setting up filing systems

and typing reports, they are not being employed in the capacity-building position that was envisioned by the program. The program clearly defines their ToRs, which include organizational management and assistance in the development of provincial strategies.

Evaluating the assistance the TAs provided to the Government officials to carry on lessons learned from the ARD's training is very challenging. No Government official surveyed by the team mentioned the training as offering a benefit to his ability to do his job. Of course, cultural issues may prevail here inasmuch as acknowledging that managerial and governance training offered positive benefits and helped officials do their job more effectively might imply that they were previously lacking the background or experience to fulfill their duties. Upon querying officials on the impact and benefits of the CSC trainings, some acknowledged that it was helpful but would not offer specific examples of what they learned, nor how they are applying the CSC training. The capacity of the government officials in the provinces and district is so low, in many cases, that they usually express satisfaction at all services and training provided to them since it is all needed and generally deemed valuable to helping them carry out their duties. However, it is worth noting that the DAI trainings are being extended to reach more officials at the request of the CSC and the government official beneficiaries. This would certainly indicate that these trainings are being received with enthusiasm and making an impact.

Under DAI and ARD, government officials have been provided with strategy development assistance in order to formulate longitudinal planning in management and development. Under DAI, the government line ministries are provided with capacity-development assistance in order to create an "Institutional Development Action Plan" which outlines the services that are target for support in each line ministry. These plans are tailored to the specific needs of each institution. Under ARD's support, governance officials engage in provincial development plans which serve as road maps to over-arching provincial development vis-à-vis their sector/ line ministry.

Afghanistan's line ministries are hampered by a lack of financial resources A critical weakness of addressing local governance programming from a bottom-up perspective is that such programming has neglected to provide capacity-building where it is needed most, to create sustained, functional and independent governance. That is, the program fails to build the crucial link between local and national government entities and fails to equip provincial government with the tools necessary to procure financial resources from the central government.

It is difficult to determine whether LGCD assistance is helping Government officials assess and respond to citizen needs more effectively. When directly asked about ways in which LGCD assistance has helped government representatives ascertain and respond to citizen needs, the answer received mentioned the ability to receive visitors in their offices — without mention of the ways in which government representatives are more effectively making efforts to reach citizens. Many government officials indicated that the furniture provided for their offices and waiting rooms allowed them to receive citizens in a more dignified and organized fashion, which is not to be under-estimated in a hierarchical society such as Afghanistan.

A district official from Mazar indicated that prior to receiving assistance through LGCD, it was challenging for him to access communities in hard-to-reach areas and/or to respond to citizens' complaints. Now, with the help provided through LGCD, he indicated that he

regularly receives citizens and is able to respond to them in an organized and respectful fashion. Now when citizens have a complaint, they can easily access him and he is better able to solve community problems by addressing them in a timely manner. The official indicated that through LGCD, his ability to respond immediately to various situations in the Districts has helped him be a better administrator. The same official also indicated that with the resources provided to him by the LGCD project, he is able to get out of his office to visit outlying districts and previously neglected communities. However, when asked specifically how many times he has gone out to visit outlying districts in the last six months in which he has been a beneficiary of the program, he indicated that he has not yet taken a comprehensive tour of his Districts, but is planning such a tour before the end of the year.

It is difficult to judge whether Government officials are using the assistance provided to better manage their resources or to perform their duties more effectively. The process of capacity building of any institution, particularly Government agencies and certainly in Afghanistan, is a long process and difficult to measure quantitatively except through the examination of specific outputs. Since the program's capacity-building measures have only been in place for a few months in a process that requires years of sustained attention, there has simply not been adequate time in which to witness and measure the development of capacity. The apparent discrepancy between what has been described to the evaluation team and what was seen in the field is explainable, in that both DAI and ARD have only recently been using these comprehensive processes for project planning, so some lag-time exists. Many of the projects the team visited in the field were likely to have been developed prior to these processes being put into place.

The programmatic design does not include a standardized schematic or quantitative plan by which specific deliverables and/or services were to be measured over the course of the program, thereby making the outputs difficult to assess. There is no mechanism built into the program to ensure that the equipment and support provided is being channeled in a consistent way with distinct accountability measures such that the government recipients have to demonstrate increased capacity to deliver certain constituent services over a certain period of time. Lacking such quantitative measurements by which to determine outputs, combined with lack of programmatic accountability to ensure that the assistance is tied to deliverables, it is difficult to make an over-arching assessment of how the governance-strengthening efforts provided by the ARD/LGCD program have impacted the ability of local government officials to more effectively conduct their duties, to manage resources and to better respond to citizen needs.

Due to time and logistics constraints of the evaluation, the only mechanism available for measuring the capacity of the government officials was direct interviews of the officials, and TAs providing the technical assistance to their offices. Hence, the measurement of whether capacity was being built had to be derived from feedback provided by the benefactors and implementers of the assistance. While the program recipients are citing significant positive impacts, it is too early to determine if they will have any real and/or lasting impact for improved government or constituent services.

However, it is apparent that capacity building processes are indeed being established through the combined synergistic efforts of the various LGCD provisions. Citizens now have some improved processes to engage their government officials. Through a combination of various types of assistance, processes are assisting government offices to

run more effectively such as the establishment of organizational and staff management policies, as well as the institutionalization of information / documentation systems. With organized and sustained efforts these processes with increased accountability measures, can facilitate improved local government capacity, greater responsiveness and accountability to citizen. However, this is a long-term prospect and the LGCD programs are the initial steps that must be continued if continued results are desired; it will take time to ascertain the results of these processes.

Recommendations

- Projects that refurbish local government offices must do so with the express goal to make it more useful for community interaction and activities;
- Materials used in skills training for local officials should match the achievable skill level for the Training and immediate needs;Technical Advisors need more in-depth training before they start their positions and need to have a full understanding of their responsibilities and limits;
- Technical Advisors need to have better connections with the office, to overcome animosities and increase their positive influence;
- The training presented to Civil Servants should address their needs within the Afghan government and be scalable to keep them developing more and better skills;Local government officials should be encouraged to cultivate communication with the media and the public in order to allow constructive criticism

Component Two: Community Development

The LGCD Program's Component Two, Community Development, is designed to create linkages between communities and local government by providing opportunities for the joint development of projects and processes involved in community-building initiatives.

The premise behind this component is that by providing the Afghan government a prominent involvement in community development projects government legitimacy will be enhanced, helping mitigate the insurgency. The program aims to provide assistance for community development projects to be implemented in unstable and underserved areas while providing opportunities for the Afghan government to both be involved in the process and to take credit for the work, so that the community development projects appear to be the work of the government.

The start of the Component Two was to include a comprehensive assessment by both Contractors. The assessment exercise was to be a starting point from which the Contractors could start more concrete engagement with the communities, this was to lead to further and more articulated planning for development projects.

DAI contracted out their own assessment exercise to an Afghan NGO, which began in late January 2008 and completed in March 2008. The assessment aimed to identify population characteristics (economic, population, livelihoods and ethnicity data) of selected districts. While the data was intended to identify community needs and to develop corresponding projects, the poor quality of the information undermined its utility. According to DAI management, the effectiveness of the initial guidance and training provided to the NGO

was inadequate and DAI recognizes they may have over-estimated the NGO's capacity to do this assessment.

DAI feels that the post-mapping engagement that they conducted with the Provincial Development Councils, Community Development Committees, village elders and representatives was comprehensive and effective. This follow-on engagement, according to DAI, provides adequate information about the communities' needs and effectively defines the development projects.

ARD began the LGCD program with an assessment; first, identifying LGCD's target communities, a process which involved extensive consultation with MRRD, USAID FPOs, PRT representatives, provincial governors and the provincial councils. Then, ARD subcontracted a number of national NGOs to collect information on the specific communities identified for programmatic implementation. Sanyee Development Organization (SDO), Cooperation for Humanitarian Association (CHA), Tribal Liaison Office (TLO) and Afghanistan Development Association (ADA) are the NGO engaged for the assessment. According to ARD, these NGOs were tasked to go to the targeted communities to collect information about the population and their priorities, working through community representatives who included elders, community development councils and provincial councils. The NGOs then developed what was described to the evaluators as community profiles, documenting the needs, the security situation and economy of the community. The Evaluation Team was told by ARD that even though the evaluation was complete, its quality was so poor such that the reports could not be shared. However, also according to ARD, the reports did contain some information useful enough to identify community needs and project identification.

The Afghan NGOs that conducted the assessments may have gathered some useful population information. But the fact that both contractors indicate that the assessment results were substandard indicates that the NGOs were neither properly trained for the task nor capable to conducting the assessment. The lack of adequate information from this initial assessment is critical and explains how and why many projects developed by both contractors did not reflect the communities' needs.

