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Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) – East

Final Report

Ghazni Province_Khwaja Umari District_Qala Naw Girls School Sport Field (PLAY) opening ceremony

Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) – East

Final Report

The authors' views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government

Name of USAID Activity:	Afghanistan Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) - East
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Geographic locations:	**Ghazni Province:** Andar, Bahrami Shahid, Dih Yak, Khwaja Umari, Qarabagh, and Muqur **Khost Province:** Gurbuz, Jaji Maidan, Mando Zayi, Tani, and Nadir Shah Kot **Logar Province:** Baraki Barak, Khoshi, and Mohammad Agha **Maydan Wardak Province:** Chaki Wardak, Jalrez, Nirkh, Saydabad and Maydan Shahr **Paktya Province:** Ahmad Abad, Laja Ahmad Khail, Laja Mangal, Zadran, Garda Serai, Zurmat, Ali Khail, Mirzaka, and Sayed Karam **Paktika Province:** Sharan and Yosuf Khel
Overall goals and objectives:	SIKA – East promotes stabilization in key areas by supporting GIRoA at the district level, while coordinating efforts at the provincial level to implement community led development and governance initiatives that respond to the population's needs and concerns to build confidence, promote stability, and increase the provision of basic services.
Expected Results:	• Address Instability and Respond to Concerns: Provincial and District Entities increasingly address sources of instability and take measures to respond to the population's development and governance concerns. • Enable Access to Services: Provincial and District entities understand what organizations and provincial line departments work within their geographic areas, what kind of services they provide, and how the population can access those services. • Advocay, Public Outreach and Relationships: Provincial authorities improve their ability to communicate with District Entities in order to help then better understand their population's needs and prioritize basic service delivery interventions. • Improve Basic Service Delivery: Provincial authorities are able to improve basis service delivery by using GIRoA, CDCs, DDAs and District Community Councils (DCCs), which gain capacity to plan, design, implement and monitor projects, with a focus on labor-intensive projects or productive infrastructure.

The SIKA-East Program was implemented by AECOM under contract AID-306C-12-00002.

Contents

Executive Summary ix

Program Overview 4

I. Address Instability and Respond to Concerns 8

II. Access to Services 16

III. Advocacy, Public Outreach, and Relationships 24

III. Improve Basic Service Delivery 36

Gender Mainstreaming and Empowerment 46

Youth Engagement 56

Monitoring and Evaluation 64

Way Forward 68

Acronyms

CDC	Community Development Council
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DDA	District Development Assembly
DE	District Entities
DG	District Governor
DGO	District Governor's Office
DIC	District Information Center
DPP	District Project Portfolio
DoWA	Department of Women's Affairs
DSPP	District Strategic Planning Process
DSW	District Social Worker
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
IDLG	Inde¬pendent Directorate of Local Gover¬nance
INS	Insurgents
FY	Fiscal Year
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
IR	Intermediate Results
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MISTI	Measuring Impact of Stabilization Initiatives
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NABDP	National Area Based Development Proramme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
PE	Provincial Entity
PGO	Provincial Governor's Office
PLAY	Physical Education, Leadership, and Youth Development
PMC	Project Management Committee
PMP	Performance Management Plan
PRRD	Provincial Rural Rehabilitation Department
SIKA-East	Stability in Key Areas-East

SPC	Service Providers Catalogue
TOT	Training of Trainers
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation & Hygiene
YOC	Youth Organizing Committees

Photo: In Baraki Barak District, Logar Province, a local Community Development Council utilized a grant from USAID to repair a dilapidated irrigation system (karez), which now supports 150 families from three villages. In the past, conflict over scarce resources resulted in bad blood between the villages. This demand driven project not only supported the livelihoods for hundreds of families, it also brought communities together to end a dispute.

Executive Summary

The USAID funded SIKA-East Program, in partnership with the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), was designed to strengthen governance and the delivery of basic services for 30 conflict-affected districts of Eastern Afghanistan. SIKA-East began operations in 2011 in two pilot districts, eventually expanding to 21 districts across five provinces by September 2014. In December 3, 2013, the program received an option period contract and launched operations in an additional 9 districts and one province, with the program closing out a year later in September 2015. In total, the program operated in 30 districts across six provinces: Ghazni, Khost, Logar, Maydan Wardak, Paktika, and Paktya.

Building upon previous stability programs led by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA)—such as the National Area Based Development (Program) and the National Solidarity Program (NSP)—SIKA-East helped bridge the gap between the government and communities, forging citizen-government connections and enhancing sub-national service delivery systems. SIKA-East programming was in line with GIRoA's strategy of "establishing an environment that is sufficiently stable for Afghan-led sustainable development to take place"[1] and focused on three key areas:

1. Engagement and building vertical and horizontal relationships between provincial and district entities and constituencies;
2. Improved technical capacity for good governance; and,
3. Enhanced service delivery.

SIKA-East was a district level program that expanded and strengthened District Development Assemblies (DDAs) to develop comprehensive development plans that represent the actual needs of rural district residents. The program revitalized Community Development Councils (CDCs) to implement 'hard' and 'soft' projects. SIKA-East also worked with GIRoA line departments, District Governors (DGs), Provincial Governors (PGs), Civil Society Organization (CSO) leaders, and other actors to promote good governance and service delivery.

SIKA-East worked with district leaders and residents to identify Sources of Instability (SOIs), over time the program included a broader governance focus of improved service delivery to address the needs and priorities of citizens and respond to long-standing grievances.The impact of the program is seen in the improved technical capacity of district government officials and traditional community leaders to plan, design, and execute governance and development activities in response to local priorities.

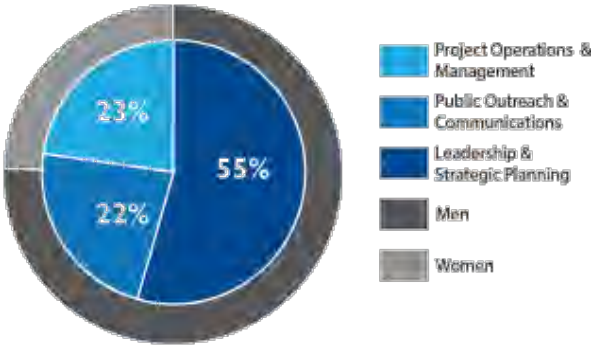
SIKA-East provide a comprehensive capacity building program to improve the responsiveness of local governments—leadership and management, communications and public outreach, and project operations and maintenance. SIKA-East prepared sub-national governance bodies to engage with the public to develop inclusive plans that represent the needs and aspirations of communities. Based on these plans, SIKA-East worked with CDCs and other groups to address these priorities through traditional small-infrastructure works (irrigation systems, schools, culverts) and other 'soft' grants (vocational training, governance meetings, media outreach).

SIKA-East also provided platforms to enhance citizen-government engagement to gradually repair broken relationships and improve mutual trust. Through thousands of meetings, media initiatives, and special events, the program served as a bridge between the public and GIRoA, creating mechanisms to help district leaders further identify and address local problems. Community cohesion and resilience was improved through strengthened communications, residents empowered through expanded DDAs and other groups to participate in development decisions that impact their lives, employment of new skills to mobilize resources and connect with GIRoA to obtain services without outside support. Throughout the life of the program, the needs and priorities of marginalized groups, such as women and youth, were integrated into all program interventions

[1] USAID Stabilization Unit PMP, page 4 and Area Objective 7.

SIKA-EAST

41,425 Number of individuals that learned new skills in support of good governance and improve service delivery during **1,800 SIKA-East capacity building sessions** to help local governments identify local priorities and design, implement, and monitor grant projects that address them



4,151 Number of projects proposed in DPPs that were prioritized by district leaders to respond to longstanding public grievances

2,175 Young men and women now playing an active role in local government and development decision making as a result of the Physical Education, Leadership, and Youth Development (PLAY) initiative. Through the completion of 151 multi-purpose athletic fields in schools, youth leaders are cultivating new leadership skills through sports to increase their civic engagement

690 Number of service delivery projects completed by district partners using SIKA-East grants that addressed the needs and priorities of over **1.6 million rural Afghan citizens**

$26.5 Million dollars invested into rural communities through SIKA-East grants

175 Advocacy and public outreach initiatives conducted by DDAs, youth, and women leaders without financial support from SIKA-East, resulting in services planned or implemented in collaboration with GIRoA, peaceful resolution of communal disputes, and several meetings to strengthen citizen-government relationships

76% Increase in women leaders (DDA members) involved in substantial governance and development decision making since the beginning of the program

31% Percentage of DPP Projects proposed by women leaders as a result of inclusive strategic planning events

30 District Project Portfolios (DPPs) developed by local partners that serve as development roadmaps for communities, which engaged over 2,000 district leaders during inclusive planning events to identify local priorities

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Access

Improved access to government services, markets, and educational and employment opportunities, benefiting xxx,XXX residents in eastern Afghanistan.

Empowerment

Local citizens are empowered, they work directly with government sector representatives to identify community development hurdles and implement local solutions in health, education, security, and agriculture sectors.

Capacity

District and provincial entities acquired the ability to plan, develop, manage, and monitor local development through participation in joint monitoring visits of SIKA-East grants.

Collaboration

Improved effective interaction between provincial and district entities. In XXX, for example, each government department assigned a spokesperson responsible for providing services announcements to the public. In a society dominated by radio and word-of-mouth communication, providing the government with the correct tools to disseminate services messages is critical.

Knowledge

Enhanced the expectations of female citizens of their government. SIKA - East provided gender-integrated services fairs that brought men and women together to understand the government services to which they are entitled.

Sustainability

Identified community development problems and solutions in ongoing advocacy workshops in all Program districts; SSMs have strong potential for sustainment if the DE participants fulfill their commitments to the community. In SSMs, WAC members worked with government sector representatives on issues such as providing teachers, boosting student attendance, and public health.

Program Partners

Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) The mission and mandate of IDLG is to ensure peace and stability, achieve development and balanced economic growth, and improve service delivery by supporting strong and capable governance entities to employ just and democratic processes at the local level. SIKA-East and IDLG recruited short-term specialized staff embedded within Provincial Departments of Economy, five Provincial Governors' Offices, and 21 District Governance Officers to improve functional delivery of coordination and strategic communications services. The three positions served as an institutional link to strengthen cooperation and planning between district and provincial entities, and to effectively leverage resources. SIKA-East and IDLG designed and delivered comprehensive training for the recruited staff.

Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) MRRD strives to ensure the social, economic, and political wellbeing of rural societies, especially poor and vulnerable communities, through the provision of basic services, strengthening local governance, and promoting sustainable livelihoods. To encourage greater ownership by MRRD and sustain achievements generated through the program, District Social Workers (DSWs) were hired for areas that had yet fill the positions. DSWs were recruited jointly with MRRD in line with Afghan Civil Service Legislation to ensure the positions could be transferred to GIRoA at the end of the program.

District Entities and Programs

National Area Based Development Program (NABDP) MRRD **l**aunched this in 2002 with the support of UNDP to contribute to the sustainable reduction of poverty and an improvement in livelihoods in rural communities by investing in social organization, infrastructure, local economic development, and sub-national governance initiatives.

National Solidarity Program (NSP) Created in 2003 by MRRD to develop the ability of Afghan communities to identify, plan, manage, and monitor their own development projects. Communities elect their own leaders and representatives to form voluntary Community Development Councils (CDCs) through a transparent and democratic process.

Community Development Council (CDC): Community members (both men and women) elected to serve as its decision making body. CDCs are responsible for implementation and management of development projects and are key liaisons between the community and government/non-governmental organizations.

District Development Assembly (DDA): DDAs were designed to represent the rural communities at the district level, with CDCs electing DDA members through a transparent and democratic process. DDAs play a pivotal role in rural development by incorporating district priorities into District Development Plans (DDPs). NABDP instituted to represent the voice of rural Afghans (including women) and to promote engagement with the central government, incorporating district priorities into Provincial Development Plans. Since the inception of DDAs, NABDP has set out to support and strengthen the capacity of DDAs.

Program Overview

The SIKA-East program began operations in 2011 in two pilot districts, eventually expanding to 21 districts across five provinces by September 2014. In December 3, 2013, the program received an option period contract and launched operations in an additional 9 districts and one province, with the program closing out a year later in September 2015. In total, the program operated in 30 districts across six provinces: Ghazni, Khost, Logar, Maydan Wardak, Paktika, and Paktya.

SIKA-East was originally designed as a traditional stability program to complement U.S military counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan. Overtime, as the program identified Sources of Instability (SOIs) with help from district leaders and residents, the program shifted towards a broader governance focus. In the context of rural, Eastern Afghanistan, this primarily entails strengthening service delivery to address the needs and priorities of citizens and respond to long-standing grievances.

Implementation was granted official notice to proceed as late as September 2012, when MRRD and IDLG agreed to sign an Implementation Letter with USAID for the four SIKA regional programs.[2] SIKA-East used the time of the delay to conduct thorough preparations and initial work for the first pilot districts, enabling the program to effectively jumpstart operations as soon as the agreement was signed.

The primary objective of the SIKA-East program was to promote good governance and service delivery in targeted districts with the intended effects of promoting stability and reducing the impact of the insurgency through capacity building with MRRD and IDLG in target areas. The program focused on three key areas:

- Engagement and building vertical and horizontal relationships between provincial and district entities and constituencies;
- Improved technical capacity for good governance; and,
- Enhanced service delivery.

The program sought to increase confidence in the district level government, to improve vertical and horizontal inter-governmental relations, and to strengthen their communication and coordination to better provide services to constituents—leading to greater legitimacy of provincial and district governing structures.

At its heart, SIKA-East was a district level program. The program expanded and strengthened District Development Assemblies (DDAs) to develop comprehensive development plans that represent the actual needs of rural district residents. The program also revitalized Community Development Councils (CDCs) to implement demand-driven infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects. In addition, SIKA-East worked with GIRoA line departments, District Governors (DGs), Provincial Governors (PGs), Civil Society Organization (CSO) leaders, and other actors to promote good governance and service delivery.

This report is centered on the program's contractual Intermediate Results (IRs), as well as crosscutting issues related to youth and gender focused interventions, which help measure the program's success in achieving its broader strategic and Program Objectives (POs).

Strategic Objective: To assist GIRoA officials at the district and provincial levels to respond to the population's development and governance concerns to better instill confidence and build stability.

I. **Address Instability and Respond to Concerns (IR1):** Provincial and District Entities increasingly address sources of instability and take measures to respond to the population's development and governance concerns
II. **Access to Services (IR2):** Provincial and District entities understand what organizations and provincial line departments work within their geographic areas, what kind of services they provide, and how the population can access those services.
III. **Understand Needs and Prioritize Interventions (IR3)**: Provincial authorities improve their ability to communicate with District Entities in order to help them better understand their population's needs and prioritize basic service delivery interventions.
IV. **Improve Basic Service Delivery (IR4):** Provincial authorities are able to improve basis

[2] This delay was caused in large part due to MRRD negotiating to move from a grant program to an on-budget program in line with the *Kandahar Model*.

service delivery by using GIRoA, CDCs, DDAs and District Community Councils (DCCs), which gain capacity to plan, design, implement and monitor projects, with a focus on labor-intensive projects or productive infrastructure.

Programming related to youth and women were integrated into all IRs, but are presented as separate sections in this report.

Theory of Change

As noted by independent program evaluators, the majority of citizens in SIKA-East districts had little to no experience in community driven strategic planning prior to SIKA-East. Residents in general had limited contact with the government, and had never been consulted about rural development projects in their area. In addition, as longstanding requests for basic services—access to water, education, health services—went unfulfilled, public perceptions and attitudes towards GIRoA deteriorated.

For this purpose, SIKA-East designed programming that focused on strengthening the capacity of Provincial Entities (PEs)[3] and District Entities (DEs)[4] to improve sub-national service delivery and address community needs, which would result in more positive perceptions of GIRoA and reduce support for anti-government elements.

SIKA-East therefore operated according to the following theory of change: If GIRoA is better able to provide for the stabilization needs of its citizens, then the transition to long-term, Afghan-led development programming would be more successful.

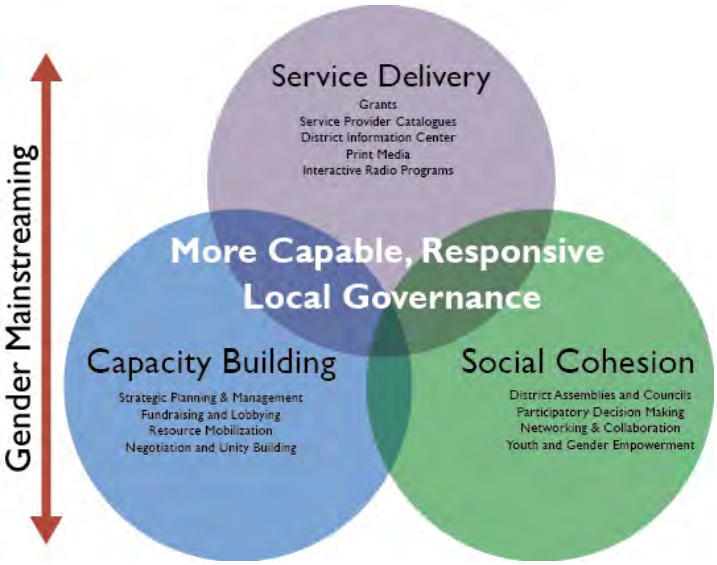
Program Approach

Through a comprehensive capacity building program for PEs and DEs, which covered necessary skills to improve the responsiveness of local governments—leadership and management, communications and public outreach, and project operations and maintenance—SIKA-East prepared sub-national governance bodies to engage with the public to develop inclusive plans that represent the needs and aspirations of communities.

Once these plans were established, SIKA-East worked with CDCs and other groups to address these priorities through grants. The majority of these grants were for traditional small-infrastructure works (irrigation systems, school boundary walls, culverts) but also covered non-infrastructure activities that respond to local needs (vocational training, governance meetings, media outreach).

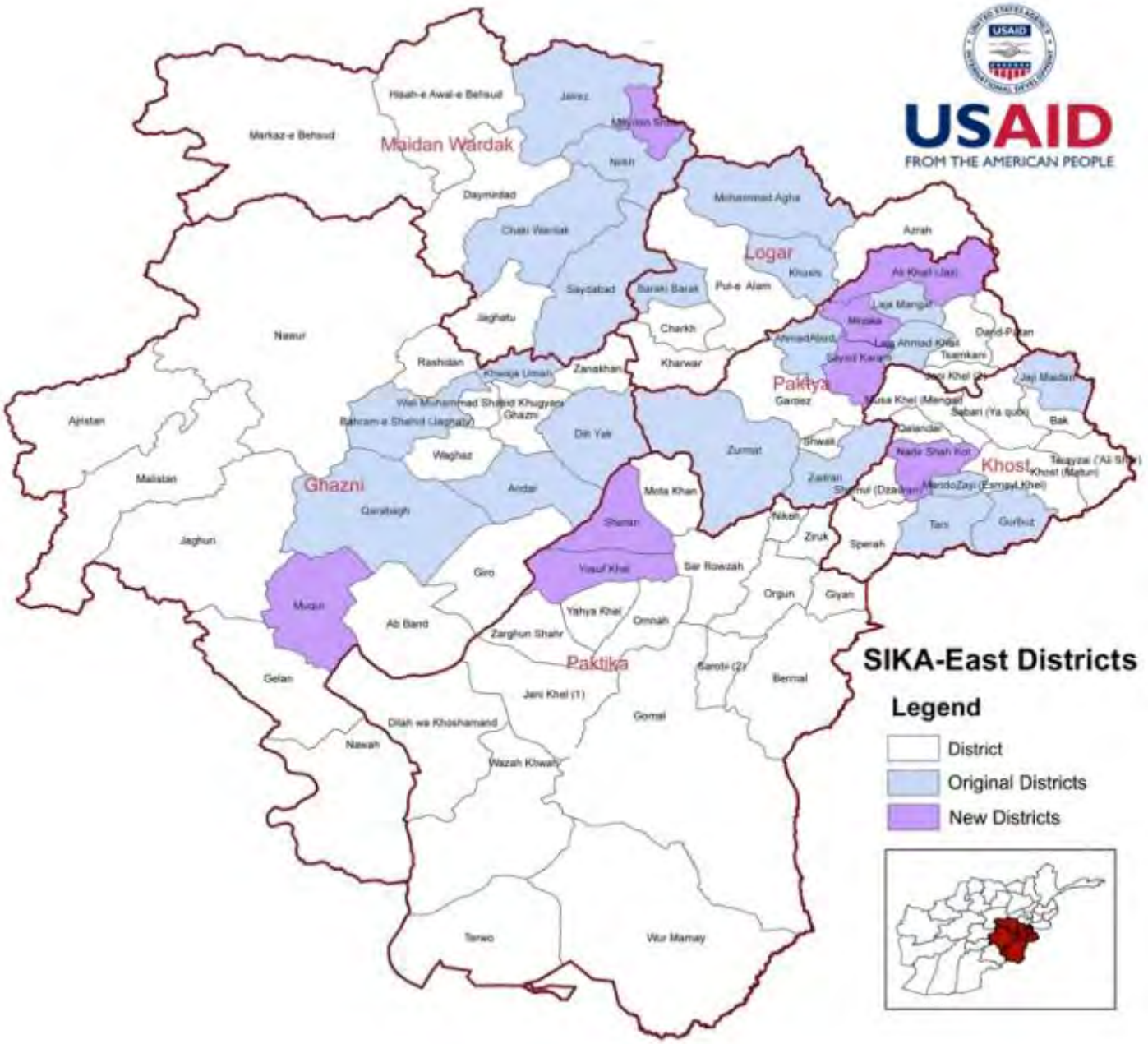
At the same time, SIKA-East provided multiple platforms to enhance citizen-government engagement to gradually repair broken relationships and improve mutual trust. Through thousands of meetings, media initiatives, and special events, the program served as a bridge between the public and GIRoA, creating mechanisms to help district leaders further identify and address local problems.

