Introduction

Lack of physical security affects Afghan citizens on a daily basis and makes the government’s delivery of services across the country and the monitoring of these services extremely difficult. Nearly four decades of protracted conflict have resulted in weakened government institutions, particularly at the sub-national level. With civilian casualties on the rise, and decreasing accessibility of civil servants to districts, the role of communities in planning, implementing and monitoring their own development has become increasingly important. In addition, the use of intermediary agents, whether NGOs or private contractors, has become critical in both mobilizing communities and overseeing project implementation and monitoring.

To meet these challenges, projects have responded by developing robust monitoring systems and experimenting with innovating monitoring tools. This array of tools includes participatory monitoring, such as citizen scorecards; strong grievance redress mechanisms (GRM); independent monitoring by third parties; and leveraging new technologies, such as satellite imagery and the development of mobile applications.

The following showcases the robust monitoring system developed within the National Solidarity Program (NSP) and its successor Citizen Charter Afghanistan Project (CCAP) to monitor the project implementation across Afghanistan’s 34 provinces.

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The National Solidarity Program (NSP) was established in 2003 by the Government of Afghanistan to develop the ability of communities to plan, manage, and monitor their own development projects. Communities, supported by Facilitating Partners (FP), elect their leaders and representatives to form voluntary Community Development Councils (CDC) through a transparent and democratic process. CDCs then implement their own infrastructure projects, such as building schools, roads, irrigation systems or ensuring access to water and sanitation. Due to the declining security conditions and persistent corruption, CDCs have become the mechanism to extend the coverage of service delivery to rural communities.

NSP is the only government program to have reached all the country’s 34 provinces, touching the lives of over 20 million villagers. Since 2003, NSP has funded some 88,500 subprojects to improve access to transport, water supply and sanitation, irrigation, electricity and schools in approximately 35,000 communities in across 361 districts in all of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces. The program has also generated 47.8 million days of work for skilled and unskilled workers, injecting much needed short-term wage transfers into poor rural communities throughout Afghanistan.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL SOLIDARITY PROGRAM (NSP) MONITORING SYSTEM

Several factors contributed to the multifaceted design of the NSP monitoring framework. First, the NSP’s objective was to strengthen local governance and advance socio-economic development, which included a number of sectors and numerous subprojects. Second, the project was implemented over 14 years with a total of US$2.5 billion. Third, the NSP was financed by four different funding sources: IDA, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), the Japanese Social Development Fund, and bilateral funds from various donors with distinct grant agreements. Last, the project included three overall components: (i) community block grants for economic and social development; (ii) establishment and capacity building of CDCs; and (iii) project implementation support.

During 14 years of project implementation across the country, NSP established its own comprehensive multi-tiered monitoring system to track progress and financial flows and to capture community feedback. The M&E has evolved during the three phases of NSP: 1, 2 and 3.
The monitoring and evaluation department of MRRD/NSP was responsible for coordinating all monitoring activities, including overseeing data collection by FPs; compilation by the provincial monitoring staff; and analyzing and reporting regularly from headquarters in Kabul. NSP had a monitoring system that was linked to the web-based MIS, which generated regular and satisfactory project status reports, both in terms of quality and identification of issues on weekly, monthly and quarterly basis.

Over the project period, the highly decentralized monitoring system of NSP improved significantly, with data compilation and input done at the provincial management units (PMUs), while analyses and reporting undertaken by the monitoring department located at the central NSP Management Office (PMO) in Kabul. The M&E arrangements established for the NSP III were comprehensive and generally effective. The arrangements included a multi-tiered monitoring system to track quantitative and qualitative progress, capture community feedback and financial flows on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, bi-annual and annual basis using a variety of monitoring tools. A variety of complimentary tools were developed and used by communities, government officials, NGOs, and independent third party monitors to collect information on fund flows, procurement, and project implementation, including construction, functionality and sustainability of infrastructure built; community elections, and women’s participation; and linkages to other government programs. The project’s comprehensive monitoring system comprised ten different monitoring tools (see figure 1.)