USAID found the implementers initial project designs to be ineffective, causing delays at the very start of the program. Both implementers acknowledge that their initial management teams did not effectively handle the management and implementation of LGCD. The implementers also mention changing directives from USAID CTOs and a lack of consistent management at the start if the LGCD program. These conditions subsequently resulted in the loss of significant opportunities and impacts during the first two years.

Projects developed for Component Two are supposed to reflect community needs in areas that are unstable, underserved and/or hard to access. It is envisioned that the processes involved in the joint collaboration and project development between government and communities would promote three critical program goals. First, in helping the Afghan government meet the needs of previously inaccessible communities, community development projects are designed to strengthen the legitimacy of the Afghan government. Second, as communities see their needs being more effectively met, this would increase the citizen's trust in the Afghan government. Third, by providing economic opportunities

in unstable and inaccessible areas, community development projects would further promote stability in unstable environments.

The evaluation found that ARD's community development projects aimed to connect citizens to their local government have not achieved this goal. This failure reflects the operating conditions in Afghanistan, the current state of governance and the mechanisms employed to achieve community development by ARD/LGCD.

It is necessary to examine the viability of the theory that donor-funded community development initiatives that provide partnership opportunities with government structures, can bring the Afghan government into closer contact with communities. The evaluation team discovered many weak points in the underlying assumptions behind this theory as well as in its practical applications. Fundamentally, the theory can only work effectively if Government is at the helm of the community development process, and at least understands and is fully engaged as a partner in the process. LGCD through its Implementing Partners provides a mechanism for and on behalf of the Government of Afghanistan in restoring or creating citizen confidence in their government's ability to provide basic services at the community level.

The evaluation team's findings and prior first-hand experience notes that over the past three decades Government provided only negligible local services. Furthermore, the evaluation found that Government office-holders have little or no experience with public service delivery and meeting the needs of their constituency. Many officials often times have only a vague concept of how to execute their duties as service-providers. Moreover, local government departments in Afghanistan are so poorly resourced (aside from the assistance provided by this and other programs) that local government officials typically do not have the means to execute even a small percentage of their expected duties as public servants.

Dozens of Afghan citizens interviewed indicated that had never received any services from their local government, and they felt that their Government was incapable of responding to their needs. Many indicated that they had only experienced service provision by the International Community and national NGOs. These organizations were the only bodies they saw as capable of responding effectively to citizen needs. At the most basic level of community representation, the shura, or Community Councils work with the village to represent their needs to the local officials, with no service implementation authority of their own. Some shuras are an effective representative of the community; others represent their own interests ahead of the community's.

While it is the intention of the LGCD program to provide community development projects which engage the Afghan Government, the dozens of interviewed constituents did not perceive that their Government was really behind the process of community development.

When LGCD community development services and projects were effectively designed to respond to community needs, citizens were certainly appreciative of services and the support provided. However, they do not appear to believe that the government has actually provided these services. Most of the citizens understand that a third party international organization is involved, orchestrating the relationship. (This is not to discount the fact that many people interviewed were pleased to see their Government

involved, in any degree in their communities and helping implement projects. However, most citizens interviewed did not perceive that the Government of Afghanistan was acting on their own initiative or out of sheer interest in serving their communities.)

In addition, most beneficiaries of the community development projects were fully aware that the Government of Afghanistan has little available resources to meet their needs and many further indicated that the Government has little interest in doing so. In those communities where Government officials came to visit project sites, many persons were pleased to see their Government involved in the project ribbon-cutting ceremonies and making the effort to be involved in the projects that offer benefits to their communities. However, they realize that Government's involvement in these projects is upon the behest of the International Community. They recognize that either the International Community or an NGO has executed the actual project work. Hence, the community development work, while appreciated, is generally not promoting people's confidence in the Afghan Government as more capable of meeting their needs.

The Government's image is further diluted by the involvement of local implementing partners. For projects budgeted at more than $10,000.00 LGCD implements via a sub-contract or grant mechanism, with these projects carried out to qualified local entities. While this mechanism appears sensible and necessary, given limited abilities of government to implement projects, in reality, the involvement of another third party entity often serves to muddy the objectives of the program of promoting and extending the reach of local government.

Because many of the CD projects are infrastructure projects, they require organizations that possess engineering capacity. In underserved and inaccessible areas, locating an implementing partner with engineering capabilities is extremely challenging. For this reason the implementing partner is often brought in from outside the region, further limiting the effect of creating lasting linkages or partnerships. Moreover, if the community's primary point of contact on CD projects is the implementing partner, the community may well lose any perception of government's involvement in the process.

But the ultimate goal of linking communities and government can only be realized if the projects developed under Component Two are those in which both community and governance have, in fact, worked in an integrated fashion.

ARD's delay in expanding staff and offices into the regional and filed offices had a profoundly negative impact on their ability to develop and implement effective community development programs since it is almost impossible to effectively manage field-based programs without a field-based presence. For the first one-two years into the program, field projects were developed from ideas generated from the Kabul office with one-time trips by Kabul staff to the communities, based, in many cases, on perceptions about community needs rather than developed through direct engagement with the community. Projects were sometimes developed from the standpoint of what was logistically most feasible for the program implementers to deliver rather than what would be bested suited for the communities.

The role of the Field Program Officer (FPO) in the development of projects often served to complicate the process of community development, rather than make it more effective. The Field Program Officers were, in accordance with their SOW, authorized to serve as

LGCD Program Activity Managers. As such, they are to participate in the process of community development programming, in addition to the fact that they must approve all projects. However, there are many factors that skew the FPO's ability to adequately understand and develop programs, which actually reflect community needs.

The FPOs bring a variety of professional backgrounds to their programs, but many did not start their job with a great deal of development experience. By the nature of their constant interaction and co-location with the military and the need to maintain a good relationship with their hosts, many FPO end up reflecting PRT priorities, in community development programs. Moreover, the movement of the FPO is restricted so that they are only infrequently able to get out into the communities and the way in which they can interact with the communities is constrained by their movement and security requirements, traveling in full body armor with the PRT military convoys. This obviously affects not only the types of assessments the FPOs are able to conduct with the community, but also affects the community's perception of what the FPO stands for and how they will interact with him/ her and/or portray their needs

The role of the Deputy Field Program Officers (D-FPO) and other Afghan staff in the field should have a crucial role provide stronger connections into the communities. Their abilities to access areas where foreign nationals are suspect is vital to make the connection with the community by checking the communities needs (through grass-roots conversation and first-hand observation,) explaining the projects' value in the community, ascertain the ability to conduct projects and can be more effective for Monitoring & Evaluation efforts to ensure data validity.

Other factors that constrained the development of effective community development projects were the lack of engineering staff on the ARD program. In March of 2008, Tetra-Tech Inc. purchased ARD and this facilitated the engineering competence of Tetra-Tech Rizzo to be devoted to the LGCD field projects. From March 2008 until now, community development projects that involve significant engineering have been more vigorously developed and successfully executed.

The LGCD program has utilized three mechanisms under Component Two—contract awards, grants to NGOs, and Community-Based Small Grants (CBSGs). The aim behind the use of these mechanisms is to provide opportunities for communities to be developed through direct intervention (CBSGs are given directly to the community) and/or for local partners to facilitate the community development. However, until contractor field presence was established, challenges existed in the quality control of executing either of these mechanisms effectively from Kabul. Many of the projects were implemented by partners that were not local. The team observed several projects where neither the process nor the product had represented or responded to a cited community-need or priority. Moreover, there were projects that failed although in some cases, entirely or which were cancelled part of the way through.

Because of slow project implementation, ARD and DAI did not spend much money in the first two years of the program USAID responded by pushing contractors to speed up project implementation and increase 'burn rate.' It is the perspective of the contractors, that, despite their late start, laying the foundation for the processes involved community development and local government capacity building takes time and should not be rushed.

According to the contractors, they were still getting the processes in place when they began to feel 'driven by certain political factors, one of these being 'burn rate.' [2]

The Evaluation Team found some poorly applied Community Development projects in each region they traveled. Erkaly, a village near the Iranian border, received a carpet-weaving program that did deliver tools and training for the people. The applicability of the program is questionable from the fact that few of the carpets have sold – thus no benefits from the program have reached the participants, and the fact that one of the main beneficiaries of the project stated that his family didn't need a new loom (with a shorter life-span than the one it replaced,) but rather agriculture assistance that would have been much more applicable to his situation.

The LGCD/NW team is now implementing a utilizing a highly effective Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tool. This tool asks and encourages local government officials to engage effectively with their constituents to ascertain community needs. The PRA uses proven methodological tools and a systematic approach, and order to identify projects that address true priorities. Following the introduction of the PRA tool in the summer of 2008, the LGCD/NW projects have been more representative of community needs and have involved significantly more community ownership.

In conclusion, the process of developing and implementing community development projects under component two has not achieved the goal of connecting citizens to their local government. Where the community does not perceive government involvement—even if government presence has been encouraged -- the project is simply viewed as a positive impact of the International and/or NGO community.