Community cohesion and resilience was improved through advanced communications training, empowering residents through expanded DDAs and other groups to take charge of the development decisions that impact their lives, and employ new skills to mobilize resources and connect with GIRoA to obtain services without outside support. Throughout the life of the program, the needs and priorities of marginalized groups, such as women and youth, were integrated into all program interventions as illustrated below.



[3] PEs: To include GIRoA Line Departments, PRRD, Provincial Governors, and similar bodies
[4] DEs: To include DDAs, CDCs, tribal elders, and other district level partners

Area of Operations



Ghazni Province:
- Andar
- Bahrami Shahid (Jaghatu)
- Dih Yak
- Khwaja Umari
- Muqur
- Qarabagh

Khost Province:
- Gurbuz
- Jaji Maidan
- Mando Zayi
- Nadir Shah Kot
- Tani

Logar Province:
- Baraki Barak
- Khoshi
- Mohammad Agha

Maydan Wardak Province:
- Chaki Wardak
- Jalrez
- Maydan Shahr
- Nirkh
- Saydabad

Paktya Province:
- Ahmad Abad
- Ali Khail (Jaji)
- Laja Ahmad Khail
- Laja Mangal
- Mirzaka
- Sayed Karam
- Zadran
- Zurmat
- Garda Serai

Paktika Province:
- Sharan
- Yosuf Khel

Governance foundation training in Sharan district, Paktika Province, prepares district leaders to conduct strategic planning events to prioritize local service delivery needs

I. Address Instability and Respond to Concerns

Provincial and District Entities increasingly address sources of instability and take measures to respond to the populations' development and governance concerns

One of the primary impediments to improving good governance in Afghanistan is the inability of local institutions to identify and understand the concerns and priorities of their constituents. Through strategic planning and core capacity building, SIKA-East assisted local stakeholders in each target district to reach consensus on interventions to meet local service delivery needs. Planning sessions and capacity building led to the development of District Project Portfolios, an inclusive development roadmap that PEs/DEs used to prioritize and implement projects that respond to the service delivery needs of residents.

District Development Assemblies able to create and implement District Plans This Program Objective (PO) indicator measures the ability of DDAs to apply planning and leadership skills gained in SIKA-East capacity building sessions to identify community concerns and implement projects (awarded grants) that address the population's service delivery needs, ultimately leading to the creation of DPPs. Partners in all 30 districts achieved this program objective and received complementary training to better engage with constituents and improve the responsiveness of local government institutions. A detailed breakdown by district on the timeline of major programming events that led to the establishment of DPPs is provided on page xx of this report.

Female District Development Assembly members included in district decision-making This indicator measures how many women DDA leaders have increased their participation in local governance and development decision making. Details on this PO indicator are provided in the Gender Maintreaning and Empowerment section of this report.

Output Indicators SIKA-East exceeded all targets, the program significantly expanded the base of active district leaders able to communicate with citizens and develop inclusive strategic plans, with over 2,855 people participating in activities to improve local governance, and 4,151 projects proposed in DPPs that represent citizen needs.

Output Indicators: Address Instability and Respond to Concerns

Indicator	Cumulative Progress			Target
1.1.1 # of primary stakeholders attended Democracy and Governance events	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	
	1,876	979	2,855	1,200
1.1.2 # of projects proposed by women/ # of proposed projects in the DPP[1]	**N**	**D**	**%**	
	1,276	4,151	31%	1,000

	DPP	Non DPP	Total	D	%	Total
1.1.4 # of implemented projects/ # of projects in DPPs[1]	1,215	411	1,626	4,151	29%	646
1.1.5 # of implemented female proposed projects: # of projects implemented	412	108	520	1,215	34%	150
1.1.3 # of Local women in a substantive role					**Total**	
					1,275	784

Stakeholder Engagement and Registers

To develop situational awareness and strengthen ties with district partners, SIKA-East worked with MRRD, IDLG, and district bodies to engage stakeholders and identify key participants through a mapping process. This orientation phase was the first step in the program's district implementation cycle.

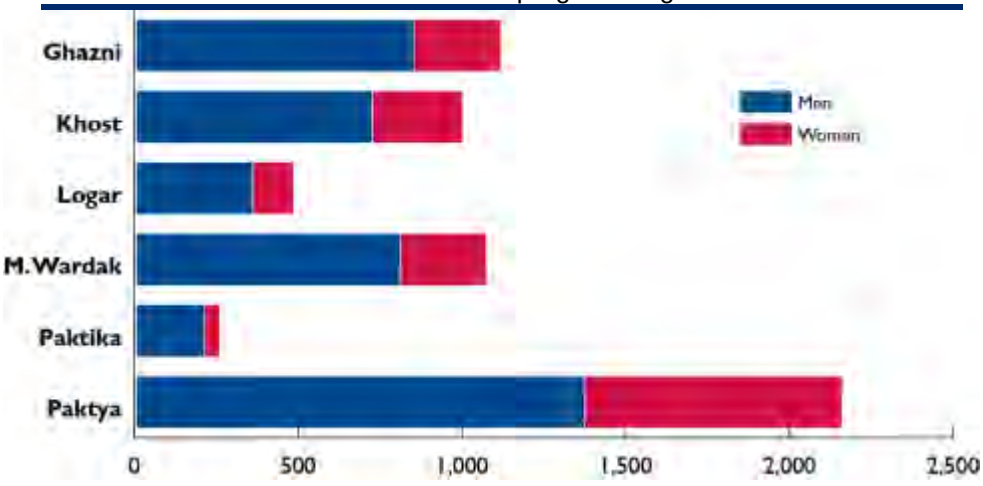
Stakeholder Engagement TOT sessions were first held for SIKA-East field teams to understand specific challenges in their areas of responsibility, and learned practical skills to establish a sturdy platform for dialogue and collaboration. After the initial training, an introductory briefing was held at the district level to elect working groups that included DDA/DCC members, SIKA-East staff, and government representatives that completed the stakeholder mapping process in all districts.

Through extensive area networking and consultation with provincial and district authorities, 6,024 individuals—29 percent women— and groups that influence stability and instability across social, economic and political spheres were identified, with many absorbed into expanded DDAs. SIKA-East also ensured that religious scholars, tribal elders, *Jirga* members, private sector leaders, and other respected actors were not overlooked.

Informed by stakeholder mapping, SIKA-East district profiles, MRRD, IDLG and other official records, and drawing on a mix of formal and traditional institutions with a role in stabilization, SIKA-East compiled a District Stakeholder Register that defined core groups of participants for program activities. Over time, registers were updated in collaboration with government partners, and eventually handed over to MRRD and IDLG for their future use.

Stakeholder Registers

Influential men and women involved in programming in SIKA-East areas



District leaders, including several DGs and PRRD officials from Sayed Karam, Mirzaka, and Ali Khail Districts, convene in the Paktya Provincial Capital to officially launch the SIKA-East program

Strategic Planning

Stability Analysis Methodology SIKA-East designed a local version of the District Stability Framework (DSF) utilized by the US Military. The revised DSF tool would later become known as SAM, which was piloted in Baraki Barak and Saydabad Districts in June/July 2012. SAM sessions were conducted in each hawza (cluster of villagues that GIRoA uses as an administrative unit) of 22 districts. The SAM session was followed by three other related training sessions: Project Concept Development; Resource Information Sharing; and Communication Plan Development. More details on capacity building are provided under the IR4 section of this report.

The SAM methodology presented several challenges. The entire process was time consuming, and in many cases the same individuals could not attend all four (4) required sessions, resulting in less continuity in the planning process. The program responded by designing a new streamlined methodology that still maintained *hawza* representation, the DSPP.

District Strategic Planning Process Utilizing a bottom up approach, the DSPP became the program's core governance activity jointly facilitated by SIKA-East, DGOs, DDAs, and several line departments. The analytical process, designed by Provincial Rural Rehabilitation Departments (PRRD) for use at the district level, integrated SAM and the community mobilization approach of MRRD's NABDP program. The DSPP was locally driven and adapted to the rural context of Afghanistan. It included tools, language, and examples that are culturally appropriate and familiar to the participants. To avoid complexity associated with similar analytical approaches, this integrated method relied upon the established government mechanisms of community engagement and planning familiar to DEs, as well as practices that were found effective during the original process conducted in the first 22 SIKA-East districts.

During the process, DSWs trained by SIKA-East assisted the newly expanded DDAs, *hawza/wanda* leadership, and government authorities in analyzing and defining local interests, concerns, and priorities; generating workable solutions as a result. Participants were encouraged to openly discuss issues in the district, facilitating a simple but structured framework to identify sources of instability and their root causes. In total, 2,915 individuals (21 percent women) played important roles in district level planning to identify SOIs, community priorities, and strategic solutions to address them. The SAM and DSPP processes revealed dominant instability trends across all areas and resulted in a list of standard categories of SOIs and their systemic/root causes.

In order to better integrate district strategic priorities into the SIKA-East funded process, the community and DEs chose solutions from two sources, including existing District Development Plans (DDPs) and NABDP Priority Lists, or proposed unique solutions during the discussions. The final product of this process was the DPP, a combination of joint SIKA-East and GIRoA approaches, and a development roadmap to address local priorities.

Standardized Sources of Instability

Category	Source of Instability	
Governance	1	Weak government-citizen relations
	2	Deficient service delivery
Conflict	3	General social disunity
Economy	4	Dysfunctional agricultural institutions, systems
	5	Lack of livelihood, employment opportunities
Physical Insecurity	6	Low security force capacity
	7	Security force misconduct
Gender Disparities	8	Violence against women

Representing women's interest in their communities, women leaders from Qarabagh District, Ghazni Province, advocate for local priorities during strategic planning evens with the local government

District Project Portfolios The DSPP sessions created a rare opportunity for community leaders to engage with each other and jointly decide how to address governance and development concerns. The DPP, an inclusive district strategic plan that represents the needs, priorities and aspirations of constituents, became the guiding document for local leadership and GIRoA agencies to improve the district's governance and service delivery systems, primarily funded by SIKA-East funded grants.

In result of the DSPP and DPP process, 4,151 proposed projects were recorded in all 30 SIKA-East districts. Of these, 690 were implemented with SIKA-East assistance. More than a thousand of the listed DPP projects have been proposed by female DDA members, and five percent of these have been implemented.

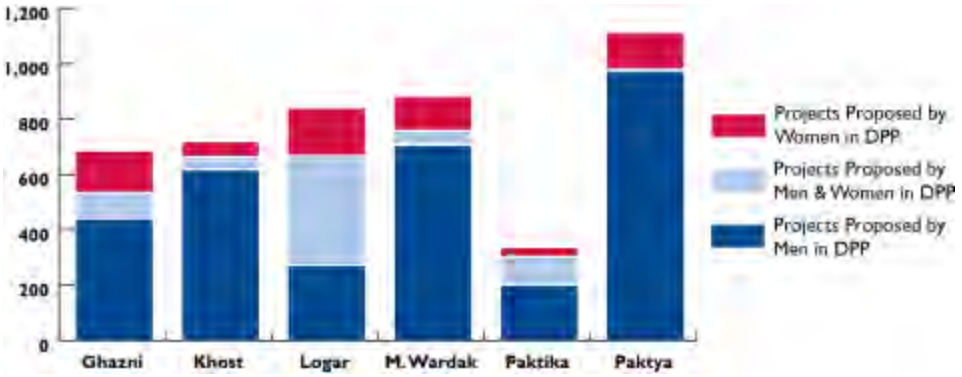
SIKA-East completed and received approval for all 30 DPPs by September 2014. All the DPPs were reviewed and approved by district partners, MRRD, IDLG, and USAID. DPPs also included a narrative that provided overviews of the DSPP and DPP process, along with district specific SOIs, root causes, and community recommended solutions.

SIKA-East also funded priorities not covered under the scope of the grants program utilizing other means. In total, 690 projects were implemented using program funds that are directly linked to proposed projects in the DPPs, 183 of which were infrastructure related.

The majority of non-grant funded projects (71 percent) that respond to DPP priorities were implemented through various program supported coordination meetings, which helped bring stakeholders together to identify the shifting needs of communities. Other projects not specifically outlined in DPPs, but respond to general concerns and priorities raised during planning events, include school sport fields and training for youth, and specialized capacity building to strengthen local institutions, such as DGOs, Provincial Governor Offices (PGOs), and other actors.

Proposed Projects in DPPs

Provincial Breakdown of DPP projects proposed by men and women



The table below provides a district breakdown of major events that led to the creation of DPPs:

District Launch and DPP Establishment by District

Province	District	District Launch	DPP Approval	First Grant Award
Ghazni	Andar	February 17, 2013	August 8, 2013	September 5, 2013
	Bahrami Shahid	September 1, 2013	November 30, 2013	August 17, 2014
	Dih Yak	November 25, 2012	March 23, 2013	June 30, 2013
	Khwaja Umari	May 9, 2013	October 5, 2013	January 15, 2014
	Muqur	May 25, 2014	July 29, 2014	August 27, 2014
	Qarabagh	September 1, 2013	November 30, 2013	April 23, 2014
Khost	Gurbuz	June 21, 2013	October 8, 2013	January 12, 2014
	Jaji Maidan	June 21, 2013	November 6, 2013	January 30, 2014
	Mando Zayi	October 1, 2013	December 1, 2013	January 20, 2014
	Nadir Shah Kot	May 28, 2014	August 7, 2014	August 24, 2014
	Tani	June 21, 2013	October 7, 2013	January 20, 2014
Logar	Baraki Barak	June 11, 2012	October 18, 2012	September 5, 2013
	Khoshi	May 9, 2013	October 3, 2013	February 9, 2014
	Mohammad Agha	November 25, 2012	March 23, 2013	May 20, 2013
Maydan Wardak	Chaki Wardak	February 7, 2013	June 26, 2013	July 7, 2013
	Jalrez	September 1, 2013	November 19, 2013	February 25, 2014
	Maydan Shahr	May 25, 2014	August 7, 2014	August 20, 2014
	Nirkh	November 18, 2012	March 16, 2013	June 10, 2013
	Saydabad	June 4, 2012	October 18, 2012	May 20, 2013
Paktika	Sharan	June 18, 2014	September 17, 2014	August 10, 2013
	Yosuf Khel	June 18, 2014	August 26, 2014	August 10, 2014
Paktya	Ahmad Abad	September 22, 2013	November 18, 2013	January 27, 2014
	Ali Khail	May 28, 2014	September 17, 2014	August 20, 2014
	Garda Serai	February 7, 2013	November 3, 2013	May 6, 2014
	Laja Ahmad Khail	June 19, 2013	October 3, 2013	January 2, 2014
	Laja Mangal	June 19, 2013	October 23, 2013	January 19, 2014
	Mirzaka	May 28, 2014	August 27, 2014	August 25, 2014
	Sayed Karam	May 28, 2014	August 26, 2014	August 13, 2014
	Zadran	February 7, 2013	July 8, 2013	March 17, 2014
	Zurmat	February 7, 2013	August 29, 2013	November 10, 2013

With inclusive roadmaps for development and good governance established in all target areas, DEs drew upon capacity building to execute proposed projects and respond to longstanding community needs.

SNAPSHOT

What Water Can Bring

A single karez brings together four villages to bring clean water to their

Stonemasons repairing a karez in Arab Khail village, Saydabad district, Maydan Wardak Province

"[Once the karez is rehabilitated], the community will start trusting their elders and they will expect them to support the local government in the future. Young people will get employment opportunities and their income will considerably improve."

- **CDC Srakala Markazi**

The Ramadan dawn comes early with the summer sun; dusk comes late. Heat and fasting make this an unlikely time of year to undertake major outdoor works. But in the village of Arab Kheil in Maydan Wardak Province around 30 men from four villages gather each day equipped with stonemasonry tools to repair the ancient *karez* that supplies this region with water. More local workers will join them soon to clean the water springs and existing canals.

The water is drinkable and feeds the farms. The shortage of water has been the source of bitter fights between the villages in the past. "It is about the health of our children too," points out an elder. "Once the canals are clean, our women won't have to go far from the safety of their homes each day to fetch water," adds another.
The local Community Development Council (CDC) tells how lately their young men have distanced themselves from their elders and have started joining the insurgency. To make things worse, each summer their fathers' farms suffer from dwindling water supplies from the rundown *karez,* and there are few livelihoods other than farming in the area. The Taliban offer payment to new recruits and blame all misfortune on the Afghan government.

But now locals have a proof of the contrary. It is their own government, with USAID support, that arranged for the work being done in Arab Kheil.

It started earlier this year: elders from four villages formed a *shura* where they defined *karez* rehabilitation as one of their priorities. They tasked their CDC with finding funds for the project. With the support of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and USAID's SIKA program, the *karez* will be fully restored before the autumn rains.

These elders choose the laborers wisely: at least one from the poorest families, and an even number from each village. This *karez* will bring peace between villages, clean water, and honest income. It will also bring trust between young men, their elders, and their government. With enough water, farms will yield better crops and the one thousand men from this area will not look to the Taliban for an alternative. They will look to their elders and their government.

Service Provider Fair_Registration Point_Ghazni Province-December 2013

II. Access to Services

Provincial and District Entities understand what organizations and provincial line departments work in their geographic areas, what kind of services they provide, and how the population can access those services

Provincial and District Entities access available services from GIRoA line departments to address citizen needs The long-term sustainability of local government led development depends on their ability to access funding and leverage existing support services provided by GIRoA. This PO indicator reflects the success that PE/DEs have in accessing such services.

This was measured primarily through attendance of various service delivery and governance coordination meetings that increase their ability to understand what organizations and provincial line departments work within their geographic areas, what kind of services are available, and how the population can access these services in order to address local priorities.

The number of PEs and DEs able to access available services from GIRoA line departments increased steadily since the baseline period, rising from a baseline figure of zero, to 1,302 government and non-government district and provincial leaders.

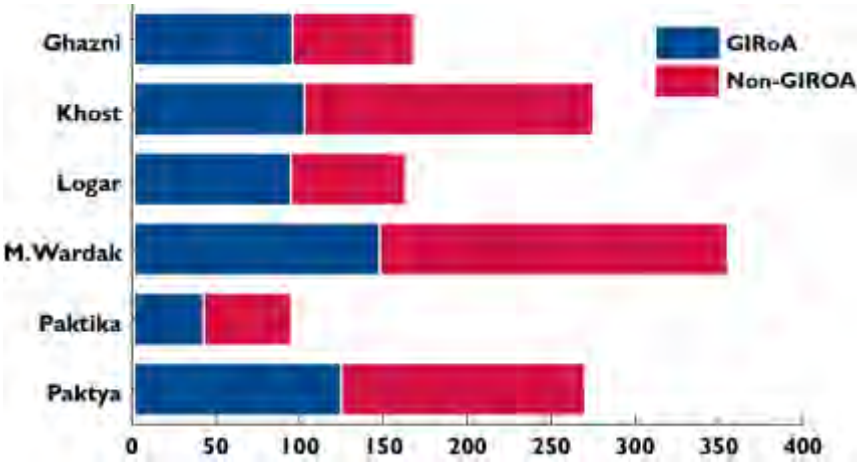
Maydan Wardak Province had the most PEs/DEs with access to available services at 27 percent of the total, even though the province only had five (5) active SIKA-East Districts. Paktika Province, with only two active districts, recorded the least at seven percent.