Under the Community Participatory Monitoring system, the local committees provided oversight of block grants utilization and sub-projects implementation to ensure quality and accountability. The monitoring department also developed an FP input monitoring system, which allowed NSP to monitor the number of FP staff deployed at the provincial and district levels, as well as the training provided by FPs to CDCs. In addition to the periodic ‘Implementation Monitoring Reports’, ‘Post-Implementation Monitoring Reports’ were also produced to assess sustainability of sub-projects and governance capacity of CDCs, beyond subproject completion. The post-assessments were carried out twice on a random sample basis about three and six months after the sub-projects were completed. For monitoring in high risk areas, the monitoring department recruited local monitors.
Figure 1. NSP MONITORING TOOLS

1. Community Participatory Monitoring by Facilitating Partners (FPs or NGOs)
   - Elected teams of 4 non-CDC members (2 men and women) were trained to monitor and report on key aspects of the CDCs’ mandated performance and project implementation.

2. Monitoring by Provincial Management Units (PMUs)
   - FCs monitored and reported on the CDCs’ work and the overall work progress.

3. Local Monitors
   - Dedicated monitoring staff in all provinces to monitor the results framework indicators, FP and CDC performance, using standardized templates and field visits (2 pairs of monitors for every 10% of communities under coverage in each province).

4. In insecure areas, local people were hired and trained to monitor, using simplified monitoring procedures, and to report on progress to the provincial offices.

5. Technical Monitoring by Line Departments
   - The NSP Engineering, Procurement, Finance, Facilitating Partners Management, Environment and Social Safeguards and Gender Departments monitored progress based on small samples.

6. Third Party Monitors
   - An international Third Party Monitoring Firm (TPM) was contracted by the ARTF to conduct ground verifications of the sub-project implementation, and monitor the management information system (MIS) and the provincial level spending. The TPM reported directly to the World Bank.

7. Bank Supervision
   - Regular implementation support missions, Implementation Status and Results (ISR) reports, and mid-term reviews, as well as ad-hoc reviews and workshops to support the monitoring of the project.

8. Audits
   - Financial monitoring through an internal control unit within the PIU, internal audit unit within MRRD, and external annual audits from Afghanistan’s Supreme Audit office.

9. Mobile-based monitoring
   - Pilot on a mobile-based monitoring mechanism for real-time data.

10. External studies & evaluations
    - Studies and evaluations, with a focus on project elements that required more qualitative data and analysis.
The NSP further developed and expanded on the effective database and management information system (MIS) set up by the earlier phases. All data collected on the ground was entered at the provincial level itself, without requirement for documents to travel to HQ. The decentralized data entry was supported by a web-based database system, that made the data entered anywhere to be immediately accessible at the HQ. After working out the various reporting needs, the NSP’s MIS team set up the system such that the database could automatically generate most of the required quantitative reports.

The NSP database had a number of standalone modules but the central system could capture data from each subproject, each grant, in each community and compile and synchronize that data nationwide. Eventually, the central database included all NSP related information for each of the over 35,000 communities, 88,000 subprojects and over US$ 1.5 billion in grants. The database also captured information on the various subprograms of the NSP. Stand-alone modules included ones for administration (fleet and stock/inventory management), human resources, capacity building, and FP management. The FP management module, in particular, was recognized by donors and other stakeholders alike, as an exemplary tool for contract management.

M&E data on performance and results progress was used to inform project management and decision-making. Data and field experience was regularly taken on by the PIU management team who continuously updated the operational tools, procedures and policies. There were regularly changes being introduced and these were documented in three revisions to the operations manuals.
CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Several lessons learned emerged from the implementation of the NSP and challenges continued to influence the effective monitoring and implementation of the project:

- **The comprehensive database and management information system made it** possible to manage and collect the large amount of data that was needed for the monitoring of NSP but collecting, processing and analyzing data from more than 35,000 communities posed a huge challenge. All data collected on the field was entered at the provincial level though a web-based database system and was immediately accessible at the HQ. In addition, most of the required quantitative reports were generated automatically. However, the quality and analysis of data have been a challenge. Despite robust MIS system, verification and control of data has proven to be difficult and requires more technical support and oversight of the client.

- **Implementation of MIS has been very challenging.** MIS from design to implementation needs professional support and technical expertise, awareness of users and the involvement of stakeholders to ensure collection of reliable data (input), for efficient processing and effective decision making (output). On the top of it having MIS in a conflict country adds to the difficulties.

- **The comprehensive monitoring system** enabled the findings from the field to regularly inform management decisions, and for the operations manuals to be revised on an ongoing basis to ensure that the implementation requirements took into account the changing circumstances.