Recommendations

As LGCD moves forward and Mission consideration is given to future programming the following recommendations are provided for community development programming in support of PRT activities:

- Targeted communities become engaged communities with PRAs (and where possible the elected Community Action Group- CAG.) Groups such as the PRA (and CAGs) will be to identify appropriate community development projects and propose these projects to the Implementing Partners' (IP) local staff.
- As a pre-condition for funding a request the partner should provide the following to the IP – a verbal or written consensus that the community adopts and supports the proposed project; the community will become a stakeholder in the project by

[2] The burn rate reflects the amount and spending rate of the USAID program budget that is being spent by program implementers and it is one of the indicators AID uses to measures the success of program. This measurement is unrelated to the efficacy of project development and neither to the quality of the implementation measures. The evaluation team believes that if ARD and DAI had started implementing programs in a timely fashion – within four months of the program start – there would be no issue concerning burn rates. The dramatic increase in expenditures, coupled with the loss of time caused by the program's late start, caused LGCD program implementers to construct some projects in haste, without always taking the appropriate strategic planning steps of involving the community in the design and implementation. Concerns to increase the burn rate also drove program implementers to design large infrastructure projects since these are big-budget projects. Again, these were not always designed with the community's best interests in mind.

providing support to the project in the form of local labor, security and maintain the project for its sustainability. Where local/District/Provincial Government support is required for the sustainability of the project, the implementing partner shall provide this by meeting with the appropriate Government level officials. This provides a mechanism for linking the community with their respective local Government officials.

- Any implementing partner may propose multiple projects – implemented individually as long as all pre-conditions are met and funding remains available. This process keeps the community engaged, and avoids "one-off" projects.
- Where appropriate the IPs schedule and hold inter-partner District/Provincial meetings quarterly or at least bi-annually. Appropriate Government officials and local NGOs should be included as participants. This mechanism reinforces linkages to local Government and provides a mechanism for inter-community communication and fostering relationships. Local governance capacity building efforts for Government officials be linked to existing or proposed similar efforts where appropriate.
- Engaging more local participants for projects will aide the success through their community knowledge, add local involvement and responsibility for the project. The local partner is more likely to know and be better able to build the connection to local government than an outsider, who is less likely to know their shura personally.

Component Three: Local Stability Initiatives

According to the Task Order, LGCD's third component, Local Stability Initiatives (LSI) was envisioned to "improve stability in targeted districts and provinces." by "identifying and addressing development issues that are leading to instability and support for insurgency." In the COIN (counter-insurgency) vernacular, LSI initiatives are to help "hold" territory after military operations "clear" the area of insurgents. The expected outcome is that LSI activities will, eventually, lead towards more complex, ambitious projects that "build" fuller stability.

Both ARD and DAI admitted that LSI implementation over most of the program period has been poor. They readily admit failures to properly staff this component, or even comprehend fully and appropriately the concept of LSI. The evaluation team heard the phrase "little or nothing was done on LSI" or "the contractor wasn't doing any LSI" more than once.

LSI implementation appears to have proceeded in three phases as described as follows:

First Phase of LSI

This phase describes the period when ARD is inactive in the Component and DAI was over-subscribed by demands imposed by USAID. As for ARD, according to ARD and USAID officials, this contractor was simply not performing any LSI projects until April 2008. According to senior ARD officials, it was told by USAID "not to do LSI" until some point in the first quarter of 2008.[3] Subsequently, ARD hired a Director of Local Stability Initiatives. It also appears that during the first two years of the project, USAID

[3] Current ARD COP stated this in a meeting with Evaluation Team in Kabul on 1 December 2008. Current ARD D/COP re-stated in a phone conversation with Evaluation Team member on 19 January 2009 the claim that ARD was "told" not to perform LSI by USAID.

and both implementing partners lacked a shared, clear vision for LSI. According to some USAID staff, ARD simply lacked both the understanding of what LSI was and that the staffing had the will to execute it. Apparently, ARD interpreted LSI as a "conflict management" program rather than a community-based stability program. In other words, ARD saw the component as primarily a means of "mapping" tribal and other grievances, and then launching interventions aimed at mediation. This is distinct from the effort to follow-on after kinetic military operations aimed at "clearing" insurgents to develop community cohesion and interaction through small-scale development projects like canal or karez cleanings.

USAID staff also noted that another critical issue for both ARD and DAI was the inability to hire individuals who understood how to design a community engagement process or criteria – a problem for implementing both Components Two and Three.

During this first phase of LSI implementation, DAI had the opposite problem. Rather than not attempt LSI because of allegedly so being instructed by USAID, DAI over-attempted LSI and under-performed in delivering it. Former staff suggested that a major reason for this lies in the vague definition of LSI in the Task Order. This allowed both USAID staff in Kabul and FPOs in the field to interpret the component aims as they saw fit. According to a former CTO, then-USAID leadership sought to use LSI as a way of "building the relationship" with the military. Likewise, FPOs sought to use LSI as a means to access funds more quickly. In the words of both current and former USAID staffers, LSI turned into a "military slush fund" where "political concerns" dictated where it was used. This posed a serious programmatic problem. Given the lack of discretion as to whether or not a particular project or circumstances were truly appropriate for LSI, the demand for projects quickly mounted. This resulted in over-stretch of DAI capabilities, especially in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, and threatened to drain the budget for LSI activities.

LSI implementation suffered not only from conceptual difficulties, but as well the singular inability of contractors to perform. According to a former CTO, "hundreds of activities were in the pipeline, approved and promised, but ground had not even been broken on the simplest of activities. As a result, the former CTO went on to state "we had no clue if we were over or under budget, and therefore we had to stop new project nominations." This assessment applies to DAI from about December 2007 to April 2008 but could be said with respect to ARD as well: according to USAID officials, "both contractors were so far behind on actually implementing the first 2 tranches of project nominations it was impossible to know where we stood in terms of budget or anything else, primarily because they had not even surveyed many of the projects and the projects they had surveyed and started were coming in at much higher cost than expected."

Aggravating the problem was the sheer geographic expanse of contractor AORs. This imposed a serious burden on USAID staff in overseeing contractor projects dispersed across a vast and sometimes inaccessible terrain.

Second Phase of LSI

In response to the lack of discipline in identifying and executing LSI projects, USAID Kabul imposed a strict new regime. This second phase of LSI implementation was characterized by a reduction in both the scope of LSI and the mechanism for delivering it.

LSI was redefined as "Quick Impact" projects identified exclusively by the Development Advisor (DevAd) to CJSOTF/SF (Special Forces, herein "DEVAD/SF")[4]

The DEVAD/SF was fully integrated into Special Forces, from which s/he received daily reports indicating fertile areas or people apt to work against the Taliban. Consciously attempting to move away from the "slush fund" approach, DEVAD/SF would work with military counterparts in the Joint Effects Cell, sifting through reports from the ground to detect if locations were "ripe" for LSI intervention. This process involved close consultation at the battalion and potentially at the company level, to assess among other things if the area was "ripe" to be "transformed." ("Ripeness" criteria were various indicators of improving security trends.)

If the area met these criteria and was deemed a priority area, DEVAD/SF would deploy to the area and verify the information with the SF team on the ground. DEVAD/SF would either carry cash in the form of community small grants ($20,000.00 to $30,000.00) or have a DAI or ARD representative with him.

In the view of some this new approach of working through the DEVAD/SF was productive. DEVAD/SF had unique access to non-secure areas and had close relationships developed with SF and with Marines deployed in Helmand. The then CTO believed that projects were well-considered and in areas where USAID would get a "good bang for our LSI buck."

In many cases, projects were attempted in areas that, by definition, were quite dangerous and therefore difficult places in which to work. DAI staff was "scared" to work in these areas and its Afghan subcontractors also often refused to work there. For that reason, projects were often limited in scope, sometimes providing only material assistance or to perform simple operations that required minimal oversight by DAI. FPO in Kandahar identified some LSI-appropriate projects, during this phase of the project. However, they were in very dangerous locations. In the event, two DAI subcontractors were killed trying to implement the projects, according to USAID staff.

The Quick Impact/DEVAD/SF approach was not without its critics. One CTO has noted that working exclusively with Special Forces over-identified LSI with the special operations community. According to a former CTO, friction sometimes arose with FPOs at PRTs who did not have the same access to areas as DEVAD/SF. DAI staff complained that LSI projects came down to them without full consultation in the form of "taskings" that were frequently haphazard. As the sole interface with the US Special Forces for all of Afghanistan, DEVAD/SF's presence was a prerequisite if any LSI projects were to be implemented. When DEVAD/SF went on leave/mission/trainings, DAI LSI had no point of contact for operations.