In total, 45 percent of all DEs/PEs that gained greater access to available services were government entities, and 93 percent were DEs.[5] The remaining seven percent for PEs depicts the influence that SIKA-East had at the provincial level despite its district level focus.

Output Indicators Strengthening inter-government and sub-national relations, SIKA-East built the capacity of provincial and district leaders to better manage and improve the delivery of basic services. By ensuring that PEs and DEs communicate on a regular basis, the relationships between these entities were strengthened through meetings and information sharing, resulting in a better understanding of GIRoA service delivery responsibilities. SIKA-East facilitated meetings and conferences that brought MRRD, IDLG and other GIRoA officials together to share information and coordinate service delivery without SIKA-East support.

[5] For counting purposes, government entities include: DDA members (not expanded DDA+), DCC and CDC members, DGs, PGs; "and line department representatives.

PEs/DEs able to access GIRoA services to address citizen needs by Department



The following table includes five indicators measuring progress. With the exception of indicator 2.1.3 and 2.1.4, SIKA-East exceeded all output indicators for this IR. Targets for these two indicators were not met because the targets were determined utilizing historical data that had large numbers of duplications, which made for unrealistic benchmarks to achieve. Considering the baseline figures for both indicators were zero, the program managed to engage a large number of district and provincial leaders to help transform dysfunctional relationships that existed before.

Output Indicators: Access to Services

Indicator	Cumulative Progress				Program Target
	Male	Female	Mix	Total	
2.1.2 # of individuals in D&G conferences	4,389	1,231	-	5,620	1,100
2.1.3 # of individuals in D&G meetings	6,394	1,661	-	8,055	31,700
2.1.4 # of Service Delivery Coordination Meetings	546	358	67	971	1,160
	Number				
2.1.1 # Cooperative initiatives between MRRD/ IDLG				48	46
2.1.5 # Follow-on activities without program assistance				168	174

Cooperative Initiatives between MRRD and IDLG

By facilitating a number of cooperative initiatives between MRRD and IDLG, SIKA-East strengthened inter-relations that increased general understanding of services, organizations and line department programs and improved their service delivery capabilities.

In total, SIKA-East facilitated 48 such initiatives through the life of the program. Included in this figure, are the establishment of 30 expanded DDA bodies, DDA conferences in provincial centers, a national level youth summit held in Kabul, female action summits (jalsas), and religious scholar conferences.

Democracy and Governance Conferences SIKA-East facilitated a number of conferences to strengthen good governance at the district level over the course of the program. These were attended by a total of 5,620 individuals, of which 22 percent were women. The most important events include (in historical order):

Women leaders from Logar Province register to attend celebrations for International Women's Day, attended by hundreds of women, GIRoA officials, and other district leaders to show solidarity in advancing the rights of women in Afghanistan

1. Gender Integration in Stability Process (March 12-14 2013, Kabul): SIKA-East, in collaboration with MRRD and the Department of Women's Affairs (DoWA), facilitated a three-day conference with the objective to streamline gender across all phases of the program within the framework of Islamic and Afghan culture. Some 30 men and women participated.

2. District Governors' Conference (November 11-12, 2013, Kabul): Co-hosted by SIKA-East and IDLG, this event assembled 21 DGs and their representatives from the SIKA-East original (base period districts) area of operations. The conference enabled an exchange of experiences and lessons learned and served to elicit ideas and feedback on the program's option period and transition to governmental entities.

3. DDA Provincial Conferences: Five conferences were held in the provincial capitals of Maydan Wardak (November 2013), Ghazni, Khost, Logar, and Paktya Provinces (December 2013), bringing together provincial DDAs+ and sub-national government authorities to strengthen the local ownership and management of the DPPs. The conferences were attended by 510 DDA members in total; nearly one-third of the attendees were women.

4. International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (November 25, 2013): SIKA-East joined with expanded DDAs, Provincial and District Governors, PRRD and DoWA representatives, as well as tribal and religious leaders, to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Across the five provinces, 1,246 government authorities, district leaders, and local activists joined in panel discussions and other forums to create and raise awareness about gender issues and promote collective activism to tackle these effectively. Approximately 40% of the participants were male and 60% were female.

5. International Women's Day (March 8-9, 2014): SIKA-East supported the DoWAs in Logar, Ghazni, Maydan Wardak, Paktya, and Khost to host province-wide events in recognition of International Women's Day. Nearly 2,000 participants—1,549 women and 409 men—attended the events on March 8 and 9 across the five original target provinces. In 2015, several districts held local ceremonies without SIKA-East support to mark the international event.

6. Female Jalsas (March – May, 2014) In coordination with IDLG and MRRD, SIKA-East organized a series of female DDA *jalsas* (summits, or forums) in each province, joining women expanded DDA members, local government representatives, female members of Provincial Councils, and other influential women to deepen dialogue and to share challenges among peers. The first jalsa was held in Maydan Wardak on March 18 and 19, with 40 female DDA leaders representing Chaki Wardak, Jalrez, Nirkh, and Saydabad Districts, as well as government representatives. Female jalsas were held from April 29 to May 1 in Ghazni, Khost, Logar, Maydan Wardak, and Paktya provinces. Participants

included 354 women and 50 men, including 208 DDA members and some 70 government officials.

7. Religious Scholars Conference and Workshops (October-November 2014): In support of female priorities outlined in DPPs, SIKA-East facilitated a religious scholars conference in Kabul attended by 16 spiritual leaders from all six target provinces, who agreed on ways to curtail negative traditions against women mistakenly attributed to Islam. The scholars cascaded the initiative downward to the provincial and district levels, with similar workshops held in all six provinces, engaging 334 Islamic leaders into an alliance against practices harmful to women.

8. Provincial Spokesperson's Conference (October 19-24, 2014, Kabul): This was a joint effort with all four SIKAs and IDLG that brought together 58 total, 33 Provincial Governor's Spokespersons and 25 senior officials to Kabul to enhance sub-national governance communication capacity, to align their messaging with the IDLG communications priorities and policies, as well as to improve their skills in dealing with a changing media landscape in Afghanistan. The conference included IDLG briefs on their oversight functions, including M&E and the communications framework. The spokesmen were also briefed on crisis communication techniques, message development, public relations strategies, and were afforded networking opportunities to share best practices with their counterparts. Guest speakers from news outlets and the former presidential spokesperson Wahid Omar discussed advanced public affairs techniques with an emphasis on leveraging the evolving media landscape in Afghanistan. This activity equally supports IR 1 and IR 3, through government capacity building and established government-citizen communication institutions, respectively

9. PLAY! Summit (November 25, 2014, Kabul): To expand the sustainability and impact of the PLAY initiative and to establish a dialogue between provincial youth and senior government officials, SIKA-East and IDLG facilitated a major PLAY summit in Kabul attended by 12 youth representatives — two from each target province — who advocated for youth concerns directly with senior GIRoA officials, including six deputy ministers, CSO leaders, sport federation members, in the presence of some 100 stakeholders and media representatives.

10. Advocacy Summit (April 2015): 33 participants DDAs, civil society, youth, and DGs.

DDA members from across Ghazni Province gather at the provincial capital with DGs, PRRD officials, and other influential actors to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the DDA, and identify areas of cooperation with the local government

Democracy and Governance Meeting Participants
In total, 971 meetings were held over the life of the program, attended by 6,394 men and 1,661 women. The meetings were conducted with various sub-national government entities, improving DE understanding of and ability to access appropriate governmental services. The particular goals of the meetings included service delivery and resource coordination meetings, grant review and communication committee meetings, IDLG district coordination meetings, event management meetings, and other information sharing mechanisms between institutions. These meetings institutionalized communication mechanisms between local governments and citizens, and created opportunities for district partners to address longstanding community needs.

DDA members in all target areas witnessed the benefits that improved coordination and information sharing could entail through regular meetings between the government and district leaders. The DEs used these meetings to advocate for specific causes, forge alliances, raise funds, plan, and coordinate activities. Such meetings were originally initiated, coordinated, and financed by the program. As originally envisioned, over the course of the program, DDA sub-committees increasingly conducted meetings independently of direct SIKA-East interventions, leading to a number of independent developmental activities.

Follow-on Activities and Advocacy Initiatives
Starting as early as August 2012 in Baraki Barak and Saydabad districts, the SIKA-East advocacy program was initially designed to enable DDA trainees to meet with appropriate government officials, obtain funding from outside organizations, and implement activities on their own for DPP projects not funded by the program. Over time, SIKA-East provided a comprehensive series of advocacy workshops to DDA members, local committees, youth, and specific groups requested by District and Provincial Governors.

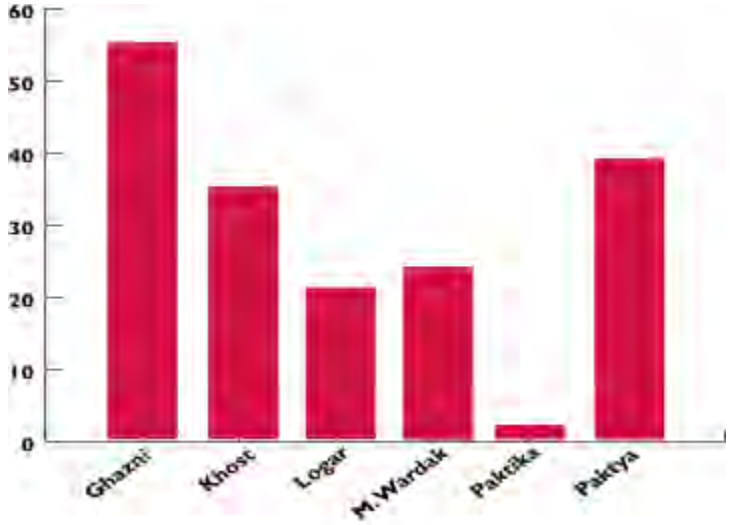
The core base of five trainings -Resource Dialogue and Advocacy; Lobbying; Fundraising; Coalition (unity) Building; and Negotiation Strategy- were delivered either in a short course or in a longer advanced advocacy program. This type of training was highly regarded by participants due to the applied adult education techniques that emphasized hands-on and interactive work, rather than pure lecture formats. More details on communication training and the committees that implemented these activities are provided under the IR3 section of this report.

In result of the provided capacity building, and showcasing the sustainability of this program component, district entities conducted 174 advocacy initiatives over the course of the program without any technical or financial support from SIKA-East Initiatives included raising funds for small infrastructure projects, resolving tribal and land conflicts, reopening schools, advocating for donations, books, libraries, training, and other activities.

The chart below provides a provincial breakdown of these activities completed without the program's direct assistance.

At the provincial level, Ghazni reached the highest number of follow-on activities – 55, while Paktika Province had the least, probably due to the later launch of the program, as well as the conflict-heavy environment. Major follow-on development activities conducted by SIKA-East trainees without program support are presented throughout this document in side bars and success stories.

Development/Advocacy initiatives completed by DEs without direct program assistance



DDA Ends Cycle of Violence

Photo: Mando Zayi DDA leaders from Khost Province hold a regular coordination meeting to discuss the district's most pressing challenges, such as social cohesion and tribal conflicts.

In Afghanistan, where ancestral connections run deep, disputes between tribes, clans and families can have deadly consequences. Clashes can sometimes span generations, with many forgetting how the actual conflict originated in the first place. For this reason, it's imperative that new conflicts be resolved as early as possible.

With assistance from USAID, DDAs are effectively utilizing advocacy training to bring feuding groups together to end violent disputes and foster greater relationships between the people and local government.

Nearly two years ago, two Pashtun clans—the Warza and Haider Khil—in Mando Zayi District became engaged in a bitter land dispute that left 12 people dead, injured many more, and destroyed relations between the groups. The land in question, close to the capital of Khost city, is said to be worth one million Afghans. With the high value of the land, it seemed that neither side would negotiate.

DDA leaders knew this dispute could drag on for years, limiting the ability of both clans to freely travel due to fears of reprisals and retaliations.

Enlisting the help of the District Governor, tribal elders, and religious leaders, the Mando Zayi district development assembly managed to call both parties to the table through several individual and group meetings, listening to the grievances and concerns of both clans. Finally, the elders of the disputing families, with the facilitation of the district leaders, reached an amicable solution that divided the land and compensated the Haider Khil clan for their disproportionate number of casualties.
Believing this to be fair and equitable solution, brokered in presence of local figures of authority, both families are now willing to end the conflict once and for all.

SNAPSHOT

ADVOCACY LEADS TO NEW COMPUTER LAB FOR GIRL'S SCHOOL

USAID-provided training in advocacy pays off for high school girls in Logar's Khoshi District.

Students at the Khoshi District girls high school work at the new computers provided by Roshan in response to advocacy efforts by the Khoshi DDA's women's communication committee.

The women's communication committee from the Khoshi DDA successfully advocated for a computer lab for the local girls high school.

Khoshi District in Logar Province has a large high school for girls, one of the few institutions providing quality education services for girls in the area. Like students everywhere, the girls are keen to learn about computers and related technology. However, because of a lack of computers at their school and the electricity to run them, efforts to expand the school's curriculum never materialized.

Fortunately, Khoshi District also has an active women's communication committee within its DDA that has the girls' interests at heart. The women on the committee also have some knowledge and experience of making things happen, having been trained in advocacy and resource development with USAID's Stability in Key Areas – East program. SIKA-East is enhancing stability and good governance in Logar and five other insecure provinces of southeastern Afghanistan.

Working with the Education Directorate and other institutions in their district and province, the women succeeded in persuading Roshan Telecom Afghanistan to pay for five personal computers, a printer, and other ancillary equipment. Roshan also provided a storage container to house the gear, along with a self-contained solar energy system to power the entire facility.

Naturally, the girls are delighted with their new computer lab. "This lab will help us learn about new technology and enable us to work alongside men," said one girl. "We may not be able to go to the city to continue our education like our brothers, but we can learn some of the same things right here at home."

"When we started advocating for the computer lab, nobody thought we'd be able to do what men find hard to accomplish these days," observed Lailumah, head of the women's communication committee. "Now that the lab is up and running, we've proved that women too can get things done."

Insert text

III. Advocacy, Public Outreach, and Relationships

Provincial authorities improve their ability to communicate with District Entities in order to help them better understand their populations' needs and prioritize basic service delivery interventions

SIKA-East institutionalized various platforms for meaningful information sharing between a broad range of actors, enabling government partners to strengthen cooperation between MRRD, IDLG, line departments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), international development programs, special interest groups, and the private sector. A number of initiatives, such as support for DICs, radio dramas, live radio call-in shows, DDA Communication Committees and locally driven public outreach plans further contributed to enhancing communication links between citizens and the government, with the aim to enable and encourage citizens to engage their sub-national government through local mechanisms.

Communication measures/mechanisms institutionalized by Provincial and District Entities This indicator[6] measures the number of measures/mechanisms that have been institutionalized by PEs and DEs for two-way communication purposes with the Afghan population. This indicator reflects the dialogue amongst the various GIRoA line departments as well as between Afghan citizens and GIRoA. Mechanisms include DICs, radio plays/dramas, interactive radio call-in shows, communication committees and other mechanisms improved the functioning of GIRoA.

The program set high targets for this indicator, at 90 total institutionalized mechanisms. After careful evaluations to determine which district level mechanisms were truly entrenched, 78 such mechanisms met the criteria based on their impact and potential for sustainability. However, considering the baseline target of zero, nearly every district managed to establish three potentially sustainable avenues to improve citizen-government relationships.

Output Indicators As noted by independent evaluators, communications focused interventions had significant impact and were highly regarded by program beneficiaries. Radio stations broadcasting government-led messaging and related programs reported that the interventions reached nearly five million Afghans. SPFs and related information products reached thousands of people, and helped raise awareness of GIRoA services, and over 2,100 youth are now active in local decision making.

s Framework on October 2014.

DDA Responds to Needs of Displaced Afghans

Photo: Mando Zayi DDA leaders from Khost Province hold a regular coordination meeting to discuss the district's most pressing challenges, such as social cohesion and tribal conflicts.

After several coordination meetings with line departments and international partners, the Mohammad Agha DDA successfully established new living quarters for displaced Afghans that recently returned to their country. Over 100 families returned to Logar Province within the last year, fleeing violence and military operations in Pakistan.

The returnees were reluctant to work with the government and ask for support due to years of mistrust. Recognizing the urgent need to support the vulnerable families, the DDA acted on their behalf, collaborating with the Department of Refugees and Returnees and the United Nations (UNCHR) to establish new living quarters and a kitchen for the displaced families.

"When we came back to Afghanistan, we were confused about living conditions. We lost everything. Due to lack of communication, we never had trust of our local government, because no one passed us any message regarding government activities and we didn't know who to contact. The DDA is supporting the community now, and these initiatives helped change our attitude and removed our misunderstanding," said a returnee now living in the new facility.

Output Indicators: Advocacy, Public Outreach, and Relationships

Indicator	Cumulative Progress			Targets
	Male	Female	Total	
3.1.1 # of service delivery information products disseminated.	-	-	13,982	11,130
3.1.3 # of citizens engaging the SNG through implemented local mechanisms			4,989,326[7]	12,865
3.1.4 # of Youth participating in SNG decision-making	1,423	752	2,175	600
	N	D	%	
3.1.2 Proportion: # of unsolicited visitors at the SPFs : # of SPF Visitors	5,538	9,123	61%	3,990

[7] This figure includes self-reported data from radio stations for people that listened to various radio/media programs.

District Communication Plans

Early in the program, it became clear that the DDA would not get funding for all the community priorities that they outlined during the planning phase of the program. To address this, SIKA-East communication officers provided specialized training to a range of partners to help them find different sources of funding and effectively utilize existing community resources. Some of the trainees volunteered to do outreach activities on a consistent basis, and in every district, these three to six volunteers became the Communications Committee, a subcommittee of the larger DDA.

The Communications Committee members' role quickly expanded from working on advocacy projects, to drafting and implementing a joint communications plans with their DG on advocacy and outreach priorities. The purpose of the plans was to lobby for new projects, conduct community outreach, gain citizen input through dialogue, and build a united voice on issues of concern. In many districts, this was the first time DDA members and DGs had worked together. The planning process removed barriers and misconceptions and created an ongoing working relationship between institutions and participants. The plans also created a unified district agenda and effort among the DDA and DG that provided direction and focus to their efforts.

By the end of the program, 30 district communication plans were developed by sub-committees and local GIRoA leaders. The communications plans outlined activities, budgets and timelines, and grew in sophistication and detail over time to address more complex issues like internally displaced people support, girl's schools, and inclusion of projects in line ministry budgets. The communications plans were implemented with a small budget with SIKA funds for public meetings, with the understanding that the cost would eventually be raised through donations or government funds. These plans were officially handed over to DDAs as part of the programs transition package, and copies were provided to MRRD and IDLG to serve as a model for future use in rural areas.

The popularity of the advocacy training and its visible impacts increased the requests by Provincial and District Governors to train their staff, line ministries, civic organizations and women and youth organizations. With these organizations, it was difficult for staff to track the impact of the advocacy trainings given that the initiatives did not involve SIKA funding or involvement after the training. Still, dozens of success stories were captured by the staff in various published reports, and showcased the sustainability of the program.

Communication Training and Coordination
Communications committees received specialized training in the design of their respective communication and outreach plans, as well as comprehensive advocacy training that was put in service of implementation of these plans under SIKA-East mentorship.

These plans were refined and over 375 communication implementation plan meetings across all 30 target districts—in other words, meetings between DDA Communication Committees and third parties aimed at implementing their respective communication plans. Throughout and beyond the program, the 30 DDA communication committees continued advancing their district outreach plans that support projects not covered by the scope of SIKA-East programming. As mentioned in MISTI's mid-term evaluation of the program, the totality of communication training for DDAs has helped build robust mechanisms for local entities to identify community priorities, lobby for outside funding, and implement tangible service delivery projects.