An example of the limitations of relying on a single individual to generate LSI projects occurred with the failed river crossing attempted at Regak village in Uruzgan Province. From a community development perspective the project was highly ambitious, involving some 250 workers from various tribes in the area. The project aimed to forge cooperation through shared labor on the river crossing. DAI claims that this project came down as

[4] During this phase, the CTO could also direct LSI funding in coordination with interagency civilians and military personnel on the PRT as political considerations might require. An example of this occurred in January 2008, after military operations in Musa Qala in Helmand Province.

another high-handed "tasking" issued via the DEVAD/SF mechanism, with inadequate consultation. A former CTO acknowledges that the former DAI Chief of Party resisted vigorously, arguing that the proposed river crossing design would not withstand swollen river currents. His recommendation for a bridge, instead of a crossing for the remote and difficult to access area was refused.

USAID says that the project suffered from repeated delays, as the river crossing model proceeded under DAI execution. A crucial failure, according to both USAID and DAI, was the decision to proceed with the project without the on-site visit of the chief engineer. DAI also claims that the project suffered from inadequate communication with SF teams, a result, it says, of the fact that all communication with SF was routed through DEVAD/SF. In the event, the labor of so many villagers from different tribes over the course of summer and fall of 2008, washed away when heavy rains indeed swelled the river, taking the river crossing with it in late November and early December 2008.

Third-Phase: LSI at the PRT/Maneuver Element Level

LSI evolved from the centralized emphasis on SF with the introduction of "community development grants" designed to provide FPOs at PRTs with a quick impact option for projects in insecure areas. This innovation expanded the reach of LSI to PRT and conventional maneuver elements outside of the Special Forces chain.

DAI focused on other priorities at the time this innovation was introduced, and it was not until the arrival of a new Chief of Party in August 2008 that a new LSI strategy was devised to take advantage of the new, less centralized approach. As of October 2008, DAI had a new overall LSI strategy using the "LSI Toolkit", setting a criteria for LSI (Special Initiatives/Emergency Response) projects, defining terms, laying out procedures, and clarifying relative roles and responsibilities for USAID, contractors and the military.

In essence, the process begins with a collaborative decision at the PRT level among the FPO, the military and the contractor/LSI specialist for the project. A Project Concept is sent to the CTO; once approved, a more detailed "Proposal" is submitted for approval (except for Community Based Small Grants, approved by the FPO.)

The new strategy/documents allow for LSI activities in all LGCD area of operations. In addition, DAI prepares a Provincial Stability Strategy (PSS) which sets out the political-military (or 'Pol-Mil') context, including military operations, for conducting LSI. PSS's also specify the targeted "Centers of Gravity" (locations), priorities, and the budget envelope.

The DAI LSI specialists believe the PSS introduces an agreed coordination process with FPOs and the military, making all actors aware of capacity, limitations and intentions. By setting out relative responsibilities, especially for security, administration and logistics, the PSS has introduced much-needed clarity. LSI specialists also believe that the PSS will encourage military to engage local government prior to implementing a project.

DAI has also set up a new personnel structure for LSI:

- One LSI Team Leader
- Three ex-pats Regional LSI Program Managers.
- Three Afghan nationals, as regional LSI program coordinators
- Five Afghan LSI Specialists to work on LSI projects embedded with the military.

- Undetermined number of ICAs (Independent Contractor Agreements) to work on an ad hoc basis, "under the radar", to engage the communities.

In April 2008, ARD revamped its LSI Component with the arrival of a Director of Local Stability Initiatives.

ARD has a more centralized structure, led by its LSI Director and SIER Team Leader in Kabul, with a SIER Specialist and SIER Engineer in Parwan and an SIER Specialist in Hirat, moving to Badghis pending a budget modification and the same for hiring SIER Specialist for Farah.

ARD cites difficulty recruiting qualified Afghan national staff willing to go to non-permissive locations as a major complicating factor in their LSI project performance. ARD LSI now focuses in three provinces: Baghdis, Kapisa (and neighboring Parwan), and Farah. But these are subject to change as maneuver units' priorities change. The evaluation team visited an LSI project in the Taqab Valley of Kapisa Province, conducted in cooperation with the FPO based at the PRT on Baghram Air Base.

Current approach for conducting LSI
The distinguishing features of LSI are that it is quick impact, meaning limited scope and fast-execution, project implementation can happen as fast as 30-days from approval; and that it is conducted in non-secure areas, in close coordination with the military.

There are three types of LSI activities: Special Initiative Activities (SI), generally defined as projects implemented with Special Forces, Emergency Response Activities (ER) generally defined as projects conducted with conventional force, and Conflict Management and Mitigation. ARD has different definitions for SIER activities from DAI. Its approach, as noted above, is more centralized in its Director of Local Stability Initiatives, although it has forged a similar (though less clearly defined) approach for conducting LSI activities.

For DAI, a key distinction in the prescribed process is that SI later emerges from a single individual – the DEVAD/SF – while the former emerge from a coordinated process. The distinction is important since it means that the frequency and nature of SIER projects will vary depending not on the particular needs of one non-secure area versus another, but rather due to the "coordinating" dynamics found at various PRTs. The evaluation team has been told repeatedly by FPOs and PRT Commanders, that LSI is "personality driven." As described by one FPO, he is willing to go out and look at potential LSI projects in areas that are, by definition, non-secure; other FPOs are not as willing.

Emergency Response activities emerge from coordination among maneuver elements, PRTs, DevAd, FPO and the LSI team. Using the LSI "toolkit" this coordination defines the priority province, and the scope and type of ER intervention. The LSI team, DevAd and FPO jointly develop Provincial Strategy (PSS, noted above), setting out targeted districts, project concepts, timeline and budget. CTO approves the strategy, M&E and indicators are defined. Concepts budgets of less than $10,000 can be approved by the FPO, greater amounts requiring approval is by the CTO.

SI activities are generated by the DEVAD/SF, using the criteria in the LSI "toolkit". The LSI team role is more limited: reviewing the project for feasibility and requirements then

setting out a timeline and budget. Concepts less than $10,000 can be approved by the DEVAD/SF, otherwise approval is by the CTO. FPOs have no defined role in SI activities.)

Perhaps the crucial step in LSI is identifying which localities are "ripe" for SIER activities. The LSI "toolkit" lays out these criteria, including for sub-projects. To implement SI a community must be considered "unstable" and "strategically critical" by CJSOTF, with written concurrence by the CTO. ER community clusters must be considered "unstable" and "strategically critical" by either the USAID Regional DEVAD or FPO, with written concurrence by the CTO.

"Ripeness" changes and is itself time-sensitive the criteria include a half-dozen or more indicators that, in essence, suggest an increasing security trend-line:

- Decreasing attacks on Afghan National or Coalition forces;
- Increasingly positive information from communities about insurgents (e.g. planned attacks, IEDs);
- Growing confidence on the part of villagers to stand up to insurgents;
- An established positive relationship or trust between influential village elders and Coalition forces.

These indicators are verified through field visits, and once determined, an assessment of "community needs" is made by the LSI team to determine "sub-projects" from three categories: Phase I: Immediate (cash-for-work); Phase II: Short-Term Stabilization (cash-for-work of larger scope or longer duration); Phase III: Medium-Term Stabilization (more complex projects supporting development, as opposed to stability objectives.)

These phases constitute sequential, LSI implementation cycles. A one to three week field intervention is conducted, and initial, Phase I projects are implemented (according to development principles), supervised and closed. Then, after a determined period of time, the situations and needs are reassessed and another cycle of LSI activities is planned, as second or third phase projects. In theory, this goes on until the community is fully stable making Component one and two projects possible.

There are four various mechanisms for delivering LSI Special Initiative or Emergency Response activities:

1. Community Based Small Grants, under $10,000.00;
2. Direct implementation of cash-for-work projects;
3. Pre-qualified/selected vendors for rapid equipment and goods acquisition and delivery;
4. Pre-qualified/selected contractors and grantees for rapid small project implementation.

Because it is quick impact, most LSI projects are generally simple, not involving engineering such as cash-for-work (canal cleaning) or simple structural renovations.

Gravel road projects can be constructed, but, as the ARD LSI Director states, "they must be tied, as with all of our subprojects, directly to a Military Security Strategy with a strong nexus on stability for any given area. Most of the roadwork comes in the way of improved graveling projects of a short distance. We [can do road projects requiring a sub-contractor] too but they require more time."

Some LSI projects do require engineering. According to ARD engineers, such LSI projects are approved first – before engineering specifications are estimated or designs drawn. This results in delays – such as the Uruzgan River crossing project discussed above – to what is normally a very quick-response program and can complicate the process.

How has LSI worked in practice?
The engagement of the community in which an LSI project takes places determines its success. If the community is willing to participate in its implementation (volunteering basic materials, time and work) and willing to defend the project, then it the project will enhance security. If these factors are not in place, then the Taliban is likely more influential and the implementing partners are at risk. This makes the efforts reliant on the reliability of the indicators and the ability and willingness of contractors to access non-secure areas.

A former USAID staff member told the evaluation team that *"the real challenge in doing LSI is understanding the dynamics in communities (operational environment) so interventions are appropriate and community led. If you don't understand what is really going on in a community, you have no chance of making an impact. This is where integrating with the military is so important - they have intelligence and other assets that we can and should tap into to a access this information."* An experienced FPO agrees, stating that the key to successful LSI is to understand the conflict dynamics in a community, through proper assessment (questions like 'who are the key players? Who is respected? How did the problems in the area start?') Having FPOs willing to go out and visit projects and D/FPOs both willing and well trained in community development are crucial. Neglecting the role of the D/FPO as an additional means of steering LSI projects to success would be a mistake.

Given the inherent need to understand and engage communities, DAI and ARD need to hire enough staff who are willing to go to remote and insecure areas after they are fully conversant in LSI but both contractors reported that their main impediment to LSI performance is a lack of such staff. Other factors that hinder implementing LSI are from poor communications (explaining the program to PRT) and cooperation (with FPO, military elements, and implementing partners and other stakeholders.)

Even with the introduction of the carefully constructed concept documents, including the PSS, there appear to be gaps in understanding of LSI. At the PRT in Kandahar, the evaluation team met with the (Canadian) PRT CIMIC commander who professed complete ignorance of LSI. (DAI believes that the CIMIC commander knows of LSI projects, but does not realize that they are formally "LSI.") His civilian colleague from CIDA was aware of LSI, but stated that the Canadian civil-military apparatus in Kandahar was in the process of preparing another strategy for the province, and had not yet decided where LSI would fit. An even more severe attitude exists in Helmand on the part of the DfID. DAI Regional Center South (Kandahar) states that at the direction of the FPO/CTO in Helmand (Laskar Gah) there will be no LSI in the province, citing that DfID prefers to use their resources for projects.

FPO Kandahar adds that a third volatile district (straddling Kandahar and Helmand provinces), Maywand is now the AOR of a US infantry battalion. According to this FPO, USAID has assigned a sole FPO for Maywand District who will focus in large part on LSI

projects. The current FPO Kandahar explains that CIMIC lead is aware of LSI projects in Zhari and Panjwayi, although the CIMIC may not clearly grasp the term "LSI" or "LGCD." The larger point, the FPO notes, is that there is CIMIC awareness and support for LSI projects in those two districts.

In Farah, the recently arrived maneuver element liaison (a Marine Lieutenant-Colonel based in the PRT there for three weeks when evaluation team met him) stated that he had never heard of "LSI"; the same was true for the PRT Commander. The lack of awareness of LSI in Farah baffled the ARD Director of Local Stability Initiatives, who visited Farah PRT in mid-2008. According to the Department of State representative, the Marine maneuver unit at the PRT then was "ecstatic" with the possibilities of LSI. Ensuing delays ultimately ran up against the "rip" date for the unit.

This is not unusual for PRTs and LSI, Commanders rotate in and out of the PRT so often that LSI suffers from the schedule; this increases the need for consistent Contractor staff, conversant in LSI theory to educate the PRT and work with a single "driver" on the military side to initiate and advance projects. Responsibility for communication problems are clearly shared among a number of actors – USAID staff, FPOs, contractor and, as well, the military. FPO Kandahar shares his frustration at military officers who fail to follow up with even a simple, written request on projects. Addressing the gaps in communication, cooperation and understanding about LSI is essential if the program's effectiveness is to become less "personality dependent" and more dependent on the stabilization and development requirements in non-secure areas. Standard processes for at least communicating the purpose and process at all relevant levels for LSI must become a priority.

Neither the overall LSI Component nor any of the three-phased sub-projects of SI/ER are ends in themselves; both are expressly aimed at advancing a community toward projects for greater stability. Ultimately, the goal of LSI is to effect a transition from quick impact, stability initiatives towards Community Development programming, in Counter-Insurgency (COIN) parlance, to move from "clear" and "hold" to "build." At all stages, LSI shares the goal of the LGCD Components to connect remote, underserved villages to government, thereby extending its reach and legitimacy.

By the admission of contractors and USAID officials, there has been negligible "graduation" of non-secure communities to start Local Governance or Community Development programming. Citing the overall deterioration of security in Afghanistan, particularly in the areas where LSI programming is targeted. The model of graduated transition from LSI to CD/LG remains an aspiration.

There has been more success in advancing SI/ER activities from Phase-1 (simple cash-for-work) to the more ambitious scope of Phase-2 and Phase 3. Initial, Phase-1 projects are packaged with a plan to graduate to medium-term projects that would work with District or Provincial governments.

As a former USAID staff member explained, LSI methodology works when one determines who is causing conflict in a community – not simply sampling their wishes or stated needs. USAID officials say that this is where civilian development experts provide critical value-added to the military; the latter are ill equipped to identify conflict instigators or developing a plan to "transform" a community or area. The central

component of this approach is the involvement of the community or Shura itself in developing a plan to address collective issues; an approach that differs from the military tendency to simply query needs and then declare, "We'll do it." Indeed, one team member interviewed a PRT commander who openly acknowledged the military's inherent weaknesses in applying development principles.

LSI Monitoring & Evaluation

Because LSI projects are conducted in areas where access is limited, monitoring and evaluation frequently suffers. The absence of frequent M&E is another reason that LSI projects do not mature into Component Two projects. Having Deputy FPOs better trained – and motivated – to ensure that projects are meeting their objectives and confirm Implementing Partners' activities and results would be a concrete improvement in any follow-on LSI-type program. ARD cites indirect metrics to measure the impact of stabilization initiatives, noting that the very fact that the projects are accessible is an indicator of the growing stability, leading to opportunity for Afghans to earn money, restore livelihoods, and venture out without fear of reprisals from Taliban associates, who when identified are reported to local authorities.

At a CMM project implemented by DAI in Pachier Agam District of Nangarhar province the Evaluation Team visited a project that trained members of the district level shura-ulema (religious leaders) in conflict management. According to deputy head of shura-ulema, he and his colleagues, which included a senior ulema member who had allegedly been apprehended earlier and suspected of being Taliban, were impressed with the training and are favorable towards USAID. Measuring such impact is problematic, other than with numeric data (trainees, sessions) since the project was not to resolve any existing conflict.

LSI Lessons Learned

Determining how USAID should utilize LSI in the immediate and post-program future depends on more than a review of the experience date. Moving toward optimal program design and utilization requires addressing three threshold questions:

- Does the LSI premise make sense, i.e. does it have a positive impact on stability?
- Given the high-risk and close integration with the military, is it better to give LSI funds to the military?
- What is the new context for LSI?

LSI's premise does appear to make sense. Despite the fact that evaluation team could not itself directly verify all LSI programming, there is ample indirect evidence of the program's clear benefits. Perhaps the most convincing example is in Shindand District of Herat Province. The mere fact that *any* programming took place after the deeply controversial incident of August 2008 suggests that LSI has intrinsic value.

However, as with component two, there is little evidence that LSI projects have achieved the goal of linking communities in non-secure areas with local government. Indeed, virtually no LSI projects have "progressed" to the next stage of LGCD programming. There is little reason to expect LSI projects, in the remaining time before the program comes to an end, to connect Afghans to their local authorities, especially in dangerous areas where any organized group is suspect and local officials are too scared to get out and visit.

It is questionable whether it even makes sense to attach the goal of "linking" communities and government to LSI projects. Given the limited scope of most projects in the this component (cash-for-work activities such as karez cleanings), there is frequently no real scope for productive engagement with government. Cleaning a karez is a traditionally an activity that villages have handled on their own, without government involvement. Therefore the effort to "link" or "give credit to government" is contrived and is understood as such by beneficiaries. Indeed, in virtually all Components Two and Three projects the evaluation team observed, villagers credited foreign donors or others, not the Afghan government.

As for the notion of turning LSI funds to the military to implement, note the words of a PRT commander: "Do not do this! We are not good at this kind of work! The military has a short-term focus, and is biased towards metrics that are quantifiable (bricks and mortar, for example.) We are not good at the processes involved in LSI. It should definitely stay with USAID, as development experts."

By most measures, the security situation in Afghanistan continues on a downward trend. Observers believe that levels of violence are uncharacteristically high for winter, suggesting that spring activities by insurgents could be especially intense. This is an election year in Afghanistan, contributing another incentive and opportunity for disruption and violence. The imminent "surge" of US forces to the country promises to inject new opportunities and new dynamics into the country.

The surge in particular means that USAID will quickly have to consider lessons and options for the future, if it is maximize its contribution to the stabilization effort.

Recommendations

USAID must decide what version of LSI it wishes to implement, and on what scale. In fact, there seem to be two different concepts of LSI in Afghanistan: LSI is simply development work in non-secure areas ("It's CD where CD can't yet be done."); or LSI is counter-insurgency work, using community development principles ("LSI is only secondarily aimed at development; its primary purpose is to support or follow-on from kinetic operations.")