The core package of communications training for DDAs, and later extended to DGO staff, PRRD officials, and youth, included lessons on lobbying, advocacy, fundraising, negotiation, civic education, and other related areas. Through these training sessions, 14,091—5,233 women, or 37 percent of the total—learned advanced communication skills to strengthen citizen government relations and implement projects outside the scope of the program.

In addition to these aforementioned activities and mechanisms, a range of trainings sustaining communication skills for provincial and district entities further contributed to this IR.

Strategic Communication Training for DGOs

To equip DGO staff with the necessary communication skills to interact with the public, articulate government policies, streamline information sharing, and repair broken citizen-government relationships, SIKA-East facilitated six strategic communication training events for 92 DGO staff from all target districts. The four-day

A youth civil society leader educates visitors on the objectives of his organization, the Orgoon Youth Cultural Union in Paktika Province

training events covered a range of advanced topics: (1) Message development and policy-to-messages; (2) Crisis communication; (3) Professional communications; (4) Event planning; (5) , Speech writing, interviewing and public speaking techniques; and, (6) Developing comprehensive communication strategies. Another important aspect of the training involved drafting professional correspondence through email, which was frequently cited by DGO staff as an important skill often overlooked by government officials.

Photojournalism and Video Editing Training SIKA-East conducted photojournalism and video editing training for all provinces in its area of operation, for representatives from PGOs, DGOs, and DoWA offices. The photojournalism training focused on the importance, rules, and styles of photojournalism, as well as types of cameras and lenses. The training in video editing covered types of film-making, storyboards, editing techniques, and the filming of events. Both trainings were intended to enhance the capacity of the governmental staff and entities in these technical areas. This training was developed at the request of IDLG to enable government authorities to produce their own footage of government-sponsored events in areas where media access is limited.

Advocacy Training for DG Staff SIKA-East facilitated a series of trainings for DGs and their staff on Advocacy, Lobbying, Fundraising, Negotiation, and Conflict Management. The training was coordinated with IDLG's Communications Department and aligned with the ministry's most recent Media and Communications Strategy.

In-house Communications Training At the request of both provincial and district officials, in the final stage of the program, SIKA-East launched in-house coaching and mentoring sessions on communication topics selected by senior officials. DGs, DGO staff, DDA members, and line department officials were presented with a list of topics to choose from, varying from computer skills, speech writing, and refresher training on previous training topics.

These voluntary trainings were attended by a range of DGO and PRRD officials, along with youth and DDA leaders without financial incentives such as travel costs. The positive response to these events also led to additional sessions for CSO leaders and youth. The sessions varied in both size and length—usually between four and 30 participants, generally lasting several hours and in some cases spanned multiple days—and utilized adult education techniques that emphasized hands-on learning.
In total, SIKA-East held 113 demand-driven training events across all provinces, out of 180 total requests made. The most popular and requested events covered basic and advanced computer training on MS Office products, additional training on managing DICs, professional email and letter writing (maktoob), and photojournalism training.[8]

[8] Many of the sessions were split into separate sessions based on the target audience, and some were repeated more than once based on requests from district partners. Trainings in Baraki Barak were cancelled due to security concerns

Head of the Logar DoWA visits with women artisans showcasing their handicrafts and other products during a SPF

Advocacy Summits Advocacy Summits were held in Khost and Logar Provinces in the last quarter of the program, as the final communication-related event funded by SIKA-East. 63 DDA leaders, line department officials, and other stakeholders from all target districts attended the events to discuss their achievements utilizing advanced communication training to implement public outreach plans, and also to strategize ways to sustain these recent gains in addressing the servi ce delivery priorities of communities.

Service Provider Fairs and Information Products

Service delivery information products were created and disseminated to provincial and district level organizations and entities in the six target provinces. Such products included:

- Service Provider Catalogues (SPC) – lists of institutions, organizations and individuals that provide specific services of interest;
- Service Provider Booklets – abridged versions of SPCs; and,
- Service Provider Database – service provider data captured by SIKA-East.

SPCs consisted of regularly updated and widely distributed comprehensive list of services and resources available locally, aiming to enhance the DE's ability to plan for and implement projects. With support of district and provincial entities, SIKA-East produced six provincial catalogues and abridged booklets, distributing a total, of 13,982 information products to 9,565 district stakeholders and 331 organizations, active district leaders, and CSOs. The SPCs were regularly updated throughout the program, printed and distributed to relevant district and provincial entities, and handed over to GIRoA by the end of the program.

This sustained effort started in early 2012, in preparation for the initial phase of field activities, with the first SPC compiled for Baraki Barak District, Logar Province. In 2013, SPCs for the original five provinces were completed, with Paktika producing its catalogue under the option period. The provincial catalogues were produced based on local information sources, verified through individual meetings with most of the service providers to obtain updated information about their status and available services.

In cooperation with IDLG, SIKA-East transferred completed SPCs, booklets, and the accompanying database to PGOs and Departments of Economy at the end of the program.

Service Provider Fairs and Number of Visitors

	SPFs Held	Service Providers	Solicited Visitors	Unsolicited Visitors	Total Visitors and Service Providers
Ghazni	3	102	617	1,059	1,778
Khost	3	195	708	1,016	1,919
Logar	2	256	628	1,190	2,074
M. Wardak	3	168	431	704	1,303
Paktika	1	83	82	21	186
Paktya	3	165	1119	579	1,863
Total	**15**	**969**	**3,585**	**4,569**	**9,123**

Service Provider Fairs The program envisioned creating a platform for local service providers to promote available public and private sector services, and to build networks between GIRoA, DEs, CSOs, and other groups. Service Provider Fairs (SPFs) contributed to improved basic service delivery at the subnational level by strengthening the ability of service providers to reach out to potential customers, as well raise awareness of their services to the general public.

Preparations for conducting the SPF in Maydan Shahr started in September 2012 in coordination with provincial line departments. Informed by a series of service providers and resource coordination meetings the first series of fairs were launched in November 2013, with a second series of SPFs that were completed in June 2015. Fairs were conducted at the provincial and district level, achieving an overall average of 65 service providers and over 300 unsolicited visitors—interested citizens that received no travel or other financial support to attend—per fair by the end of the program. Service providers included government departments, local and international NGOs, private sector companies, and youth and women associations.

Fifteen SPFs were held in six provinces over the life of the program: Paktika Province held one Fair, Ghazni Province two, and Khost, Logar, Maydan Wardak and Paktya Provinces each held three. In some cases multiple district level fairs were conducted instead of provincial centralized events to prevent transport and security challenges from remote districts to provincial capitals.

The Fairs were attended by at least 5,538 unsolicited visitors, as well as 3,585 targeted visitors, inclusive of the 969 registered service providers that showcased their products and services. The achieved attendance result is under-reported as many women and a number of men refused to sign attendance registers due to cultural and security concerns. The following table gives a provincial breakdown of fairs and attendance.

Logar Province recorded the highest number of unsolicited visitors at its two fairs, with 1,190 individuals in total. This was followed closely by Khost and Ghazni, with 1,016 and 1,059 unsolicited visitors respectively. Paktika Province showed understandably the lowest attendance numbers, only 21, as activities in this province started in the option period. Paktya Province, despite its high number of districts, showed lower than expected attendance, most likely due to travel and security issues.

> "This is a good opportunity for both the community and government officials to understand each other's activities and reduce misunderstanding. Most people don't have high awareness of local services, but through this event, they can see what the government is doing for them and this can improve their judgment of the government."
> *—Mr. Ghulam Rasool Kamran, Logar PG representative—*

Citizen Engagement with Local Government

Throughout the program, over five million Afghan citizens engaged their sub-national governmental representatives and offices through local mechanisms implemented as a joint government and SIKA-East effort. Such mechanisms included:

- District Information Centers (DICs);
- Radio dramas;
- Radio call-in shows;
- DDA Communication Committees, DDA Communication and Outreach Plans - Implemented projects and follow-on activities;

- Voice messaging;
- Print Media; and,
- Advanced Advocacy Training.

District Information Centers At the request of MRRD and under the overall guidance of PRRDs and DGs, SIKA-East established 28 DICs in district centers—implemented as non-infrastructure grants—embedded within established DGOs. Additionally, after a SIKA advocacy training, youth in Paktika Province established a similar center at the local market using space donated by elders.

DICs aim to respond to citizen's consistently voiced frustration over inadequate access to information about governance and development activities, as well as insufficient communication and coordination with DEs on the implementation of development projects. Serving as a clearinghouse of information on development plans, annual budgets, district profiles, and available services in the area, support for DICs contributes towards two SIKA-East objectives: enabling provincial and DEs to access information on services from line departments; and, improving the ability of district, and therefore provincial and central government, to communicate with DEs.

Support to DICs included training and material support to establish a central location for citizens to access public information and interact with government officials. The DICs were equipped with essential hardware, software, and printers. DIC staff received hands-on training on computer systems and basic software applications (MS Publisher, Word and Excel) enabling them to perform administrative work, as well as to produce an array of communication and public outreach materials.

Handwritten log-books to document citizen traffic, signage, two CDs containing all the project's training materials, and ten copies of Afghan law books were purchased by the program for each center. SIKA-East also created brochures on DDA responsibilities, women services, introduction to laws, and local government services for the Centers. Toward the end of the project, SIKA-East handed over periodicals and books donated by international development and government partners, such as The Asia Foundation, to all supported DICs to use as free reference materials—training manuals, policy guides, and other articles—translated into local languages.

In a short amount of time, district leaders have been able to promote the usefulness of DICs to communities, with many centers reporting increased citizen traffic. To verify these claims, SIKA-East visited DICs to review log-books that document visitors and the purpose of the visits. The follow-on visits confirmed that log-books were properly used, space and equipment were shared free of charge, and volunteers were on board providing assistance to citizens.

The Khwaja Umari DIC achieved a record number of over 100 visitors, and the permanent presence of a female volunteer three days a week. Expanding the use of DICs, the space was also used for improved inter-governmental discussion and joint activities: DDA meetings, DG and community meetings, legal libraries (as many DGs and their staff, according to them, had never seen the Afghan laws in writing before), women-friendly venues, and so on. Log-book reports showed that most citizens used the centers for *taskira* paperwork and assistance, followed by requests for assistance with land or water disputes, outlined in the table below:

A carpet merchant in Khost displays his goods at an SPF attended by over 600 people

Citizen Traffic to District Information Centers

Breakdown of male and female visitors and most common requests for information

Province	District	M	F	Primary Purpose of Visits
Ghazni	Andar	34	5	80% Tazkira; 15% Legal issues; 5% Security
	Bahrami Shahid	42	5	75% Tazkira; 15% Education; 10% Land issues
	Dih Yak	100	0	65% Tazkira; 20% Passports; 15% Other
	Khwaja Umari	40	32	60% Tazkira: 25% Women legal issues; 15% Security
	Qarabagh	210	48	62% Tazkira; 25% Women legal issues; 13% Other
Khost	Gurbuz	30	0	50% Tazkira; 20% Land and Water; 16% Agriculture, 14% Other
	Jaji Maidan	30	0	47% Tazkira; 40% Agriculture and Land; 23% Education/Other
	Tani	30	0	50% Tazkira; 20% Agriculture; 20% Land and Water; 10% Other
	Mando Zayi	18	0	60% Tazkira; 20% Education; 20% Security/Other
Logar	Baraki Barak	28	0	90% Tazkira; 10% Agriculture and Land issues
	Khoshi	70	7	80% Tazkira; 10% Land; 10% Other
	Mohammad Agha	50	15	70% Tazkira; 10% Land; 10% Security; 10% Women legal issues
Wardak	Jalrez	35	0	63% Tazkira; 15% Water; 22% Other
	Nirkh	180	10	54% Tazkira; 23% Agriculture/Land; 23% Other
	Saydabad	148	10	47% Tazkira; 12% Land; 11% Security; 30% Other
Paktya	Ahmad Abad	56	0	46% Development Projects; 30% Tazkira; 24% Other
	Ali Khail	15	0	40% Land; 30% Security; 30% Tazkira; 10% Women legal issues
	Laja Ahmad Khail	12	0	40% Tazkira; 30% Project issues; 20% Youth issues; 10% Other
	Laja Mangal	22	4	60% Tazkira; 20% Land; 20% Project Issues/Other
	Mirzaka	6	0	50% Youth/Community Issues; 40% Development Projects
	Zadran	32	3	60% Tazkira; 20% Land; 20% Other
	Zurmat	47	0	42% Development Projects; 26% CDCs/DDAs; 32% Local issues
Paktika	Sharan	51	8	22% Tazkira; 11% Security; 10% Education; 57% Other
	Yosuf Khel	35	19	25% Tazkira; 15% Agriculture/Water; 12% Security; 48% Other
Total		**1,321**	**166**	

The overall average of DIC visitors was estimated at 62 per district since the center launch, which is slightly skewed given the high turnout rates in Qarabagh, Nirkh, and Saydabad Districts, and that several DICs were the latest to open their doors to the public. Based on data captured in logbooks by DIC staff, few women have visited DICs, largely due to cultural restrictions .

placed on women that limit their abilities to travel. Most notably in Khwaja Umari District, 44 percent of all visitors were women, which is likely due to the presence of a female volunteer who works at the DIC. The vast majority of visitors across all areas inquired about obtaining tazkiras, with the exception of four districts in Paktya

Inspired Volunteer Helps Connect Women with Government Services

Photo: Ms. Masouda, a volunteer at the Khwaja Umari DIC in Ghazni Province, reviews the DIC log book that documents citizen traffic into the center

During a field visit to the Khwaja Umari DIC, SIKA-East staff met Ms. Masouda, a former SIKA-East trainee who now volunteers her time working at the center three days a week, referring women visitors to appropriate service providers. To better understand how local residents view the DIC, SIKA-East conducted a short, informal interview.

SIKA-East: Why do you volunteer at the DIC?

Masouda: "During SIKA-East training, I was motivated when Khwaja Umari women voiced their problems during workshops which were very important, so I thought I can serve women in need through the DIC, which I was introduced to by SIKA-East trainers."

SIKA-East: What do you hope to accomplish at the DIC?

Masouda: "My only hope is to assist Khwaja Umari women and men to accomplish their own hopes. I would also like to collect all district information from all line departments and put them in a filing cabinet at the DIC."

SIKA-East: What are people saying about the DIC?

Masouda: "All community people are very happy from the DIC in the district center, and they say that this is the main service center for people in the district, and that they can perform important tasks and services for local people."

Radio Dramas The six radio dramas were written with SIKA staff input and were roughly 30 minutes in length. Four of the dramas were recorded in Pashto and two in Dari. Three programs were selected to be re-recorded in the local accent used in Khost and Paktya. The recording in local accents was useful for audience acceptance and the dramas became a topic of conversation in the local bazars. Reportedly, one of the taglines from a drama broadcast in Khost entered local vernacular and was being used in popular conversation.
The topics selected for the radio plays were based on DPP analysis addressing six sources of instability common to multiple districts:

- Educational opportunities
- Water issues
- Basic services
- What the local government can do for you and how to contact them
- Opportunities for youth
- Service availability for women

The radio dramas were initially aired in the summer of 2013 in Maydan Wardak, Logar, and Ghazni and were re-aired under grants to district entities in Ghazni, Khost, and Maydan Wardak a year later. In addition, Salam Watandar played the radio dramas twice on their network of stations for free. These included their stations in Kabul, Logar, Wardak, Paktya, Ghazni, and Parwan for an estimated listenership of 2,687,300 listeners - on these six stations with six dramas. According to the network, they intended to replay the program again in the future on their own.

The impact of these popular dramas was reinforced by a promotional effort to distribute schedules and encourage people to listen, airing of the shows at DDA meetings and in schools to spark discussion about some of the sources of instability. The radio plays had a saturation level that reached multiple listening audiences during the day and evening.

A follow-up survey proved that the show on education was regarded as the most popular among listeners. Here a young woman saves a character's life because she has been to school and is a doctor. This show encouraged reluctant families to send girls to school and young children reportedly took the opportunity to push parents to go to school. This show was the most

often replayed for free. The land and water disputes were also popular presenting a peaceful way of handling conflicts.
Twenty copies of broadcast-ready dramas on CDs were distributed among local partners, schools and other radio stations to replay as they saw fit in each province at the end of the program.

Interactive Radio Call-in Shows Early in the project, radio was identified as the most effective method of mass communication for residents in rural SIKA districts. The radio phone-in shows were broadcast through local radio stations and featured relevant, high profile domestic panelists. The shows addressed topics identified jointly with PRRD officials based on the socio-economic, political, and security trends in each province, in correlation with DPP-identified sources of instability. The following 16 discussion topics were identified:

- Weak governance and lack of trust;
- Lack of educational opportunities;
- Water disputes;
- Land disputes or tribal disputes;
- Unemployment;
- Lack of basic services in health or agriculture;
- Government corruption;
- Youth opportunities in education, jobs and leadership;
- Nepotism in government;
- Violence against women;
- Forest protection;
- Public health;
- Harmful traditional practices/gender issues;
- Drug use;
- Rule of law; and
- Lack of markets for local products

Since many of the guest panelists included DGs, DDA members, line ministry staff and NGO leaders that had never been on radio, SIKA-East developed basic issue briefs, and trained a total of 420 panelists – DGs, deputy provincial governors, Civil Society Organization (CSO) leaders, DDA+ members, female leaders, and other stakeholders - to speak on radio and handle potentially difficult or sensitive call-in questions from the audience.

"The problem is that there are those who condemn these bad traditions and customs, but they themselves still practice them. My question to the panelists; what is the solution to this problem?"
—Mr. Abdul Wahid, a Paktika citizen asking questions during a broadcast on harmful traditional practices—

The radio phone-in programs were launched in autumn 2014 in Ghazni, Logar, and Maydan Wardak provinces, and continued throughout the six provinces, with 78 shows in total featuring 390 participating panelists at the end. The shows were broadcast live across SIKA-East districts on Friday mornings and were re-aired on Saturdays to ensure a wider audience. Listenership through local radio with the Salam Watandar network stations was roughly estimated by the network to 8,000 per show, or a total audience of an estimated 624,000 listeners for all shows.

In January 2015, SIKA-East and DDA leaders in Ghazni and Maydan Wardak Provinces conducted informal surveys to assess the impact of the broadcasts, revealing significant local demand to utilize radio as a tool to strengthen citizen-government relationships. The radio call-in programs proved to offer an interactive forum for PRRD and DEs to engage with their constituents, especially in remote districts where constituents are seldom in position to meet their government representatives.

Illustratively, several security concerns were successfully resolved through citizens advocating on the air with their government officials. Corruption was openly addressed and in some cases brought to effective follow-up action from correspondent officials. Water and land disputes were clarified, eliciting a number of positive responses from citizens affected by these frequent community issues. Women and youth also gave overwhelmingly positive feedback for the chance to talk to their government representatives and obtain necessary information by phoning in the show. Additionally, the shows were used to broadcast messages of government and local initiatives of public interest. Other feedback collected during the surveys shows that while listeners were not always satisfied with answers provided by government officials, the broadcasts were definitely seen as an important step towards improving communication between the government and public.

District partners expressed their desire to continue the successful activity on their own, beyond SIKA-East funding. In Logar Province, district entities collaborated with Zinat radio to broadcast two additional shows without financial support from the program, featuring several guest panelists fielding questions from citizens, including a provincial council member, a tribal elder, and a CSO leader. In Paktika Province, a bi-weekly

show on Paktika Pashtun Gheg was launched as a result of the SIKA-East program with government partners, CSO leaders, women leaders, and religious scholars leading discussions on 13 priority topics selected by PRRD. Paktya Province launched a weekly show on important issues inviting the panelists involved in SIKA-East training.

> "I have been receiving fewer calls from constituents on certain problems, particularly disputes over water resources because many district residents have been listening to the radio shows that provide useful tips for communities to resolve issues on their own."
> *—DDA leader. Baraki Barak*

Voice Messaging The voice-messaging concept was intended to provide both DDAs and DGs with an additional tool for communicating with constituents, and provide constituents a new method for sharing feedback on government services. The SIKA-East capacity assessment conducted in 2013 showed that mobile phones were the most important component of individual communications and it was included in the SIKA-East Communications & Outreach Communications Strategy.