The optimal arrangement for LSI programming is to keep it with Community Development. The Local Governance component should be separate and distinct (likewise, the PRT Support which is not really a substantive "component" but rather a mechanism for providing generalized assistance.) In developing follow-on programming, USAID should keep in mind the several important differences between LSI and CD, noted above, while structuring the program to retain synergies. There is logic to keeping LSI with Community Development: because Components Two and Three engage the community. As one experienced FPO stated, LSI is sometimes about "connecting the community to itself"; the challenges and skill set required to perform LSI and CD, are quite close. Both LSI and CD aim to mobilize communities around tasks such as canal cleaning, basic road improvements, or small structures. While the space for engineering complexity on CD projects is wider, the engineering challenge is largely the same, leading to synergies and economies for a single implementer. This notes, the evaluation team recommends the following for future programming:

- LSI must be precisely defined with and include a realistic explanation of the Afghan context, with examples of what local stability initiatives are, and what contractors are expected to deliver;
- Given the inherent risk of LSI programming, a common understanding of LSI shared by USAID and contractors is essential;
- USAID should consider whether follow-on LSI (or LGCD) programming should be implemented by region, or by smaller areas of the country, perhaps limited to a specified number of identified provinces;
- If USAID is to conduct LSI activities, the Agency, its staff and contractors must understand the inherent risks of accepting the contract;
- Expand and improve the communication and explanation of LSI – at all appropriate levels of the military.
- A more narrow scope for quick impact programs resulted in greater success and this approach should be the norm;
- Employ and deploy USAID officers who understand military operations and development principles;
- LSI leadership should be designated and institutionalized;
- USAID conduct a relatively short training on core development skills like community development for FPOs, either before coming to Afghanistan or with their colleagues soon after arrival;
- Direct communication between LSI contractors and FPOs – consistent with established PRT communication channels – will enhance understanding and improve activity;

Component Four: Support to PRTs

Both Contractors' Task Orders describe Component Four as "to provide sector expertise in subjects that support the mandates of the PRTs to extend the reach of the GIRoA and facilitate reconstruction and development in priority provinces." Further, that the expected outcome is "to identify a pool of experts in subjects such as agriculture, local governance, conflict management, infrastructure and community mobilization who will be available to assist the PRTs in implementation of the LGCD project."

The Evaluation team found that the purpose of this component is to support the PRT with no specific and well-defined project area or focus. The component is in fact a supporting mechanism that can assist the PRT and the other LGCD components but it is not a program component itself.

In practice, Component Four programming has been negligible, or where performed, different from the concept set out in the Task order. It seems that the Component itself was little understood by the implementing firms and that the connection with the PRTs was not adequately made on a central level such that the PRTs were aware of the support the program offered or how to access it.

As Evaluation Team found that, ARD provided little support to PRTs (one Regional Director mentioned a single project that *might* be considered Component Four.) While the impression from ARD was that they were "told" by USAID not to do Component Four. A former ARD Chief of Party explains that, as an attempt to advance this component, ARD employed a full-time staff person specifically to identify appropriate projects for PRT

support. Also that, USAID was negative towards this initiative and put up obstacles for the staff to liaise with FPOs and access PRTs. Ultimately, the position was terminated in October 2008. USAID staff challenge this version of events.

DAI's experience is quite different. DAI has more than 20 PRT support activities as part of Component Four; twelve of which were done at the direct request of the PRTs. The main thrust of DAI's Support to PRTs is in conducting surveys. DAI Afghan staff themselves generally conducts the surveys. They also make a strong effort to involve both the community and local government in carrying out the surveys. As an example, the Director cited an irrigation survey in Khost, where the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock were present while DAI staff member collected primary data and the community provided secondary data.

As DAI's implements component four's through surveys, these are not only worthwhile for data, but evaluations. The Palto Dam Feasibility Assessment project, led PRT to cancel further work on a dam in Paktya Province, as the study concluded the project was not feasible. According to DAI, it has established a centralized information source that PRTs and stakeholders to access provincial data and studies in the South-East Region.

As has been evident to the Evaluation Team, the activity of this Component, as with Component three, depends on the initiative of the FPO. Support to PRTs must be "pitched" to the military and then followed through with the contractor. Some FPOs may not want or have the time to put into what is essentially a small Component of the very large LGCD.

FPO/DEVAD notes that USAID programming is hostage to willingness of military to provide transport, and access to other scarce resources. The ability of FPOs to lay claim on these scarce resources is diminished to the extent that they do not have direct monies at their disposal, or to the extent that their efforts are not directed at "brick and mortar" projects. In other words, PRTs and military in general are not impressed with USAID "process-oriented" projects, and are instead more willing to support USAID where it is building some structure. Effective development and counter-insurgency require attention to processes. Giving PRTs a civilian lead will put USAID and the development imperative on more equal footing to implement assistance programs with the PRTs.

Recommendations

- Support to PRT should not be a separate component within a program and instead be treated as separate mechanism managed by the PRT Office;
- Change the PRT structure to be civilian led, using the Iraq model as a positive example;
- Brief the military at Command levels of the availability of support to PRT programming;
- Direct FPOs to learn the efficacy of the component and actively "pitch" PRT support to their military counterparts;
- Confirm from PRT Command the level of access that Afghan nationals have to PRTs as expert support or the security screening required to provide access.

V. ANALYSIS

Project Implementation Progress

Late Start-up/ Decentralization and Lack of Organizational Blueprint
The project implementation progress for both ARD and DAI has been adversely affected by the slow start-up, slow project implementation and the delay in decentralization of both LGCD programs. Once the primary phase of decentralization had occurred and regional hub was established, both organizations experienced challenges in further decentralizing and establishing field offices. These processes took time and energy away from project implementation. Moreover, for the first year and well into the second, both programs lacked a central operational blueprint for how projects would be developed and implemented. Project implementation processes took time to develop as various methodologies were tried. In year one particularly, the progress achieved and project development and implementation was nominal. For the ARD North West program, by the end of year one, one of the regional directors estimated that only 3% of projects in the overall program plan had been actualized. Not only did the project implementation progress lag in quantity, but it also lacked in quality. Lacking a regional field presence presented challenges in designing and developing projects that adequately reflected the needs of the community since there was relatively little interaction with the community. In many cases, projects were developed which reflected more the expertise of the implementer and/or the implementer's trying to replicate another successful project.

Office & Staffing Challenges
Once regional hubs had been established, both ARD and DAI experienced challenges in further decentralizing and establishing field offices. The logistic processes involved in this undertaking took time and energy from project development and implementation. Moreover, staff recruitment issues further hampered project implementation progress. Both organizations faced significant challenges in recruiting national staff (for both regional and field offices) who were willing to travel to and work in the program's operating arena-- remote, underserved and unstable areas, challenged and underserved areas. Both LGCD/NW & SE programs have suffered from a fairly significant amount of staff turnover that has affected overall program continuity as well as project implementation progress. Staff attrition rate Progress achieved in project implementation for both ARD and DAI was affected by the challenges to recruit and retain program staff willing to live and work in the program's operating arena --remote, underserved and unstable areas.

Challenges of the Operating Arena
The fact that the program is specifically targeting areas that are unstable, remote and /or underserved provides further significant challenges for project implementation at the logistic level. For projects under $10,000.00 this is not such an acute challenge since the grant can be provided directly to the community. For projects over $10,000.00 it is necessary for greater contracting, monitoring and communications. Monitoring & Evaluation in the areas that are least accessible represents an even greater challenge since often the data gathered is not be independently verified.

Role of the FPO in Project Development/ Implementation Progress
The overly cumbersome administrative approval process also affected the project implementation progress. This specifically pertains to the USAID Field Program Officer (FPO), who acts in the field to assist with the LGCD projects. There are several FPO all of whom answer to the Deputy Director of PRT Programs while working with the LGCD

CTOs. The FPO is embedded at the PRT and works directing LGCD from the PRT on a day-to-day basis. As such, depending on their initiative, the FPO can have more influence on the projects than almost anyone else.

This effected how LSI projects developed from the PRT with minimal input from USAID or the Contractors. This also had an adverse effect on the efficiency of project implementation, finally affecting the project implementation process.

The progress of ARD project implementation appears, at this point in time, to be going smoothly and quickly. Field office staff are approving and getting projects implemented quickly and effectively. The backlog of approved projects is still being cleared from LGCD's first year.

LGCD Program Achievement of Results

The individual programmatic components of the LGCD program, even if the components themselves were achieving 100% of expected impact, are not sufficient in Afghanistan's current context to achieve the program's main goals. The challenges in achieving the program's macro-goals can be seen as the result of many factors, including inherent program design, lack of harmonization of the program components and their responsible stakeholders, weaknesses or lateness in developing coordinated operational and management strategies, challenges regarding consistency of managerial oversight and accountability, the lack of sound operational intelligence about the realities of local governance in Afghanistan, and the unpredictability and precipitous decline of the operating arena.

The Contractor's slow start negatively impacted results into the current time. This was based on misunderstandings about the primary mechanisms to work towards these goals. Local Governance programs suffered from the delay while the program was first centralized then de-centralized, staff turnover and identifying local staff. The Community Development program suffered from many of the same factors and local Implementing Partners lack of Capacity. The Local Stability Initiatives suffered by the Contractors misinterpreting its meaning. ARD interpreting LSI as a conflict mapping exercise, resulted in few projects being attempted in non-secure areas until the first quarter of 2008; USAID personnel utilized LSI projects in DAI's area of operations as a means to achieve objectives for which LSI was not designed. Support to PRTs suffered from a breakdown in understanding between USAID and ARD that persisted through much of the program. To this day, ARD has conducted almost no Component Four projects. DAI has conducted a number of Component Four projects, most of which being surveys for PRTs, not providing experts.

Other obstacles to achieve program objectives include: flawed program design, lack of harmonization of the program components and stakeholders, weaknesses or delay in developing coordinated operational and management, inconsistency of managerial oversight and accountability, lack of understanding of the realities of local governance in Afghanistan, and the precipitous decline in security in much of the operating arena.

Monitoring and Evaluating Projects

Both organizations have put Monitoring and Evaluating (M&E) systems in place and are working hard to make sure they are being followed. These include training for their staff and the sub-contractors that are implementing the projects. DAI and ARD both use

effective monitoring schemes to track project's progress defining the percentage of completion over time and by expenditure.

As is usual for development projects it is much more difficult to determine the impact if a project in addition to its quantifiable facets. That is, it is easy to count the number of people who use a bridge to cross a river, but determining what they are doing on the other side of the river is another matter altogether, one that really demonstrates the effectiveness of the project.

The M&E being implemented in Afghanistan is collecting valuable data that is being stored in their systems (such as DAI's TAMIS) that allows it to be tracked over time, disaggregated by components, geography, beneficiaries and can be shared over their network.

One aspect of the M&E that the evaluation does call into question is the fact that there is no impartial arbiter to conduct the M&E. It is understood that many project areas are insecure making the M&E difficult at best. Still the evaluation found that there were enough irregularities to warrant comment. To start, even getting the CCN members of the evaluation to talk about these irregularities was problematic. The project implementers asked the CCNs not to report everything that they saw or spoke about to the evaluation, and it wasn't until the closing days of the evaluation that the CCNs were did divulge the information fully understanding that doing so will benefit the program more and thus potentially more Afghan villages and people. The evaluation also recognizes that due to accepted local custom some monitoring is difficult, particularly gender specific training. The evaluation team kept this in mind while also being sure to ask questions to gather sensitive information.

The evaluation did observe enough irregularities to warrant mentioning. When mis-reporting was seen it was done so as a the difference between what was seen in the field and what was told to us by stakeholders, then what was reported as outcomes in project grant designs and concept reports. Requests for end-of-project reports were not fulfilled, so the evaluation team cannot ascertain if the M&E reports are final or if data will (or even can be) confirmed then reported as desired but unachievable outcomes.

At a women's nursery training project in Laghman, women are supposed to receive management training and hold the managerial positions at the nursery. Arriving unannounced at the site the evaluation team saw no women working at the nursery, only men. When the evaluator asked about the women's role at the nursery, he was told that they perform menial tasks, such as weeding. While cultural sensitivities makes first-hand observation of women's training difficult, the fact that the training could have taken place then the project implementer not admit it for cultural sensitivities indicates that the project itself is inappropriate and unlikely to achieve expected goals in such an environment. Further at this project the CCN visited multiple project sites learning from the participants that the project has not been conducting promised trainings because to do so would be against their culture, but that they report having done so (out of site and verifiable M&E) in order to continue receiving the funding.

The evaluation team respects the fact that Afghanistan's cultural rules are complicated and difficult to navigate – even for locals – and as such make M&E more difficult. The team knows that the projects where mis-reporting was apparent is a minority of the projects they

saw. But the fact that the implementers themselves admitted to the irregularities is worth noting.

Even if mis-reporting is an infrequent occurrence, the fact that it is happening at all warrants recommending that an external M&E scheme be put in place to verify project results. An external organization can be contracted and trained to meet expected M&E requirements.

Communications and Media Outreach

Both Contractors have communication and media outreach efforts within their LGCD programs. Both work within the Contractor's main office in Kabul and with the programs in the field. The main efforts here are to attract productive attention to the LGCD program and it's beneficiaries, the Contractor itself, through a sub-contractor, with USAID and by the project participants, does this.

The ARD program has assisted reporters to attend project events, usually openings or closings. ARD does not pay the reporters to attend, but does recognize the difficulties that the media faces in Afghanistan and assists the reporters with their transport to cover the stories. ARD also provides basic project information and tries to engage the media with the local government official who also participates in the event.

In addition to getting the local officials to attend the events in an effort to make the connection between the officials the project and their constituents ARD also commented their interest to have the officials monitoring the projects as part of their media outreach work.

There is also media assistance within the local government officials specifically having the TAs preparing press released from the offices. There is a sure need for closer oversight by media experts with both organizations with this program. There is already the potential for TAs to overstep their prerogative, so to make sure the TA does not speak on behalf of the official, training to make sure the TA knows how much they can properly assist and to have the officials' offices better understand the use and function of a press releases will better assist the current and future media and community relations abilities.

DAI employs a diverse media program as part of the LGCD. This includes supporting the *Facing the Nation* show that airs on TV in Afghanistan and You-Tube on the Internet; this show has every Provincial governor as a guest. DAI also contracts with Pushwat media consulting company. This consultancy is to place stories in Afghanistan media, usually on the radio. The consultancy also employs 20 journalists who are to report on LGCD activities (I assume just DAI). They are not under any direction to only report positive stories, but DAI is unaware of any critical stories to date.

Both ARD and DAI also produce program reports (monthly, quarterly, annual reports and success stories) the Contractors staff works at these through a field to headquarters levels. These assist to create good governance educational materials, including the *Facing the Nation* TV programs and project material that are distributed to communities, ministry offices and line departments. DAI conducts trainings for staff and partner organizations to create and use these materials, they also plan good governance conferences that have yet to be conducted.

As usually, in a nascent democracy such as Afghanistan's there are weaknesses in a media that is not yet independent, and the Contractors have problems relying on the Afghan media, which 'isn't free but available at a reasonable rate.' The lack of reporting skills, original stories, and reliance on external financial support to operate undermines the media's capacity to properly report balanced, informative news.

The entire LGCD program needs to present media to the local officials and community as a means to deliver and receive constituent information. This is as more than just to a means for local government to present themselves to the community. This can come as encouraging the media to report for constructive criticism while working with the local officials and their staff to best receive the information and how to work with it to learn, respond and lead by knowing it.

Demonstrated Impacts From Each Implementer

Local Governance
Local Governance has been the most effective direct program through efforts to increase the local government's functioning capacity. While many projects are happening, the duration of the programs and opportunities to demonstrate their public service capacity have been limited to date. So far the inability to link the people with their local government has also not been able to demonstrate any increased stability.

Providing physical assistance through improved facilities and the equipment therein may create an environment more conducive for local interaction and if for no other reason the program will make the conditions more 'professional.' The trainings can provide more direct assistance to what the officials can do in their offices. Working with both Contractors can improve their capacity immediately. Having a role to play within Afghanistan's governing system will allow them to perform these improved functions to better their community and build real connections to create security.

Community Development
These projects demonstrated effective impacts albeit in a limited manner:
The livelihoods projects tend to meet basic community needs. In order to make the livelihood programs work better for more communities, the programs must make sure they address actual needs and capacity to employ the training on a proper scale and in a market that can be accessed. For example, training everyone who owns a motorcycle how to repair their bikes, may save that person the costs of repairs, but does nothing to assist the local economy with new viable businesses.

The cash-for-work programs have had direct impact, particularly when organized through the CDCs and when addressing a community need. These work to provide immediate economic benefit, keep people away from insurrection and when done properly can build on itself to create more positive programs that build on themselves for additional development with greater involvement by the local government and the community.

Local Stability Initiatives
ARD demonstrated little impact until Spring 2008. Since then they have managed significant impact in limited areas. For example, In Shindand (Herat Province) their LSI projects worked with the local community adversely affected by the August military incident. In Parwan Province, LSI activities stemmed the potential spillover from military

actions in bordering Kapisa Province. Continued staffing and access issues impose constraints on operational impacts, as does the inability for these programs to 'graduate' to Community Development ones suggests the impact on stability as tenuous.