Since the majority of residents are illiterate, the voice messaging was envisioned to send 30-second audio messages to a database of phone numbers or through cell phone towers in districts. However, despite IDLG interest and lengthy negotiations with Roshan, the single telecom company interested in providing these services in Afghanistan, approval for this activity was received a few months before the closeout of the program and voice messaging was therefore cancelled. Materials, training documents and supporting documents were provided to IDLG communications and program staff, to be eventually used by another USAID or governmental program.

Print Media In support of a comprehensive stabilization communications strategy on the district level, and only in the initial phase, SIKA-East provided the design, text, and production of six types of brochures for distribution in the field by local partners. The six topics covered: Education, Opportunities for Youth, Basic Government Services, Opportunities for Women, Water, and Local Government Role. The brochures tracked directly with the topics of the radio dramas, providing a complementary layer of media on the six stability-driven topics. The total print run was 21,000. The completed brochures were distributed to DICs, partners and district entities by the end of the program.

Additional training was provided to DDA communication committee members and DG staff to produce their own print media with available office equipment and simple software, with a focus on using more images and fewer words, especially in areas with lower literacy rates.

A karez extension and water reservoir project completed by district partners in Mohammad Agha District has addressed the service delivery needs of nearly 2,000 rural district residents.

III. Improve Basic Service Delivery

Provincial authorities are able to improve basic service delivery by using GIRoA, CDCs, DDAs and ASOP DCCs, which gain capacity to plan, design, implement, and monitor projects, with a focus on labor-intensive projects and productive infrastructure

The focus of tese activities is on improving basic service delivery by implementing grant and non-grant initiatives (including both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects) that have been prioritized by the DDAs. Non-grant projects are projects where SIKA-East provides only technical assistance to the DDA in order to find solutions to address citizen needs that cannot be addressed through grants. The ultimate aim of SIKA-East's capacity building interventions is the successful transfer of knowledge and skills for PE/DEs to implement and manage service delivery projects themselves.

Output Indicators The focus of this IR is service delivery, primarily through SIKA-East grants, and capacity building, much of which was covered in other areas of this report.

IR4 Output Indicators

Indicator	Cumulative Progress			Target
	Male	Female	Total	
4.1.2 # Individuals employed through grants	31,729	1	30,878	31,730
4.1.3 # Individuals trained through grants	2,235	3,281	5,516	700
4.1.4 # of direct SIKA-East grant beneficiaries	894,118	799,556	1,693,674	1,487,862
4.2.1 # of individuals trained	31,314	10,075	41,389	41,510
			Number	
4.1.1 # of Grant projects			755	646
4.2.2 # of Project Monitoring Visits			2,881	3,990

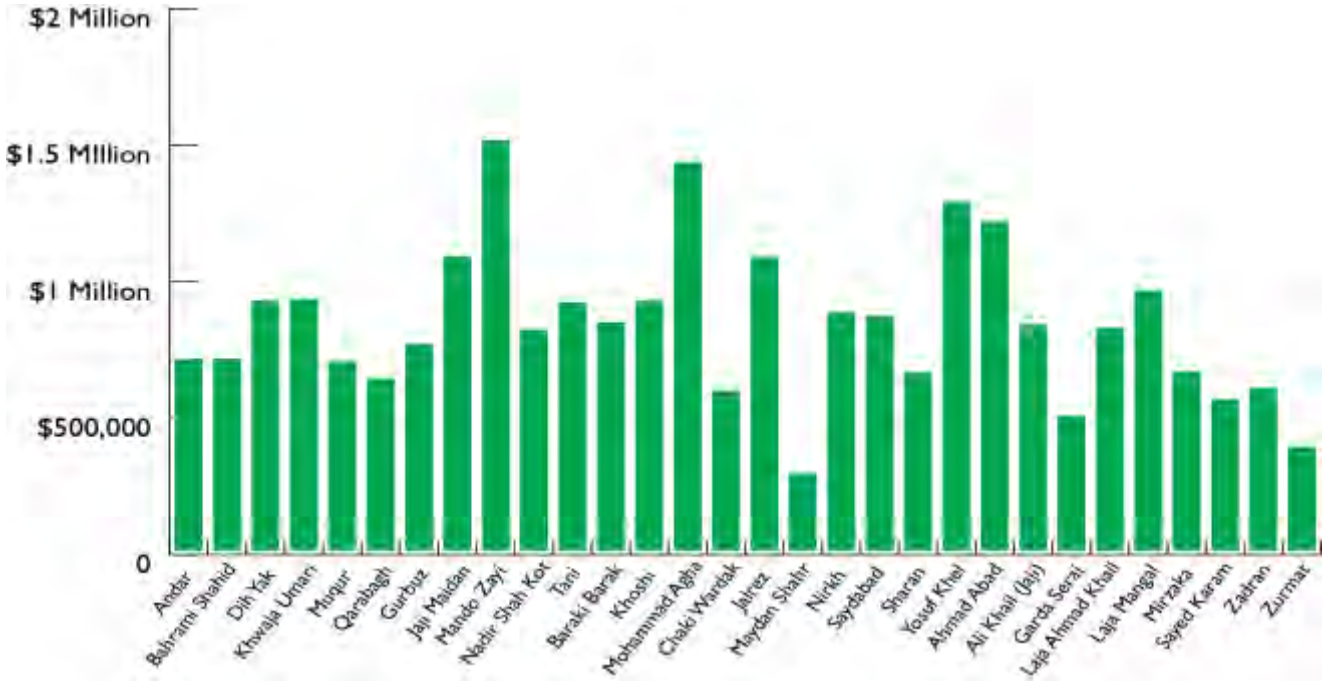
Service Delivery Grants

Complementing SIKA-East capacity building activities, DEs received grants to enhance service delivery and assist implementation of community-identified initiatives. These projects served as the practical application of capacity building, and served SIKA-East objectives by improving the ability of communities to prioritize district issues and connect with the government to formulate inclusive plans. Part of the process involved enhancing the ability of governmental and local partners to monitor service delivery projects, conducted through joint or independent site monitoring visits to ensure projects met certain milestones. SIKA-East's extensive capacity building program, also included under this IR, enabled partners and beneficiaries to plan, design, and implement.

In total, district partners completed 690 service delivery grants, investing nearly $26.5 million into rural communities across the program's 30 target districts. These new infrastructure (89 percent) and non-infrastructure (11 percent) funded grants directly address the service delivery needs of 1,693,674 people, generally split evenly between men and women.

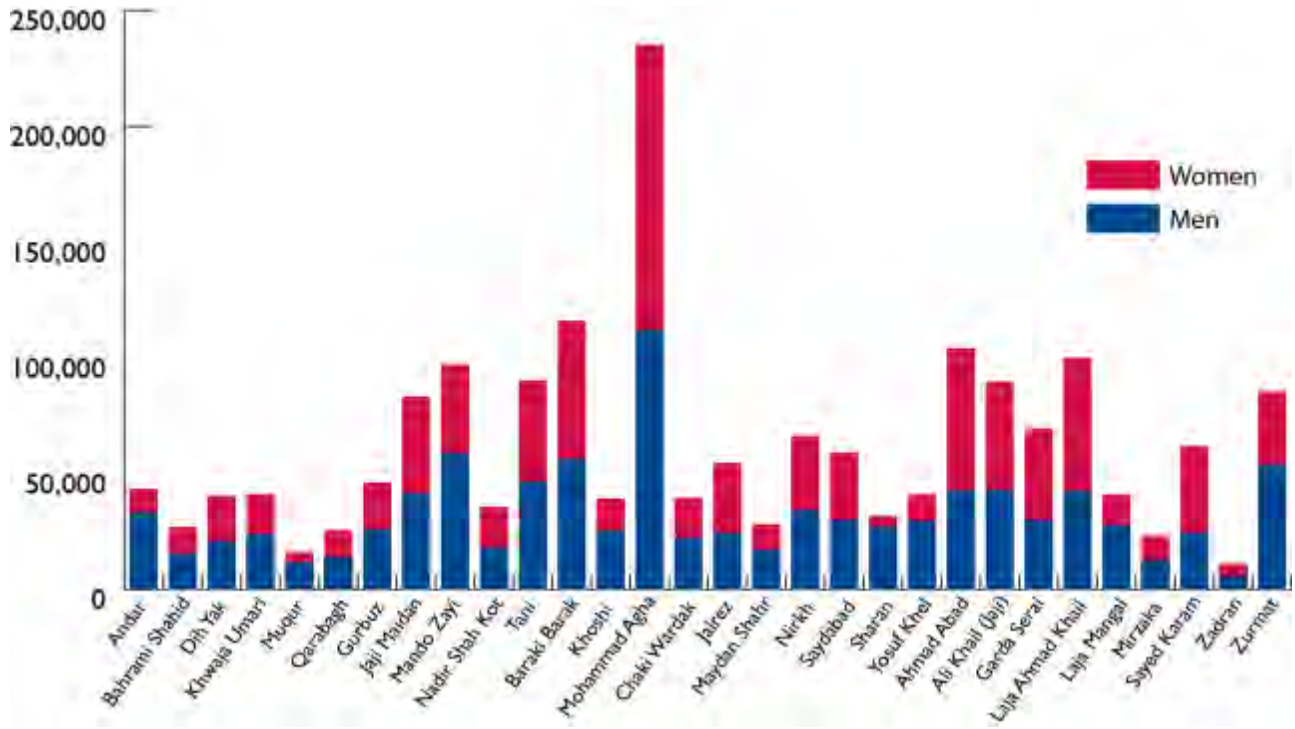
The following two charts detail the value of implemented grant projects and the number of resulting beneficiaries per district.[9]

Value of Implemented Grants



[9] These charts exclude multi-district and provincial non-infrastructure grants. More details on these grants are provided in the Appendices.

Male and Female Beneficiaries of Grants



In addition, grants awarded and implemented to multiple districts invested $1.5 million towards local priorities. These included the WOB initiative and hygiene awareness training discussed in the gender section, DICs, radio broadcasts, and capacity building initiatives for conflict management, project design, and water management amongst others.

In addition to directly addressing longstanding priorities, grant projects provided short-term jobs for thousands of people. High unemployment rates were frequently cited as urgent problems facing communities during planning events and by key informants during evaluation focus groups. Through SIKA-East program grants, a total of 31,730 individuals gained short term employment.

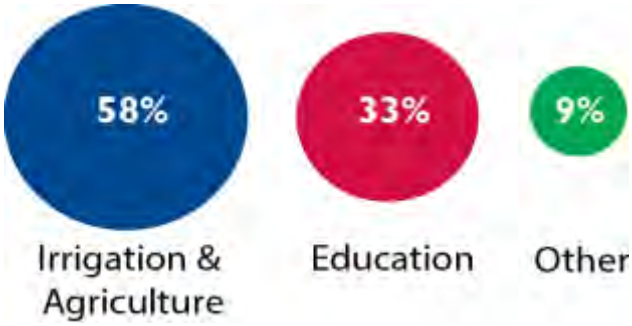
An indirect benefit of grant implementation was the revitalization or re-establishment of CDCs that experienced high leadership turnover due to the age of the members and other factors. Through the life of the project, SIKA-East engaged 497 village level CDCs originally formed by NSP. Roughly half of these bodies had to be reconstituted to award grants, either due to membership attrition or general inactivity. By the end of the program, these CDCs remained active and better able to implement a variety of service delivery projects.
Rural development projects frequently met serious implementation challenges. CDCs and DDAs employed creative solutions to overcome these obstacles, and were relied heavily by SIKA-East to resolve community conflicts, mitigate insecurity, and address technical challenges.

Cancelled Grants Several grants encountered implementation challenges due to insecurity, community and land conflicts, technical challenges, and other issues. Despite efforts to resolve these challenges through community consultations and negotiations, which in some cases could span several months, a number of awarded grants in various stages of implementation were cancelled as they couldn't be completed before the program ended. In total, SIKA-East awarded 755 grants across target districts, but 65 were cancelled. Through the implementation cycle of these cancelled grants, just over $872,000 in milestone payments were made to district partners. More details on cancelled grants are provided in the appendices.

Infrastructure Nearly 89 percent of all implemented grant projects were infrastructure related. In total, district partners implemented 611 small infrastructure grant projects, investing over $22.6 million into rural communities. The majority of the projects were focused on irrigation improvements—through the creation of new or rehabilitation of existing karez systems, canals, intakes, and flood protection walls—and education improvement initiatives (school athletic facilities and boundary walls).

The remaining projects supported transportation upgrades through culverts and small bridges, well boring to improve access to drinking water, and the rehabilitation of rural public/government facilities.
As noted during baseline and final evaluation focus groups, these highly visible projects served as tangible evidence that GIRoA and district leaders were responding to local priorities. As a result, several districts reported that public perceptions of the local government have significantly approved, helping instill public trust and confidence in GIRoA.

Infrastructure Grants by Type



Non-Infrastructure Many district priorities could not be addressed by traditional infrastructure works. To address certain Sources of Instability, such as unemployment, specialized education for youth, citizen-government communication, and capacity building for local government officials, district partners implemented a number of non-infrastructure grants.

In total, SIKA-East funded 79 non-infrastructure grants worth over $2.7 million.

The majority of these grants were for DG coordination meetings, providing a platform for DDAs, line department officials, DGO staff and civil society leaders to work together to jointly improve service delivery management. These 30 initiatives were designed to address poor citizen-government communication and lack of information sharing that was consistently highlighted by district leaders.

Non-Infrastructure Grants by Type

Village elders, CDC members, youth, and other residents gather to celebrate the completion of a new water reservoir project in Bahrami Shahid District, Ghazni Province.

Many residents—particularly women and youth—strongly advocated for vocational training opportunities as a way to address unemployment and diversify household incomes. In response, district partners implemented 25 vocational training grants, helping rural district residents learn new skills to generate income through small scale home-based businesses. The trainings generally lasted for one to three months, and covered the following areas:

- Carpentry;
- Embroidery and Tailoring;
- Food Processing; and
- Welding

Other non-infrastructure grants included computer literacy training for youth to help them gain employable skills, female priorities (WOB and hygiene awareness training), and various programs to improve citizen-government relationships (DICs, radio broadcasts).

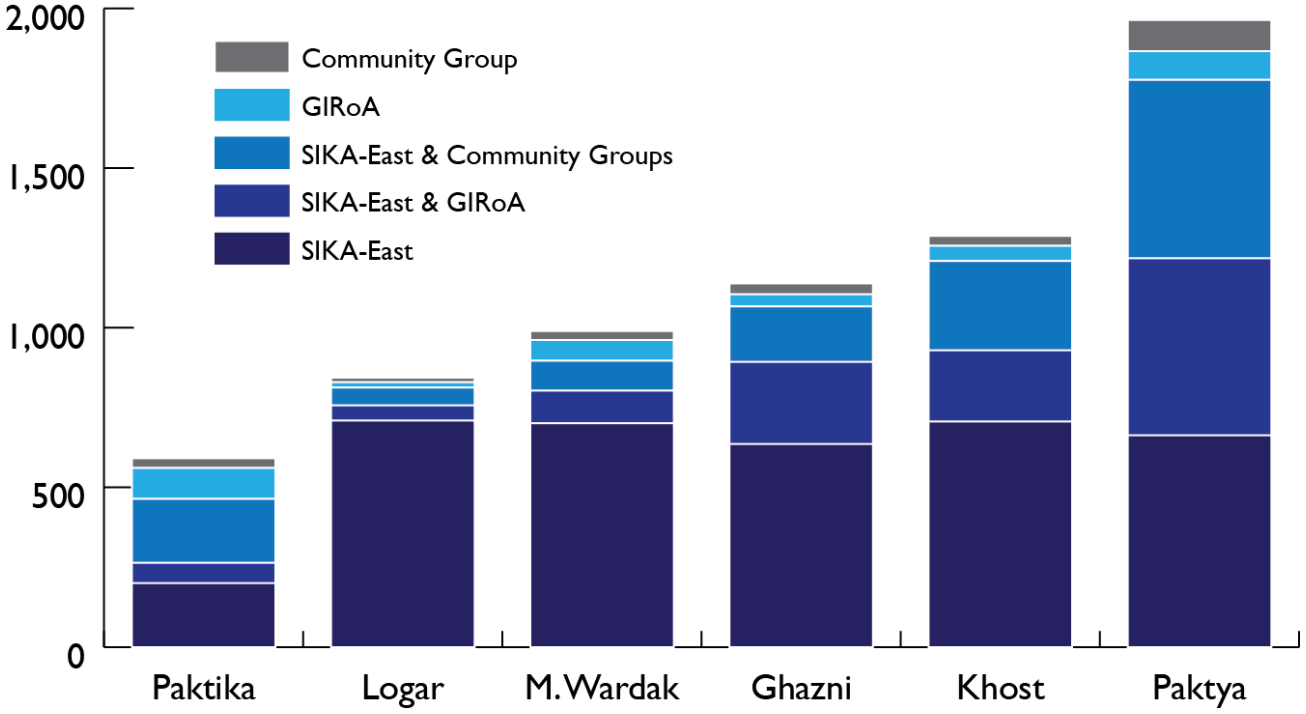
Monitoring by GIRoA and District Partners An important aspect of the grant implementation cycle was the regular monitoring of construction and management activities, ensuring projects achieved specified milestones prior to payment installments, and that projects complied with contractual obligations.

Initially, a SIKA-East team of Grant, M&E, and Engineering staff assumed the overall responsibility of monitoring, regularly visiting projects to verify their progress. Later in the project however, a concerted effort was to transfer these knowledge and skills to GIRoA and district partners by facilitating joint sites visits with the program, and support for monitoring activities held independently by government officials.

In total, the program documented 6,816 field monitoring site visits across all 30 target districts, more than doubling its initial M&E target. To ensure the sustainability and transition of service delivery knowledge, GIRoA

participated in 1,248 of these visits jointly with SIKA-East, and also conducted 354 site visits independently.[10] Other community leaders and groups conducted 1,599 monitoring visits, both jointly with SIKA-East staff and independently. The table below provides a provincial breakdown of monitoring visits.

Monitoring Visits by Province



Capacity Building

SIKA-East conducted a capacity development regimen for counterparts that consisted of intensive hands-on mentoring as well as training in governance, service delivery, communications, and project management. Over the course of several years, SIKA-East worked with its GIRoA counterparts to improve their abilities in core public sector competencies. Although starting from a very low degree of capacity, there has been a marked improvement in the ability to PGOs, DGOs, DDAs and CDCs to develop infrastructure and provide constituent services in their communities, as well as reported increase in citizen-government communication.
Due to the very limited abilities of SIKA-East counterparts to effectively execute constituent service activities unaided, a program that combined traditional classroom learning, hands-on mentorship, and learning-by-doing was introduced by the program, with a focus on immediate interventions, and long term strategies. The purpose of this approach was to bridge the aforementioned gap between the necessity for immediate action, and the long term, Afghan-led development approach.