DAI has increasing effectiveness, especially with the advent of the 'toolkit' that uses clear terms to define the process for LSI projects. Incomplete communications with the military and other actors continue to limit optimal results.

Support to PRTS
Support to PRTs activities have been carried out in only a few areas. The DAI projects have had positive programmatic impact – providing useful information to PRTS and stimulating contacts between government and community, however it is not yet possible to measure the direct impact on stability in Afghanistan.

Lessons Learned

- Effective community development requires consultation with a wide cross-section of community opinion, not just select leaders;
- The need for common understanding between USAID and contractor on the goals and mechanisms for achieving all program outcomes;
- The value of communications with a well developed and understood program description to prevent program creep into areas that are open for interpretation;
- Over promising and expectations by all parties, where there is no full understanding of the conditions on the ground nor of the capacity to deliver what is expected and promised.
- Staff consistency and hand-over time being vital to the continuation of programs, making sure that people are not moving in and out of positions too fast or without proper time shared by the predecessor and successor so they can learn from one another and meet with Contractors, donors, implementing partners, beneficiaries, etc. to continue projects seamlessly.

How Have LGCD Projects Strengthened Stability in Afghanistan?

The LGCD projects have all been marginally effective to strengthen Afghanistan's stability. The most effective programs have addressed the daily needs of the people, giving them licit options to pursue. But the enormity, diversity and challenge of Afghanistan, makes the impact of LGCD, even as large as the program is, negligible.

Local Governance Activities have had some direct programmatic impact in Afghanistan by modestly increasing the capabilities of government officials, their offices and staff. The complete extent and how this will serve their constituents is yet to be determined. The fact that some local officials have better organized files, are modestly better at preparing for meetings, at putting together their Provincial Packages and communicate through the Media better should over time culminate into improved services for their constituents. Barely more than two years into the program there is only circumstantial evidence from too few places to measure how the program may have strengthened stability in Afghanistan.

Community Development Activities have had more positive impacted to strengthen security in Afghanistan than any of the other components. This is from the simple fact

that it operates at the nexus of instability, the village level. Providing income earning potential through vocational training, providing agriculture and/or water assistance

LSI activities have had some limited impact on stability in non-secure areas. However, the failure of virtually all project communities to "graduate" from LST to CD suggests the impact on stability may be tenuous; even infrastructure assistance (bridges, roads, canals) can only deliver as well as the surrounding circumstances permit. A bridge that allows transit by vendors to a market can also allow easy access by people who want to disrupt the market.

The few support activities to PRTs that have been done have had positive programmatic impact by providing some useful information to PRTs. This in turn could have benefited communities and strengthened security in Afghanistan. But not enough time has passed to understand for sure, nor has there yet been any LSI or other activities based on these studies that could stimulating contacts between government and community. Even if and when this does happen any actions that are possible to measure will be circumstantial in their direct impact on stability.

The specific types of projects that fostered security were:

- Roads, such as the DAI Sheik Misri road construction that not only cut travel time to economic, education, health care and social concerns but also opened the community for greater inclusion by more families in a secure area.
- The Money for Work projects foster security in Afghanistan for at least a brief time by providing immediate assistance and support. But the lasting relationship with the LGCD and chances for security are as strong as the ties are lasting… having further work and livelihood chances enable better-fostered security. The livelihood activities have done more to foster security by occupying the most fertile space that insurgents use to attract supporters. Having applicable livelihood assistance will balance and advance a community's economic status. Furthermore having numerous participants from neighboring communities will not only reinforce the livelihood projects but also create sustainable opportunities by sharing the efficacy of the experiences.

Synergies with USG's other efforts and other donor

The LGCD program does cooperate with a great many other organizations, local government entities, NGOs, foreign PRTs, and other US Government officials. LGCD is also working with foreign programs and donors on a province-specific level as seen with the United Kingdom led PRT in Helmand and the Canadian led PRT in Kandahar. Future stability programs can only benefit with increased interaction and communications can benefit all involved.

Working with other USAID programs to build the links between the levels of government could benefit the program. The little synergy that has happened is with Alternative Development Program (ADP), because both DAI and ARD have the mandate for ADP programs. The future of the cooperation is based on funding for the Contractors.

Opportunities for synergies exist within USG's other efforts in Afghanistan and other donor activities. These are immediately possible for the PRTs, where numerous USG offices work daily, side-by-side. Having the State Department Representatives, USDA and other USG representatives makes comparing program capacity and possibilities

immediate and responsive. Making sure that the implementing partners and mission are aware of the potential programs is also imperative so to prevent programs that would extend beyond the program purview. As the program also works in foreign manned PRTs, it is possible to liaise with the associated country donors, CIDA, SIDA, DfID for potential program synergies.

The other USAID programs can assist from working with LGCD and can aide the program as well. For example the connections from community level government to the central level can benefit from the coordination and education amongst the programs assisting the Mayors and Ministries. This assistance can reinforce understanding of the programs and provide funding from the central government to the grassroots projects that badly need to funds.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Now that the LGCD programs are operating effectively, the two program achieving the greatest impacts are the capacity building for provincial government officials under component one and the CBSG delivering community development projects provided under components two and three.

The support provided government offices have a limited but still positive effect allowing them to better conduct business more efficiently leading to more effectively identifying community needs and liaising more regularly and effectively with their constituencies.

The CBSG projects are an effective use of money and have directly assisted various types of community groups to help communities and NGOs in identifying community needs and effectively develop programs to address these needs.

Community development projects have provided needed infrastructure and livelihoods projects to underserved communities; while the community has not connected these projects as efforts from the local government.

The success of projects and their processes do not indicate the extent to which the same have extended the reach of the Afghan government to the community, or to foster stability in Afghanistan.

Governance-strengthening initiatives have not helped line ministries access funds from their central government, a key component of government capacity building.

Communities in non-secure identify Local Stability Initiatives as welcome assistance projects from Afghan NGOs, USAID or Coalition forces.

The evaluation team's key recommendations are as follows:

- Local Governance and Community Development programs will be better served and more successful if they are designed and implemented as decentralized, field-based programs from the start of the project.
- Future local governance programming needs to be better coordinated and integrated within the framework of national governance development strategies,

and more closely integrated with Afghan ministries and relevant institutions at the national level.

- Local governance capacity-building programs can be most effective if clearly defined by an operational plan, that works as a blueprint for how the program's will accomplish its goals
- Local government initiatives need to be integrated within the framework of existing national strategies for government development, with stronger engaged interaction to fully adopt the program within the National efforts.
- Need to gain joint buy-in and endorsement for local government programs from the relevant national Ministries (as above, going beyond Memoranda of Understanding to active involvement in joint project planning, implementation and monitoring) to ensure that endorsement is being granted from the highest levels and to secure sustainability;
- Accountability and maintenance commitments (as deliverables within the program itself) need to be more vigorously factored into the program: for all capacity-building initiatives executed and assistance provided, there needs to be clearly-defined commitments of how that assistance will be utilized and maintained by benefactors Community development projects, particularly those in unstable and high risk areas need to be monitored more effectively; to overcome bias or carelessness. Accurate monitoring and evaluation needs to be done in less-permissive areas by an independent, locally aware contractor. Additionally, comprehensive training for locally based NGOs on M&E methodology and utilizing these bodies for independent monitoring of projects throughout the lifecycle of the program will be useful in this area.
- USAID needs to examine how their staff can better monitor projects, taking into consideration the roles, lines of communications and perspectives that the CTOs, FPOs and D-FPOs possess.
- A comprehensive community needs assessment should be the basis for the development of community projects; the tool utilized by ARD, the Participatory Rural Appraisal Mechanism, has been very effective in identifying projects that reflect the needs and the priorities of the community.
- Since 80% of people in Afghanistan make their living from agriculture, community development initiatives that focus on the agricultural sector and/ or have impact in this area, if executed effectively, can bring potentially high returns to entire communities.
- USAID should expect Local Stability Initiatives to be implemented as the Counterinsurgency Support projects that use Community Development principles they are. The ultimate goal can remain to transition LSI interventions into community development projects, but the immediate focus and goals of LSI should be rendering a modicum of stability to a volatile area, not development *per se*.
- Livelihoods projects are effective if they provide skills for which there is a local market and the appropriate tools by which the beneficiaries can begin applying their skills to generate income following the training; carpentry training, for example, should be offered in areas where construction skills are in demand and the programs should provide carpentry tools for the graduating beneficiaries and/or small capital to start businesses.

LGCD has suffered from significant problems from within and without the program. After the slow start, confused directives and understandings, expedited ramp up of expenditures

and staff changes the program is now seeing productively unlike any previous and this should continue effectively through the remaining months of the Task Order.

VII. ATTACHMENTS

1) Scope Of Work
2) Names/ titles of stakeholder interviewed
3) List of project site and PRTs visited
4) List of LGCD Offices visited
5) Bibliography of reference and support materials reviewed