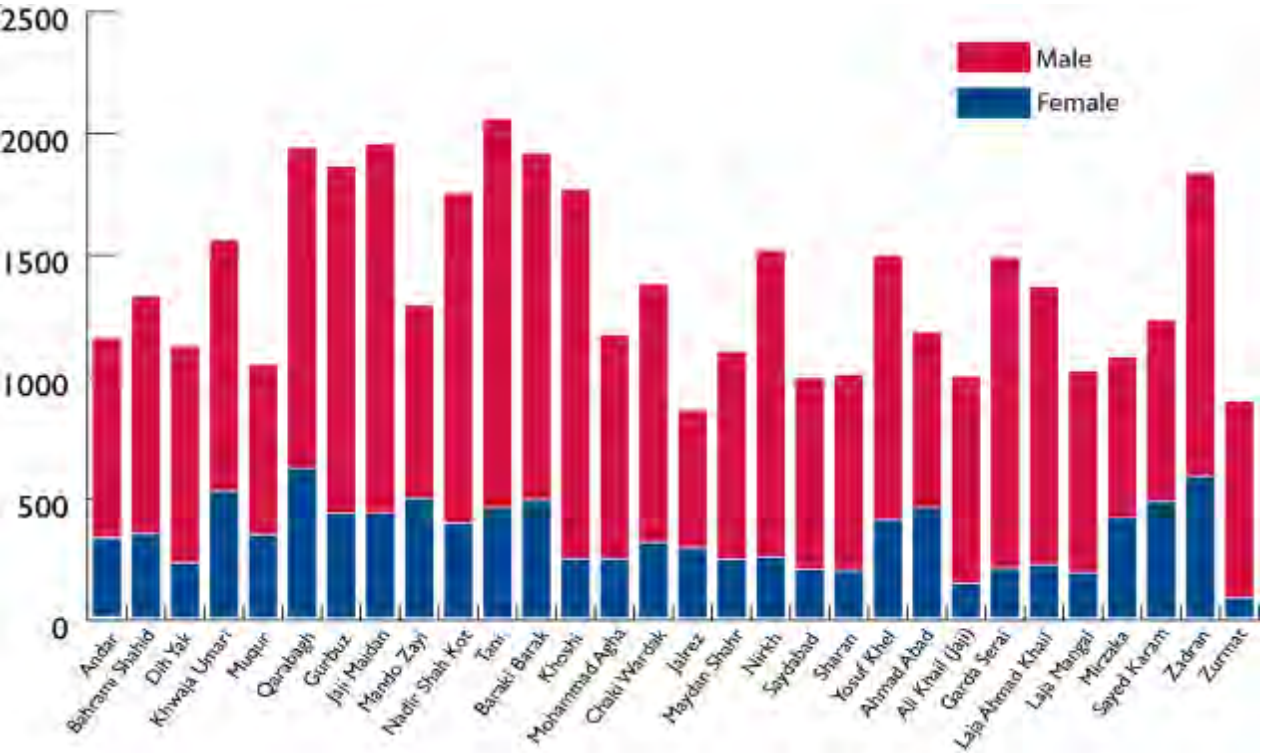
Core Curriculum SIKA-East provided integrated assistance to its partners and beneficiaries along three main program streams, enabling district and provincial leaders to identify and address local priorities, as well as to increase their capacity to plan, resource and implement activities that strengthen good governance and service delivery:

- Leadership and Strategic Planning
- Public Outreach and Communications; and
- Project Operations and Management

[10] For M&E purposes, GIRoA officials include DDA and CDC members

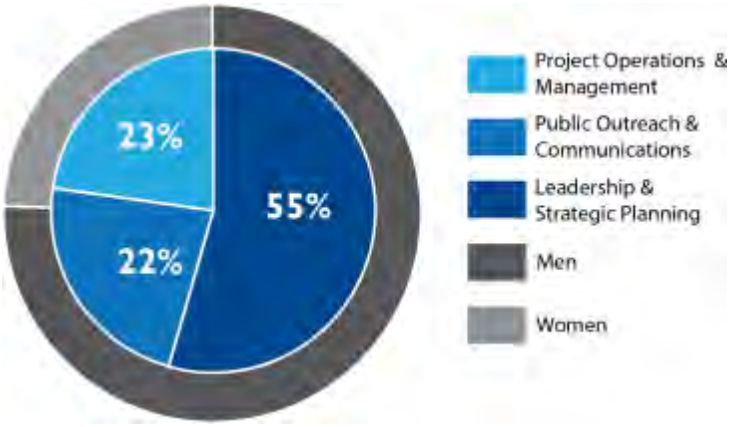
Across all 30 target districts, 41,389 individuals, including 10,075 women learned new skills to improve the responsiveness of the local government, improve citizen relationships, and implement projects in response to local priorities. The graph below provides a district breakdown of capacity building interventions through the life of the program.[11]

SIKA-East Capacity Building by District



[11] An additional, 623 individuals that were trained in provincial centers and Kabul are not included

Capacity building participants by subject type and gender



Leadership & Strategic Planning: Training sessions covered Stakeholder Orientation, Governance Foundation, SAM, DSPP, and other events that supported the establishment of DPPs.
Perhaps one of the more important training themes presented by SIKA-East were those involving SAM/DSPP towards the development of the DPPs. These training sessions provided DDAs and GIRoA officials with the tools to analyze district-level stability issues and to implement appropriate solutions. During an evaluation survey implemented in April 2015, DDA and GIRoA officials were asked if they would continue to utilize strategic planning and leadership training to develop future district plans. Over 68 percent of all respondents (757 people) surveyed 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they were likely to utilize these skills in the future.

Public Outreach & Communications Training sessions covered Fundraising, Lobbying, Negotiation Strategy, Unity Building, and Resource Dialogue and Advocacy, and DGO/PGO training and other requested subjects.

Training in various aspects of professional communication were highly regarded by district and provincial partners, with GIRoA directly requesting additional capacity building in the subject.

In total, 14,701 individuals learned specialized communication skills to improve citizen engagement, repair local relationships, and streamline information sharing processes. Originally targeted for DDA members, communication focused training was also extended to youth, CSOs, and other interested parties. A set of training sessions were also given to DGOs and PGOs, which included demand driven sessions on Community Mobilization and Engagement; Conflict Management; Gender Basic Training; General Leadership and Management; Good Governance Training; and Strategic Communication. Women represented 15% percent of the total 605 DG and PG staff trained.

Technical Training (Project Operations & Maintenance): Training sessions covered Project planning, implementation and management were a large part of SIKA-East's core curriculum. As the primary implementers of awarded grants, technical training was targeted specifically for CDCs, and to a lesser extent, DDA members.

In total, 10,684 individuals were trained in various aspects of project management. Since CDCs were the primary target of this training stream, as few women are members of the groups, only seven percent of trainees under this component were women. It was found that even though men were willing to involve women in the planning processes, such as the DPP development, men were reluctant to involve females in the actual physical implementation, which explains the relatively high levels of women's participation in planning events (31 percent) compared to technical training (seven percent).

Engineering Designs and Training An important aspect of the grant component of SIKA-East was its dedicated engineering department. Working with DEs

and line department officials, program engineers helped lead the design of rural infrastructure projects, and were key actors during grant monitoring activities. Due to shifting priorities and the unpredictable operating environment, the program developed a number of contingency project designs.

Through the life of the project, SIKA-East engineers designed 726 rural infrastructure projects. Many of these were DPP projects were deemed technically unfeasible, replaced by community leaders, or were created as secondary options for districts.

The infrastructure component of SIKA-East has been able to successfully complete vital service delivery projects in complex environments. Late in the program, MRRD's Engineering Service Department (ESD), who's staff are undertrained and unequipped with modern engineering tools, requested assistance from SIKA-East to help improve the functionality of their engineering department. To assist MRRD in sustaining these gains in rural development, SIKA-East provided over a month of hands on training to 61 officials from MRRD's ESD.

SIKA-East conducted a needs based assessment of ESD early in 2015, and tailored the training to focus on specific areas where the department and its staff lacked modernized skills, with an emphasis on building the proficiency of the engineers to operate essential, contemporary software:

- **AutoCad**: Design and Drafting
- **Civil 3D**: Civil Engineering Design and Documentation Software
- **Rivet Arch**: Architecture and Structural Engineering Software
- **SAP/CSI Bridges**: For modeling, analysis and design of bridge structures
- **GIS**: Geographic Information Systems

Training was complemented with material support—computers, software, and furniture—needed for ESD to continue producing professional engineering designs.

SIKA-East engineers, with extensive experience designing infrastructure projects in rural areas of Afghanistan, were present throughout the training, providing hands on coaching, mentoring and sharing best practices.

Leaders in Mohammad Agha District, Logar Province, celebrate the completion of a protection wall project. The protection wall will benefit approximately 300 families by protecting agricultural land from floods.

Women leaders from the Mando Zayi DDA in Khost Province accompany their male colleagues during a rare joint site visit of a construction project funded by a SIKA-East grant. The women leaders and male elders stated it was the first activity of its kind that involved women in the district.

Gender Mainstreaming and Empowerment

Women in Afghanistan face social and cultural challenges that make their daily life experience unique from men. For this reason, women often have a different perspective when it comes to quality of life, feelings of safety, freedom of movement, ability to plan for the future, and interaction with local leaders.

As evidenced in baseline focus groups and strategic planning events, the experiences of women vary significantly from district to district. Many of the women live in fear of anti-government elements, are largely confined to the home without access to education due to conservative cultural norms, and have little to no say in local decision making. At the same time, some areas are experiencing a cultural shift that allows women to receive an education, pursue professional jobs, and exercise their civic rights.

Gender considerations were prioritized as a cross-cutting theme and were integrated across all project components. Gender specialists and field staff worked closely with stakeholders to ensure its core activities designed to strengthen participatory governance included perspectives of both men and women.

Outcomes By expanding the program's key district partner, the DDA, SIKA-East provided several pathways for women to gain leadership experience, build their self-confidence, and increase their direct engagement with local government officials and tribal elders.

Through the Stability Analysis Methodology (SAM) and the District Strategic Planning Process (DSPP) process, women ensured that DPPs were inclusive and representative, with 25% of all DPP projects proposed by women (Details on SAM and DSPP are provided in the IR1 section). In addition, according to internal surveys, women leaders have reported increased inclusion in decision making processes.

By the end of 2014, the number of female DDA members involved in relevant decision-making processes increased by 56 percent in comparison to 2013, and by 76 percent in comparison to the baseline data of 2012. By the end of the program, 75% of surveyed women DDA members believed that the situation in their districts had improved due to their increased engagement in decision making.

Women leaders from DDA communication committees perhaps represent the program's most significant and potentially sustainable gender empowerment achievement. Several women displayed resourcefulness, creativity, and leadership qualities to raise awareness of women's priorities, connect with the government to obtain services, and increase the overall voice of women in rural areas. Several of these women-led public outreach and advocacy campaigns are highlighted in this report.

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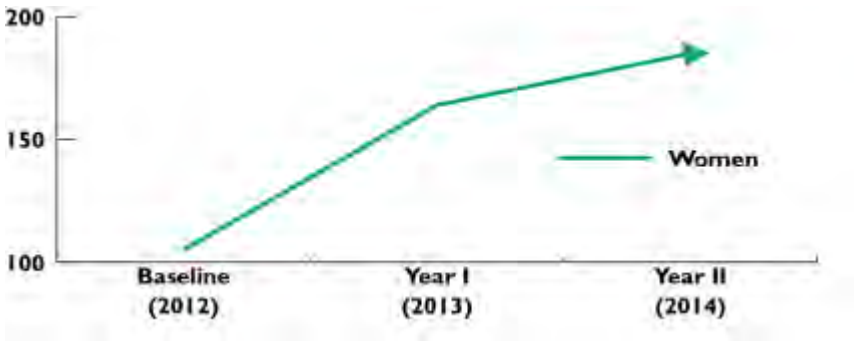
Prior to SIKA-East, women were largely unpresented in local decision making and peacebuilding processes in its area of operations. Gender focused programming has raised this from a baseline figure of 12 women (across all 30 districts), to 1,275, nearly 95 percent of which are active DDA members

Women DDA Members Reporting Increased Inclusion in Decision Making Processes



Gender Mainstreaming Strategy

With a focus on identifying pathways for meaningful engagement for women, gender programming focused on giving greater attention to women's voice, representation, and leadership. The program provided opportunities for women to influence decision making during the SAM and DSPP processes (participatory strategic planning), increased their access to information and government services by integrating women into expanded DDAs, and linked women to opportunities for meaningful participation. The strategy served as the program's roadmap to implement a gender sensitive approach, encompassing four major themes:

- Raising awareness of roles and responsibilities for men and women from an Islamic perspective
- Engaging male allies and female role models for supporting community cohesion
- Increased participation from women leads to more representative decision making in communities
- improved access to economic opportunities leads to greater stability

Based on guidance provided in the SIKA-East Gender Mainstreaming Strategy, project activities were designed to address the overall constraints to women's participation in local governance and sought to employ strategies that supported women exercising more influence in decision-making at the district level. The project also ensured that women were recipients of SIKA-East assistance, both in grants and capacity building initiatives. The strategy was officially implemented in 2014, coinciding with the program's option period and expansion into new districts, which helped propel overall women's participation.

SNAPSHOT

EMPOWERED WOMEN LEADERS EMERGE IN RURAL AFGHANISTAN

Women leaders in Nirkh District apply an innovative approach to lobby for and receive needed services from their local government

Female leaders in Nirkh District conduct a site monitoring visit of a recently constructed well, implemented through their coordination and advocacy efforts in collaboration with the government

Through enhanced participation under informal, highly representative district bodies supported by USAID, women leaders are now able collectively work with the government to identify local problems and develop strategic solutions to solve them, strengthening linkages between communities and the government.

After decades of repressive Taliban rule, coupled with long-standing traditional cultural barriers, many women in rural Afghanistan feel powerless to contribute to the governance and development decisions that impact their lives.

As democracy in Afghanistan matures, however, formerly marginalized voices are emerging as effective leaders, devising creative solutions to cooperate with the government and address the most critical needs of their communities.

In Nirkh District of Maydan Wardak Province for example, Bakht Zamina, a female leader from a USAID supported district assembly knew that improving access to safe drinking water was the top priority for villages in her area. She witnessed first-hand children contracting illnesses from contaminated water, and disputes arise between neighbors who fought over the same scarce resources.

Realizing that traditional avenues to lobby the government for help would take significant time, Zamina opted for a different approach.

Using her leadership position in the local assembly and advocacy training from USAID, Zamina conducted a fact-finding mission with her colleagues to gather hard evidence and present it to the local government for action. After conducting a water access survey in several villages, Zamina confirmed what she suspected all along—that villages struggle daily to access clean water—and now had convincing data that illuminated the urgency of the problem.

Upon learning of the actions and findings of the women leaders, the provincial government quickly approved the construction of five new wells. Utilizing funding from an international partner in the area, three wells have already been installed with two more still planned. The five wells will directly benefit 125 families, and also improve public perceptions of the local government.

"...the advocacy training sessions are encouraging women to raise their voice...women are now able to face anyone and share their problems", said Bakht Zamina.

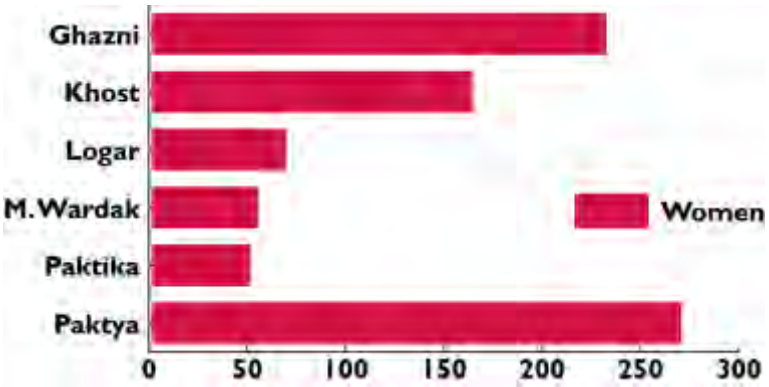
Increased Participation and Engagement in Local Governance With conservative values and customs deeply entrenched in many districts, SIKA-East examined different methods and strategies to engage with women and solicit their feedback. Taking the time to engage with women and explaining to them how their perspectives could shed light on issues impacting instability in their communities proved for a much more dynamic representation of key local issues.

To ensure district development plans were inclusive, SIKA-East implemented separate SAM and DSPP sessions for women, then facilitated additional events to integrate women's priorities with their respective DPPs. Across all 30 districts, 835 women—or 23 percent of total individuals involved—participated in SAM, DSPP, or DPP related events to identify district priorities and develop solutions to address them.

Women's participation in planning events led to significant inclusion of their priorities in district plans. In total, women leaders successfully proposed 1,276 projects across all 30 districts of the total 4,151 proposed projects.

Once women gained a comprehensive understanding about examples of instability and realized that they could play an important role in local development, a number of issues were identified that in most cases were not shared by the men. The increase in female participation and engagement across SIKA-East districts lead to a greater inclusion of grant activities that had a direct impact for women and girls, a notable achievement in areas characterized by strong tribal customs that traditionally limit female involvement in decision-making.

Women's Participation in District Level Strategic Planning Events (DSPP, SAM)



Workshops, Conferences, and Meetings During participatory planning events, women consistently noted that they had little to no contact with local authorities, which undermined their potential roles in decision making. In response, SIKA-East provided multiple platforms for women to connect with district leaders, and facilitated other special events to normalize the participation and engagement of women.

Women were highly represented during various meetings with line department officials, communications committee meetings to create district public outreach plans, and other local mechanisms to share information and advocate for local priorities. In total, over 9,000 women attended 1,377 meetings across all 30 SIKA-East districts, laying the groundwork for future government led engagement with female community leaders.

Special events, such as *Jaslas* (summits or conferences) and dialogue workshops with religious scholars also expanded regional awareness of gender issues, and helped build local support for SIKA-East programming amongst influential district leaders. More details on these and other workshops are provided under the IR2 section of this report..

SIKA-East also encouraged district partners to raise awareness and advocate for women's priorities through various communication channels. Pre-recorded radio messaging showcased vignettes dealing with gender issues, and interactive radio broadcasts often featured at least one show that tackled issues important to women in each province, such as violence against women, harmful traditional practices, and access to health and education services. These and other initiatives are covered in more detail under the IR3 section of this report

Students in Muqur District celebrate the completion of a school sport field implemented by local women leaders
In Muqur District, Ghazni Province, local leaders encountered significant challenges while attempting to complete a new athletic facility for the only all-girls' school in the district.

Women Leaders Save Struggling Infrastructure Project

Improving opportunities for youth is one of the leaders' top priorities. The athletic facility was to provide a healthy and safe outlet for girls to play sports and help advance key youth policy objectives of the Afghan government. Community members had high expectations for the project, as several other schools in the region had benefitted from similar support.
However, after a prominent leader was killed during a family dispute, followed by the resignation of another key leader, many in the community assumed the project would never materialize. Undeterred by these setbacks, Muqur women leaders vowed to finish the project and ensure that girls have equal access to improved education services.

Utilizing extensive training from SIKA-East, they formed a special project management committee to assume implementation of the school volleyball field. Two months later, the women successfully completed the project, providing an enhanced learning environment for 600 students, setting the stage for future government-led activities to enhance youth leadership and participation in governance and development.

"With this project, we have gained much experience regarding how to implement projects and mobilize women in the district. We have shown that women can also implement these types of projects… This project is one of the most successful achievements for me and for all women in Muqur District," stated Ms. Nazifa, member of the project committee.
In support of enhancing youth engagement in decision making, the Khost PG, without support from SIKA-East, organized and funded a volleyball tournament that brought together 25 teams from districts throughout the province.

The week long tournament was attended by influential tribal elders, athletes, youth leaders, and the mayor of the provincial capital, and was also profiled by local media outlets. After a week of competition, a team of athletes from Tani District outlasted a Gurbuz squad to win first place in the special spring volleyball tournament.

"The main goal of having this volleyball tournament was to bring district tribal youth together…Youth, especially sportsmen, have major effects in bringing stability, peace, and education to society, transforming tribalism to national unity and to put an end to drugs that debilitate youth," said tournament organizer Mr. Aziz Malang.
An estimated 500 fans attended the championship match.

According to Mr. Ziaullah, a member of the winning team, the PLAY! initiative is revitalizing youth interest in athletics, particularly volleyball. "Many youth weren't interested in volleyball before, but recently they have turned their minds into a national idea and want to find a way to join the Afghanistan national team."

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Youth women in Khoshi District, Logar Province, learn new computer skills funded through a SIKA-East Grant, helping address youth unemployment and lack of opportunities for women that were addressed by women during participatory planning events

Capacity Building Along with the marked increase in women's participation in these workshops and meetings, there was also an increase in female participation in capacity building courses. The program realized early on in implementation that they needed dedicated provincial gender officers to ensure that gender-specific activities were being implemented. In certain provinces, the provincial gender officers learned key connected during TOTs related to communications, outreach, and grants management. The provincial gender officers, who were all Afghan women, were able to travel to the districts and provide training to other women who could not travel to the provinces.

Despite travel restrictions and other cultural barriers, 10,076 women across all 30 districts learned skills during capacity building events that covered areas outlined in the program's district implementation cycle.[12] Training in subjects on leadership and strategic planning, communications and advocacy, and project management and operations provided women with the knowledge to become important actors in local governance and development decision making. A breakdown of women's participation in training events is outlined under the IR4 section of this report.

Moreover, SIKA-East facilitated special gender awareness sessions that introduced basic concepts on women's rights and empowerment from an Islamic perspective for youth, CSO leaders, and District Governor Office (DGO) staff. Initiated in January 2015, 842 men and 303 women increased their knowledge of gender concepts during 45 one-day training sessions. Based on pre and post assessments, the majority of participants had limited understanding of the term gender. After the sessions, however, nearly all trainees understood the importance of involving women in local governance, allowing girls to attend school, and pursue employment opportunities.

As gender awareness grew through dialogue and training, increasing numbers of women took part in infrastructure activities, such as project site visits. In turn, this triggered growing interest in developing associated knowledge and skills, leading to a gradual increase in the number of women taking part in infrastructure-related programs. The first of these visits occurred at Khost Province in 2014, where women DDA leaders joined their male counterparts to monitor the status of construction activities for new irrigation projects. Once field teams realized there was interest

> ""…[W]e are living in the 21st century, but there is still violence against women. We did not provide rights to women as have been given by Islam because we the religious scholars did not perform our obligations." Mulvi Nasrullah Qasimi, religious leader during Kabul Religious Scholar Conference.

[12] Covered in more detail under the IR IV section of this report

from women to conduct similar activities, women in other districts soon followed the example of the women from Khost. By the end of the program, women leaders participated in 42 total site visits across 16 districts. Although this is a small fraction of total site visits held over the program, the majority of women noted it was their first exposure to more technical aspects of development and governance.

Outreach, Communication, and Advocacy SIKA-East provided targeted technical assistance to the establish communications committees at the district level. In some districts, men and women worked together, while in other districts women worked separately. With training in communication, advocacy, and lobbying skills, these committees were instrumental in addressing sources of instability by identifying other resources beyond SIKA-East.

Through the communication sub-bodies, women expanded their leadership influence in their communities, and are now equipped with the knowledge and skills to sustain their high level of community activism. To cite one positive example, in Saydabad District, Maydan Wardak Province, women leaders convinced local leaders to establish a girls' school in Tangi Valley—a former Taliban stronghold. By meeting with tribal elders and religious scholars from surrounding villages, the committee was successful in facilitating education services for 18 girls.

Demand Driven Grants for Women During planning events, women consistently lobbied for grants that expand their economic prospects, increase access to education opportunities for girls, improve local health services, and other initiatives that respond to longstanding grievances.

SIKA-East funded many small grants that address these priorities, such as vocational training and capacity building courses. These are covered in more detail in the grants section of this report and the appendices.

Two other large grant projects were implemented across multiple districts; the Women's Owned Business (WOB) initiative, and a package of hygiene awareness training sessions designed to help women reduce common waterborne illnesses and improve overall health in their communities.

Women's Owned Business To maximize the impact and sustainability of vocational training for women and to promote other viable opportunities to diversify household incomes, SIKA-East designed the WOB initiative to equip women with the necessary business skills to meet the challenges of successful entrepreneurship.

In total, 320 women across 16 districts learned new skills through training, field trips, and networking events that exposed the aspiring entrepreneurs to a range of fundamental business concepts:

- Basic economic literacy;
- Saving and investment strategies;

Aspiring entrepreneurs form Jalrez District learn new business management and marketing skills as part of the Women's Owened Business training event, designed to complement previous vocational training to diversify household incomes and empower rural women

- Bookkeeping and accounting principles;
- Marketing techniques, and network building.

Several trainees cited newfound confidence gained through the training as a major achievement of the initiative, and have since formed local collectives to sell homemade products. Although not a direct result of previous vocational training, several women have found creative outlets to market homemade goods such as milk, eggs, yogurt, and other products they have vast experience producing. In Jalrez, one trainee reported that several women in her district have come together to sell homemade yogurt, selling their products to a local service provider with distribution channels in Kabul. Likewise, in Laja Ahmad Khail, women have reported that they've sold eggs, milk, and yogurt in their local market, often enlisting their eldest sons to sell the products for them if they were unable to access the markets themselves.

At the conclusion of the WOB program, SIKA-East worked with its implementing partners to gather samples of handicrafts from the trainees, displaying them at local markets, DICs, and other high traffic areas in Kabul.
During the exhibition, a prominent woman business leader took interest in straw and bamboo baskets made by trainees from Khost. This woman business leader, who sells a range of products, believed the homemade baskets could be re-purposed into unique packaging for other goods, and expressed her interest in connecting with the aspiring entrepreneurs from Khost to establish a long-term contract.

Hygiene Awareness Training In support of requests for health service projects largely advocated by women in DPPs, SIKA-East implemented hygiene and sanitation awareness training as a non-infrastructure grant initiative, providing training and material support to 333 female and 570 male DDA leaders across 14 districts in four provinces. In addition, DDA leaders worked with SIKA-East to implement outreach events at schools, delivering hygiene and sanitation awareness training to over 16,000 students across target areas, largely as an outreach initiative for women from rural areas that have few opportunities to exercise leadership skills. The following table provides a provincial breakdown of SIKA-East sponsored training and material support for the initiative.

Leveraging existing DDA leadership, the initiative was designed to expand knowledge of improved hygiene and sanitation practices to promote healthy hygiene practices in rural areas. Educational learning tools and basic hygiene items were provided to the trainees to enable local leaders to educate, motivate, and persuade community members to adopt healthy sanitation and hygiene behaviors

"We've always had homemade products, but we didn't know that we could sell them in the market and earn an income for ourselves and our children. We just put this load on the shoulders of our men and expected them to prepare all our living costs. Now we know about expenses, benefits, and getting products to markets. If we cannot go to the market, our elder sons can go."
WOB trainee, Laja Ahmad Khail District, Paktva Province

Summary of WASH Training and Material Support				
Province	Hygiene Awareness Training for DDA members		Hygiene Awareness Outreach for Schools	Hygiene Education Toolkits
	Men	Women	# of Students	# of Kits
Ghazni	150	100	5,000	500
Khost	135	65	5,000	500
Logar	103	47	6,013	600
Paktya	182	121	900	311
Total	**570**	**333**	**16,913**	**1,911**

Women in Khost Province attend a Service Provider Fair, which increased awareness of locally available services, and provided networking opportunities for local businesses to market their products and establish relationships with local leaders.

Excited students race across a new school sport field completed in Yosuf Khel District, Paktika Province, as part of the PLAY initiative, designed to increase youth engagement in decision making and to cultivate leadership skills through sports.

Youth Engagement

With over 70 percent of the population under the age of 25 and 40 percent under 15, the Afghan government has recognized the urgent need to invest in the nation's future leaders.

In 2014, the Ministry of Information and Culture developed GIRoA's first ever national youth policy, which lays the ground work for greater youth engagement and influence in government affairs. Emphasizing "meaningful, inclusive and active youth participation," the policy states, "It is essential for youth to be social and economic co-partners for society's development, and thus an intrinsic part of decision-making processes from the very beginning at both national and sub-national levels."[13] On a global level, USAID shares a similar vision through its own youth policy.[14]

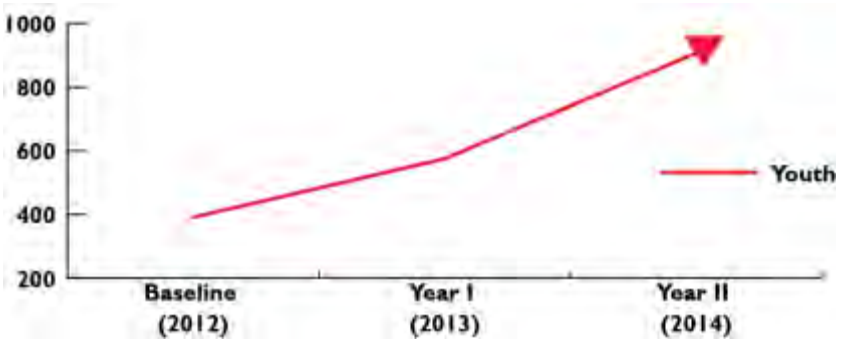
Complementing these policies, SIKA-East facilitated the inclusion of young men and women as emerging leaders in district governance and development. Across 30 districts in six target provinces, youth learned new skills during SIKA-East training events and were effectively integrated into their respective DDAs and/or Youth Organizing Committees (YOCs) formed through SIKA-East. In some cases, SIKA-East also provided support to existing youth oriented CSOs.

Youth inclusion was promoted and enabled by a coalition of government representatives, influential elders, and civil society activists, with community buy-in and interest propelled by significant rural education infrastructure investments through the PLAY initiative.

Outcomes Internal program surveys show that youth believe their inclusion in local decision making has increased significantly, rising from 391 in 2012 (the baseline period), to 574 (36 percent of surveyed youth) in 2013, and 907 (56% of surveyed youth) in 2014. In 2015, 77% of surveyed youth reported increased inclusion in sub-national government decision making.[15]
Youth are now actively involved in sub-national government decision making by attending meetings with government officials, advocating for their priorities, and participating in monitoring activities of development projects. Youth have also successfully led their own development and governance initiatives with minimal assistance from SIKA-East, utilizing training to mobilize resources, establish local coalitions, and gain support and assistance from tribal elders and line departments. Examples of these activities are provided in sidebars or success stories throughout this report.

[13] GIRoA, Ministry of Information and Culture, Office of the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs. *Afghanistan National Youth Policy*. 25 August 2014, p. 26.
[14] USAID. *Youth in Development: Realizing the Demographic Opportunity.* October 2102, p. 1.
[15] Over 1,600 youth were surveyed initially to gather data for the baseline period through 2014. The sample size for 2015 however was 443 youth.

Youth Reporting Increased Inclusion in Decision Making Processes



PLAY! Initiative

In late 2014, SIKA-East launched the PLAY initiative to enhance youth participation, engagement, and leadership in local governance and development, as well as cultivate leadership skills for youth through athletics. The premise of PLAY revolved around three main components:

1. **Infrastructure:** With a focus on secondary and high schools, SIKA-East provided 151 small infrastructure grants to CDCs to construct school athletic grounds. Based on community preferences and available land, schools chose designs ranging from football fields, volleyball courts, cricket practice facilities, or some combination of the three. The 151 new sport fields represent a significant investment in rural education infrastructure—$2.7 million across all 30 districts—and helped propel other aspects of the PLAY initiative by creating local enthusiasm and community buy-in.

2. **Sports:** Utilizing newly-constructed facilities for community-wide, youth-focused athletics, the sport fields helped cultivate positive values around sportsmanship and teamwork for rural youth. In addition, SIKA-East forged new relationships between schools, communities, line departments, sport federations, and Olympic Committee officials, laying the ground work for future regional tournaments and government led activities.

3. **Leadership:** PLAY helped youth to develop the confidence, relationships, and leadership skills to interact with government officials and community leaders. This was accomplished through the gradual integration of youth into established district bodies, and extensive capacity building in governance, civic education, advocacy, communications, and other topics.

PLAY Summit and Provincial Launch Events To strengthen GIRoA commitment and build local enthusiasm for the PLAY initiative, and also establish a dialogue between youth and senior government officials, SIKA-East and IDLG facilitated a national PLAY summit in Kabul in November 2015. The summit was attended by 12 youth representatives—two from ea ch target province—who advocated for youth concerns directly with senior GIRoA officials, including six deputy ministers, CSO leaders, and sport federation members in the presence of some 100 stakeholders and media representatives.

Longstanding youth grievances, such as access to quality education services, lack of livelihood opportunities, divides between youth and tribal elders, and lack of representation in decision-making processes were all discussed in an open forum. The diverse mix of youth and government leaders also discussed strategies to mobilize youth in rural districts, with IDLG issuing directives to sub-national entities to solidify GIRoA commitments and clarify specific roles and responsibilities.

> ""A scholar once said, 'youth is a star in the sky that shoots only once in a lifetime.' Therefore, our young people should not miss this opportunity." Ms. Zuhra Khalili, youth leader, Logar Province.

PLAY in Action

Two players block a spike attempt of the opposing team during the championship match of a volleyball tournament organized and funded by the Khost Provincial Governor that brought together youth from multiple rural districts

Membership Breakdown of YOCs by Province

Breakdown of male and female YOC membership, with percentage of youth members (< 30 years old)

Province	Male	Female	Total	Youth Percentage
Ghazni	100	24	124	71%
Khost	93	22	115	61%
Logar	63	11	74	64%
Maydan Wardak	72	15	87	70%
Paktika	37	2	39	68%
Paktya	155	18	173	70%
Total	520	92	612	69%

To better introduce the public to the initiative, youth representatives joined government officials, tribal elders, and media outlets to inaugurate PLAY during launch events in all target provincial capitals. Multiple PGs, DGs, and other high ranking officials attended the events, along with tribal elders, CSO leaders, and other influential stakeholders. The launch events provided a platform for youth to deliver key note speeches to share their vision of PLAY and advocate for priority issues, and also allowed key youth leaders to network with GIRoA representatives and establish working relationships. At the conclusion of each event, SIKA-East began the process of establish specialized youth committees, who would serve as the entry point for future SIKA-East and GIRoA led youth empowerment activities

Youth Organizing Committees To ensure the sustainability of youth involvement in governance and development, SIKA-East facilitated the formation of separate district and provincial youth organizing committees (YOCs) in all six provinces and 30 districts. The YOCs are chaired by a youth representative, while provincial level committees are led by an experienced GIRoA official. Membership is similar to provincial youth commissions envisioned in the Afghanistan Youth Policy, with a mix of youth, GIRoA officials, and tribal elders serving as volunteer members to promote youth engagement.

Responsibilities included guiding youth mobilization, assisting with implementation of leadership and sports activities, conducting public outreach and advocacy, and monitoring support of development projects. Perhaps most importantly, YOCs were district level liaisons between youth and the local government. YOC members advocated for specific service delivery priorities that impact youth with line department officials to ensure that local governments were aware of their concerns.

Youth Training Based upon strong interest of youth leaders, SIKA-East launched a PLAY training plan for YOCs that expanded upon the program's core curriculum. In total, SIKA-East facilitated 133 youth focused capacity building events attended by 3,827 individuals—including 679 women—from YOCs and other interested stakeholders.

Training was tailored to key subjects requested by YOCs, ranging from civic education, gender mainstreaming, leadership and dialogue principles, and advanced communication training. Capacity building was further complemented by increased exposure to decision making processes, involving attendance in governance and service delivery meetings with line departments, and additional opportunities to conduct field monitoring visits of ongoing grant projects. Leadership and dialogue training events involved practical exercises with local government leaders to apply the range of communication and advocacy skills learned during previous training events.

"I had never thought that the government will give youth the chance to participate in decision making. In this training I learned that there is a specific policy for youth empowerment that will be implemented by the vice president."
Logar Province youth leader during civic education training

Increased Support from GIRoA Gradually, GIRoA officials and tribal elders began to take ownership of PLAY and implement their own youth empowerment activities.

For example, to prove to young people in his district that youth priorities will be heard and addressed, the Nirkh DG, Mr. Mohammad Hanif, created a new group to serve as a link between youth and the district government. The 250 member committee was broken down into several working groups that focus on issues related to sports, culture, security, communication, and other sectors. The DG has also expressed his desire to absorb members of the YOC formed by SIKA-East, and made explicit instructions to line department heads to consult the new group on a regular basis to help solve youth issues.

PGs also funded and organized their own events that brought together rural youth from several districts at provincial capitals. In Khost and Maydan Wardak, the PGs funded provincial wide, week-long sport tournaments (volleyball in Khost and football in Maydan Wardak.

In Khost, 25 teams from districts throughout the province competed in a series of friendly exhibitions attended by influential tribal elders, athletes, youth leaders, and the mayor of the provincial capital, and was also profiled. A team of athletes from Tani District outlasted a Gurbuz squad to win first place in the special spring volleyball tournament, with over 500 people attending the final match. According to "The main goal of having this volleyball tournament was to bring district tribal youth together…Youth, especially sportsmen, have major effects in bringing stability, peace, and education to society, transforming tribalism to national unity and to put an end to drugs that debilitate youth," said tournament organizer Mr. Aziz Malang.

Youth-Led Advocacy Campaigns The tangible results of training and engagement in democracy and governance processes were most visible in the many independent public outreach and advocacy campaigns implemented by YOCs, youth associations trained by SIKA-East, and government partners without direct support from the program.

For example, in February 2015, youth from the Amarbaba Social and Cultural Association in Maydan Shahr District utilized advocacy and communications training from SIKA-East to complete several governance and service delivery campaigns independently. Inspired by the PLAY initiative and recognizing the positive role sports can have in improving youth engagement, association members were able to secure funding from local service providers and community contributions to construct a new public volleyball field that is now being used by youth from Maydan Shahr and surrounding villages. The youth leaders utilized a range of skills and creativity to implement the project at a low cost with local resources, even persuading a tribal elder to let them build the field on his private land, and negotiated with a local service provider to rent an excavator and other equipment at a reduced rate.

The same youth association also connected with the Department of Agriculture and Irrigation (DAIL) to plant new trees during the beginning of spring. After several meetings between the youth leaders and the DAIL director, the department allocated 100 saplings for the youth leaders to plant in the district. Head of the youth association, Mr. Salih Mohammad, saw the opportunity as both a community development project and a chance to showcase what youth can accomplish.

Other advocacy initiatives from other areas have been captured in previous SIKA-East reports. Several are highlighted in side bars or the provincial activities section. Perhaps the most impressive campaign led by youth occurred in Logar Province by the Mohammad Agha YOC, highlighted in the page below.

"The importance and significance of planting a tree is the move towards a greener society. We are gathered here today to protect our environment by planting trees in our beautiful city, and to show that through this campaign youth are interested in performing community services." Salih Mohammad, Amar Baba Youth Association member.

SNAPSHOT

EMPOWERED YOUTH BRING NEW ENERGY TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Youth mobilize local resources to prepare students for University entrance exams

Caption: Students in Mohammad Agha District, Logar Province, take a practice entrance exam organized by local youth leaders in an effort to improve high failure rates of Afghanistan's National University Entrance Exam

"When Logar province youth coordination committee received advocacy training, they instantly started this program. They were able to achieve their objective within a short period of time and through a very low cost."

—Norrullah Stanikzai, Logar Youth Organizing Committee member—

To gain entrance into one of Afghanistan's public universities, a student must pass a challenging test; the Kankor exam.

In Logar Province, youth have highlighted that failure rates for the exam were extremely high, primarily due to lack of preparation during high school. While several preparatory exams exist in the province, this is a luxury few rural families can afford.

Recognizing trends in population dynamics — where over half the population is under the age of 25 — the Afghan government teamed with the SIKA–East program to help youth address their longstanding priorities, such as unemployment and lack of voice in decision making. In the process, SIKA-East also advanced key government policy objectives to increase youth engagement in development and governance activities.

As part of the PLAY initiative, motivated youth leaders in Logar have participated in a range of training events that empower youth to plan, design, and implement their own development projects. The young men and women wasted little time in applying these new skills, completing a major campaign to help youth attend college shortly after their training.

After receiving training in advocacy, fundraising, and coalition building, the Youth Organizing Committee in Logar implemented a pilot preparatory exam course for 2,000 aspiring university students in three rural districts. The youth committee members collected multiple contributions from local organizations, including school supplies, stationary, and practice exam booklets. In addition, youth convinced local teachers to volunteer their time to tutor the participants.

Due to their creative fundraising efforts, the committee was able to lower the costs of similar preparatory courses from 300 Afghanis to 30 Afghanis (from roughly five US dollars to less than one dollar), making the exam much more accessible for the local population.

According to the youth committee, this initiative is only the beginning. "Successful completion of the program proves that our capacity has improved and we are now able to advocate for all of our projects and implement them in the future," stated one youth committee leader.

Logar Province_ Khoshi District_ DDA+ site visit_Najaran village canal project

Monitoring and Evaluation

All regional SIKA programs had several layers of monitoring from independent third parties. Aside from its own M&E controls, SIKA-East was evaluated and audited by the Measuring Impact of Stabilization Initiatives (MISTI), the Special Investigator General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), and USAID mission staff performing remote monitoring of program activities. A local firm—RSI Consulting—also conducted baseline and end-line focus groups with district residents to gauge the impact of the program.

Baseline and Final Evaluations

The strategic objective of SIKA-East was to increase public confidence in the district government, leading to the expansion of GIRoA provincial authority and legitimacy. In order to measure this strategic objective, seven indicators were established and evaluated:

- Index I: Qualitative Stability
- Index II: Percent Afghans Reporting their District is Moving in the Right Direction
- Index III: Government Confidence
- Index IV: Quality of Life
- Index V: Percent Afghans Reporting DG is Responsive to Needs of Local People
- Index VI: Resilience
- Index VII: Percent Afghans reporting improvement in DG service delivery

From 2012-2014, SIKA-East hired a local firm—RSI Consulting—to conduct qualitative baseline research in SIKA-East districts through implementation of focus groups. Ten focus groups were conducted in each district. The baselines were done in waves prior to SIKA-E implementation in the district, and provided contextual information related to these seven indicators.

The focus groups polled a cross-section of residents on stability and other topics: security, governance, rule of law, optimism about the future, GIRoA security forces, freedom of movement, and community cohesion. These citizens were later contacted in 2015 for final evaluation discussions. The qualitative data collected from the RSI focus groups also helped to contextualize and triangulate quantitative data from the region, especially the data gathered from MISTI.

Overall, the assessment shows that 25 of the 30 districts have improved on one or more indicators related to the program's Strategic Objective. Six districts have improved on all seven indicators: Sharan, Qarabagh, Andar, Chaki Wardak, Nirkh and Zadran.

Another nine have a mix of improvements and/or no change from the baseline on the seven indicators: Mohammad Agha, Khoshi, Baraki Barak, Khwaja Umari, Dih Yak, Bahrami Shahid, Saydabad, Nirkh and Zurmat. It should be noted that in some cases (e.g. Saydabad in Wardak), the improvements are nominal or increased from exceptionally low (one to two percent) positive ratings.

The districts that perhaps showed the most significant improvements were Zadran District in Paktya Province, and Baraki Barak District in Logar Province, both of which were notoriously difficult areas to implement development projects due to insecurity and other issues. In Baraki Barak for instance, almost no positivity was encountered. During final focus groups, however, more people believed the district was headed in the right direction. In large part due to development around the district, trust in the local government and its services has also risen.

Initially, 14 percent of female and 18 percent of male focus group participants felt their district was moving in the right direction. This figure has risen substantially, to 54 percent and 47 percent respectively. Likewise, participants feel safer. Zero respondents felt safe according baseline data in Baraki Barak. In 2015, 51 percent of women and 33 percent of men responded positively to questions about overall stability and safety. In addition, Afghans reporting improvements in service delivery by the District Governor rose from zero percent to 59 percent for women and from 2 percent to 40 percent for men.

Findings from the baseline and end-line focus groups are substantiated by similar evaluations conducted by USAID's primary monitoring and evaluation program for Afghan stability initiatives.

MISTI Evaluations

Mid-Term Evaluation The MISTI mid-term performance review of SIKA-East issued in November 2014 found that the program largely met or exceeded its program objectives.[16] Singled out for achieving a particularly strong impact was SIKA-East's gender mainstreaming activities and communication training, recommended as models for future USAID programming. A final evaluation by MISTI is expected to be published later in 2015.

Evaluating 181 sampled projects and activities in Ghazni, Logar, Khost, Paktya, and Wardak to determine which SIKA-East activities have had the most or least contribution to local perceptions of governance and service delivery objectives, MISTI concluded that SIKA-East contributed to all three stabilization objectives: (1) increased support for GIRoA; (2) decreased support for anti-governmental entities; and (3) improved normal functioning of society.

MISTI found that the program has contributed to: project community ownership and unity; responsiveness to community needs; bottom-up approach in community decision-making; full governmental involvement at all stages of the project cycle; improved communication between government and communities; paved way for future government interventions through other service providers; temporarily improved job opportunities; and, mitigated water conflicts.

Connecting Afghans to their government and improving their perception of its service delivery, SIKA-East was also evaluated as successful: program activities were implemented through government structures and presented as GIRoA-led. Beneficiaries reportedly credit them to MRRD and refer to their DGs and PRRD

According to MISTI mid-term evaluation of the program, SIKA-East's outreach activities helped decrease the distance between government and local communities at district and provincial levels.

The evaluators assessed SIKA-East as most successful among the four SIKA projects in terms of communications, with its "highly impactful and well-received communications trainings which taught communities how to develop agendas and communication strategies and learn how to communicate their problems and concerns with local government authorities… In addition, communications trainings have visibly empowered women to advocate for their services and rights…. Communications trainings significantly improved bottom-up communication by creating systematic mechanisms to facilitate communication from the village to district to provincial levels."

The communication committees set up and trained by SIKA-East were also among the top most valued program components among the respondents.

The coordination and communication mechanisms institutionalized by SIKA-East have been recommended by MISTI as a model for future USAID and other donor's programming.

[16] Management Systems International (MSI), MISTI: *SIKA-East Mid-Term Evaluation.* November 2014, p. 26.

offices to resolve any issues. This has been achieved through successful branding and marking, including government-led public events facilitated by SIKA-East.

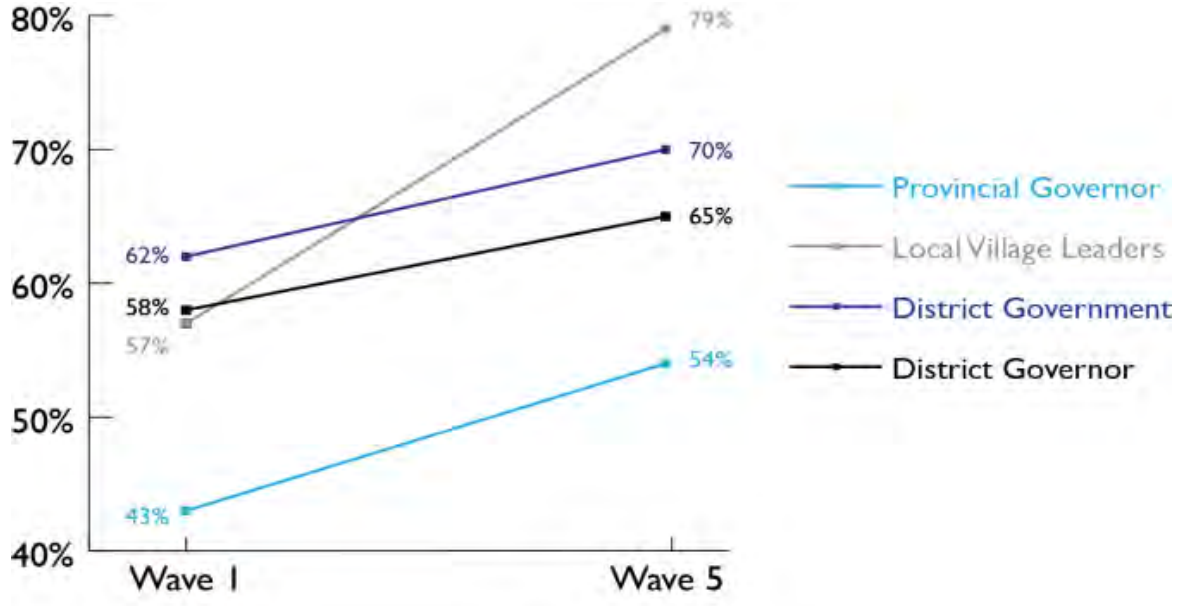
MISTI Analytic Report Charged with determining whether USAID project activities caused changes in stability and resilience at the district and village levels, MISTI measured key indicators over five semi-annual iterations, or "waves", to observe changes to overall stability and improvements in local governance.

Over 27 months, MISTI interviewed over 10,000 residents in SIKA-East target districts. Changes from their baseline period through 2015 largely mirror findings from the program's internal surveys, as well as focus groups conducted by other evaluators.

MISTI's final wave report (Wave 5) noted significant positive changes in regards to local awareness of development projects—six in ten survey respondents have heard about development projects, compared to just 36 percent initially—and more people are satisfied with their access to basic services. Moreover, general outlook among district residents has increased steadily since MISTI's baseline research. People that think their districts are moving in the right direction has risen from 41 percent initially, to 63 percent by the end of the program. Perhaps most importantly, public confidence in local government entities has risen. According to MISTI's Wave 5 report, through surveys of over 10,000 people, confidence in DEs, and other local government bodies have improved. [17]

MISTI Wave 5 Report, Confidence in Local Government

Percentage of Respondents Reporting Increased Confidence in Local Government Entities



Despite these positive changes, many residents are still distrustful of some government officials, viewing many as corrupt. Over half of surveyed respondents believe district officials abuse their power for financial purposes, particularly in Nirkh District of Maydan Wardak Province, and Zadran and Zurmat District in Paktya Province.

Project Verifications SIKA-East worked with MISTI to verify program activities, with evaluators visiting field sites to assess the quality of infrastructure projects, training programs, and document their Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates.

MISTI classified projects as either executed, executed with conditions, or not executed. SIKA-East maintained a strong track record of implementing successful service delivery projects and training activities as throughout the life of the project.

[17] Management Systems International (MSI), MISTI: *MISTI Wave 5 Analytical Report.* November 2014, p. 88.

Strategic Planning Process Traiing_Gurbuz District_Khost Province-July 2013

WAY FORWARD

Challenges Encountered

Insecurity in field locations, as well as Kabul where the program headquarters was established, was by far the most significant challenge for the program.

The volatile perating environment was caused by several factors outside the program's control. Tensions over presidential elections in 2014, open discussions between GIRoA and the Taliban, public anger over high unemployment rates, protests and demonstrations, and a host of other socio-political factors all contributed to an unpredictable security situation.

According to the MRRD district security ranking system, over half of all SIKA-East districts were rated as extremely or highly insecure. Insecurity varied over time in specific districts, but Baraki Barak, Nirkh, Zurmat, Bahrami Shahid, and Saydabad were amongst the most volatile target districts over the course of the program.

At the local level, security incidents—typically initiated by Taliban or affiliated actors, but also other groups—impacted project implementation both directly and indirectly. Operating out of District Administrative Centers, field staff and local partners were exposed to clashes between Insurgents (INS) and Afghan security forces on a fairly regular basis, depending on the district. When operating at the provincial level, Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), kidnapping, and illegal checkpoints affected the ability of field staff to travel safely.

SIKA-East implemented a number of security measures to mitigate risks to its staff and local partners. Staff were equipped with and trained on emergency GPS software on their issues smartphones, which alerted program security officers. Security staff also coordinated with tribal elders and Afghan security forces closely to analyze potential threats.

While Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), Afghan Local Police (ALP), and other GIRoA forces were the primary targets, SIKA-East property was damaged during several incidents, and field staff were exposed to significant risks. The mobility of field staff to conduct site visits, meet with community leaders, and travel locally were limited due to security incidents. Several other incidents occurred close to SIKA-East projects. In these cases, the project was temporarily suspended to ensure the safety of laborers and district partners. Property intended for SIKA-East projects was also hijacked and stolen by anti-governments on several occasions. SIKA-East mobilized CDC members and tribal elders in attempts to recover the materials. In some cases, communities contributed funds to replace the stolen goods.

On 27 November 2014, INS orchestrated a complex attack on the SIKA-East office and guesthouse compound in Kabul. SIKA-East suffered zero injuries or casualties, but the facilities were damaged. SIKA-East personnel and overall operations were moved to a new secure location in Kabul, and program implementation resumed normally with minimal interruption.

USAID Vetting Part of the program's strategy to increase public confidence in the government and improve overall stability was to deliver demand driven small-infrastructure projects quickly. While there were several challenges to accomplish this, the USAID vetting process, which was severely backlogged for much of the program caused significant delays on implementation.

Generally, several months would pass between the time DPPs were approved and actual projects were implemented. By the time MISTI's mid-term evaluation of SIKA-East was issued in late 2014, 29 percent of all SIKA-East grants were being evaluated by USAID's vetting unit, and were under the process for four months or longer. The grants at the time were valued over $4 million, and many were not approved before the winter season began and construction activities were suspended, further delaying planned interventions. Late in the program, USAID vetting approvals were issued more timely, but the initial delays had already disrupted program activities and caused physical grant implementation to last longer than originally anticipated.

CDC Membership Turnover The sustainability of sub-national bodies, particularly CDCs, depends on active local leadership able to organize the group and recruit new members. CDCs were the primary awardees and implementers of SIKA-East grants. Membership attrition rates were very high, however, and identifying new members suitable to implement USAID funded grants was a time consuming task. When a CDC couldn't be awarded a grant, SIKA-East often looked to DDAs, or special Project Management Committees (PMCs) formed by the program to serve as temporary groups able to implement projects.

Lack of Female Staff With burgeoning female participation, SIKA-East was faced with a lack of female staff to support trainings and activities across all districts, particularly in option period districts. The gap was covered by sharing female staff across provinces for specific events, and cooperating with male staff to deliver trainings if local elders approved.

Lack of Qualified Vendors A number of bids to implement projects received no offers or offers that were deemed technically unacceptable under the published Request for Applications (RFA) terms and USAID regulations. Despite SIKA-East's efforts and facilitation, the low capacity of local organizations and service providers, significantly uneven across provinces, prompted the program to republish bids and/or decrease Scopes of Work (SOWs), often causing months of delays in activity execution.

Lessons Learned

GIRoA Ownership During the option period, SIKA-East made strong efforts to present the program as government led, particularly by PRRD and DGOs to help improve public perceptions of GIRoA. This required near constant coaching and reminders by SIKA-East staff to GIRoA officials. Several key leaders within PRRDs and other offices continually mentioned SIKA-East by name—and in some cases USAID—during public meetings, ceremonies, and while addressing crowds at special events. The program implemented a strict branding strategy that excluded contractor names, USAID, and implementing organizations on communication materials for audiences outside Kabul. In addition, SIKA-East often prepared press releases on behalf of local government bodies designed to maximize positive exposure for the government.

Despite these efforts, GIRoA officials were largely unable to help present the program as GIRoA led. In addition, focus group participants were quite familiar with SIKA-East, often calling it "SIKA NGO", but recognized local government contributions towards development projects to a lesser degree.

To help GIRoA take greater ownership of programming and take advantage of public relations opportunities, the importance of this strategy must be instilled early on in the program and achieve substantial buy-in from influential leaders. Part of the challenge also stems from "NGO fatigue" in certain areas, which are accustomed to seeing foreign organizations funding and implementing projects.

Impact of Communications Training Along with gender programming, independent evaluators (MISTI) during a mid-term performance review suggested that SIKA-East "double down" on communications related interventions. Skills in professional communication were in high demand in SIKA-East areas, with multiple institutions and leaders requesting additional training in similar topics.

In addition, leveraging media outlets—primarily through local radio stations—to raise awareness of local priorities and increase citizen engagement with GIRoA was considered a novel approach. District partners also requested additional interactive radio broadcasts and pre-recorded radio dramas. Although funding was not available beyond the initial support, partners in Logar managed to negotiate with broadcasters to air government-led programming for free on their own. Leaders in other areas were also attempting a similar strategy to continue the initiative.

Grant funding for communications was a fraction of the total grant portfolio of projects, and appears to have added significant value towards the overall objectives of SIKA-East. Furthermore, communications related training typically is cheaper to implement than longer governance capacity building events.

There are significant opportunities for future programs to leverage the existing Afghan media infrastructure to deliver impactful communication focused programs. An added benefit of implementing communication related interventions in rural areas, is the presence of professional Afghan media outlets, many of which have received extensive training from USAID—primarily through the organization Internews—and are capable of managing complex grants efficiently and effectively.

Focused Gender Strategy While SIKA-East did find some initial success in engaging women in rural areas early in the program, it wasn't until the program developed and implemented a comprehensive strategy—the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy—that it saw significant results.

Casting a wide net, the program engaged directly with women leaders, and with influential men, applying a culturally and religiously sensitive approach that encouraged local solutions. Workshops with religious scholars, consultations with tribal elders, and exposure opportunities for women outside their traditional spheres, helped propel gender programming and improve the participation and engagement of women in very conservative areas.

This cooperation had a particularly strong impact in traditionally conservative areas, such as Paktya and Paktika, where women's involvment in decision-making and capacity building was intially low. In FY 2013 for instance, fewer than 200 women participated in SIKA-East training events in Paktya. With implementation of SIKA-East's gender mainstreaming strategy, this number grew to over 2,000. Future programs looking to engage women in Eastern Afghanistan should follow a similar approach by engaging both men and women in a focused strategic way.

Transition and Way Forward

In support of a full program handover and transfer of responsibilities to GIRoA partners, SIKA-East implemented a comprehensive transition package, ensuring government and district entities can effectively take control of major program activities. These include a variety of electronic and hard copies of training curriculum, communication products, district profiles and DPPs, assessments, and other knowledge management materials. In some cases, SIKA-East encouraged additional measures to ensure the sustainability of program responsibilities, such as uploading documents to the MRRD website, assigning dedicated personnel to update products (SPCs, district profiles, and other documents), and provide additional computer literacy training for government staff.

Sustainability Through the life of the program, SIKA-East established functional district bodies capable of acting as liaisons between the people and the government, specifically the expanded DDA. In addition, CDCs were reconstituted and approved for USAID grant awards, and received extensive project management training to implement rural development projects.

As SIKA-East learned through the project, maintaining this level of performance, particularly in rural areas, is a process that requires close cooperation and active local leadership. These bodies were formed prior to SIKA-East, but the majority were not fully functional or present in remote, challenging areas. Through its enhanced engagement with communities, GIRoA at the district and provincial levels should monitor these groups and provide necessary support to keep these vital groups operational.

GIRoA Ownership Based on focus group discussions with ordinary Afghan citizens and as evidenced through high participation rates of local leaders, the SIKA-East project was well known and regarded in its areas of operations, but was not necessarily seen as being led by the government. This challenge is described in more detail under the lessons learned section of this report.

GIRoA, particularly through PRRDs, have an opportunity to extend SIKA-East activities through trained district social workers, engagement and governance officers, and through DGOs, who now have the ability and tools to implement their own capacity building programs and service delivery initiatives. The availability of funding through the government will likely hinder the continuation of program interventions under GIRoA, but opportunities exist for district partners to connect with other development partners to implement local projects and address the priorities of citizens.

Monitoring with Stakeholders To increase engagement by GIRoA officials and other stakeholders in monitoring and engaging with project implementers, SIKA-East worked with PRRDs, line departments, DDAs, and other actors to form monitoring task forces. By the end of the program, GIRoA was leading its own monitoring initiatives, helping forge productive relationships with district leaders that strengthened overall service delivery.

Effective monitoring to ensure projects are implemented transparently and met high quality standards was recognized as a high priority by DGOs, who helped form their own committees comprised of youth and line department officials. These initiatives need to be maintained through strong leadership from MRRD to help encourage future GIRoA led project management.

Suggestions for Future and Follow-on Projects

Rural Gender Programming As noted by MISTI evaluators, SIKA-East achieved measurable impact in amplifying the voice of women in SIKA-East target areas. While the program did not remove all challenges and barriers for women, and cultural norms that limit the roles of women still dominate Afghanistan, enthusiasm for gender programming was high in the Eastern region.

Many women in target districts stated that their first meaningful involvement in decision making was through SIKA-East programs. Through their engagement, development plans were more inclusive, and several local priorities were addressed through public outreach and advocacy campaigns using skills learned during program capacity building events.

While there are several gender focused programs in Afghanistan, few reach women in remote areas. New USAID funded gender programs, such as PROMOTE, should investigate the possibility of extending interventions in remote regions where women have less access to development programs, and utilize existing women leaders trained through SIKA-East and other projects to advance their objectives. This could be particularly beneficial for women that participated in the program's WOB initiative to learn viable business skills and launch their own small-scale enterprises.

Youth Empowerment Although youth were not a primary focus of the program initially, PLAY was perhaps the most visible aspect of the program and received broad support from communities and government partners. Youth are anxious to be involved in the decisions that impact Afghanistan, and displayed considerable abilities to advocate for local needs and mobilize resources to implement governance and development projects. Youth should have been integrated into early program interventions, and should remain a focus of future capacity building and service delivery programs.

Communications Training Capacity building focused on professional communication was a highlight of SIKA-East, yet even more could have been accomplished. This is especially true for media related initiatives using the radio, or through mobile phone networks. Local radio stations have received extensive support from USAID programs from other international donors, and are able to implement complex grant projects. Future programming that expands upon interactive radio broadcasts and pre-recorded messaging in rural areas would be widely accepted and appreciated by local institutions.

2014

Annexes

Women leaders in Nirkh District, Maydan Wardak Province, utilized training from SIKA-East to connect with the local government and install new wells to increase access to safe drinking water

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