- **Streamlining and strengthening the program management structure:** Transformation of project management and monitoring structure from one that was run by expatriates to one that was managed and implemented by Afghans, reduced costs and enhanced the sustainability of the program. This strategy reduced the time taken to approve sub-projects, improved their quality at entry, and improved the monitoring of FPs during implementation and post-completion.

- **The FPs were critical to the successful monitoring of NSP** and they played a big role in data collection from the communities and reporting to PMUs throughout the project.

- **Bank Supervision:** Given the Client’s low capacity, the Bank’s Task Team supported the monitoring by conducting regular missions, Implementation Status and Results (ISR) reports, mid-term reviews, and ad-hoc reviews and workshops. In addition, the Bank’s Task Team worked continuously with the client on program management supervision, operational improvements, review and the provision of technical expertise on program and policy issues. However, supervising projects is Afghanistan is extremely difficult since the Bank team is not able to go out to field and the team needs to rely heavily on feedback and reports from others.

- **Involvement of CDCs in the monitoring of service provision** by district and provincial authorities, and the linking of this function to the Provincial Councils contributed to both strengthening the efficiency of the Provincial Councils and giving the CDCs a voice in an ongoing dialogue on service provision. In addition, the participatory implementation fostered a sense of ownership by the CDCs of the serviced provided.
Use of Third Party Monitoring data and reports evolved over the time. TPM became a constructive feedback mechanism for the project. Original reports had been shared mainly with ARTF donors to assure proper use of funds. Over time, findings were used increasingly by NSP staff, with issues identified shared with FPs and field offices so that they could be addressed, and responses and updates obtained and shared back with the monitors and donors.

Adaptability of Tools to Security Situation. To accommodate deteriorating security conditions, which prevented safe access to some areas by NSP’s own staff and the Bank, the Third-Party Monitoring, originally designed to cover quality of block grant-financed community subprojects, was expanded to cover gender, ESS, grievance handling, and fiduciary controls for grants.

The deteriorating security conditions in the Eastern and Southern regions forced FPs to suspend their facilitation activities in several districts even though there was still demand from the rural communities in high risk areas for support from NSP. In fact, over the course of NSP, and including CDC, FP, PIU and MRRD provincial directorate personnel, over 370 people were killed and more than 125 kidnapped, with the highest numbers during NSP III. In addition, field monitors in highly and extremely insecure areas reported that the quality and impact of the social mobilization processes was generally weaker in riskier areas and it was difficult for FPs to involve women or spend sufficient time on capacity building efforts.

Community Monitoring in FC context: The levels of monitoring expected by international donors often require literacy levels that succeed the capabilities of the local population. In addition, there is a lack of data of whether acting as a community monitor increases individuals’ security risks.

Risk of corruption: Afghanistan ranks as the third most corrupt country in the world in Transparency International’s 2015 corruption perceptions index. As sub-national institutions are particularly weak, independent monitoring by third parties, national level oversight, strong M&E systems, transparent project information, and grievance redress mechanisms were critical. That said, while TPM gives further confidence to the donors, the use of TPM can undermine program’s own reporting and monitoring systems, and increase costs associated with monitoring.

Quantity over quality: Due to the sheer size of the project and the decentralized implementation, the monitoring remained focused on quantitative data, such as the number of projects designed, implemented, and completed, rather than measuring the quality of implementation.

Evaluation issues: The Monitoring framework focused mainly on the input, processes, and output reporting, and less so on assessment of program outcomes. The assessment of critical issues, like the sustainability of sub-projects, operations and maintenance arrangements, audits of CDCs financial management, sustainability of livelihood sub-projects, and functioning and effectiveness of CDCs were not undertaken.

Insufficient baseline data: A lack of baseline data - a common problem in long-term conflict zones – was a challenge. For example, for NSP III several indicators in the results framework lacked baseline data, as data from the NSP II impact evaluation came too late or was inconsistent with the indicators included.
Citizens’ Charter Afghanistan Project (CCAP) is a successor to NSP and is part of the larger, ten-year Citizens’ Charter National Priority Program (CCNP), which was launched by the Government of Afghanistan in 2016. CCAP will support the first four-year phase of the CCNP, and is funded by the Government, ARTF and the World Bank/IDA. CCAP will reach an estimated 8.5 million direct and indirect beneficiaries in approximately one-third of districts located across all 34 provinces of the country.

The Citizens’ Charter builds upon the community platform created through NSP and strengthen the partnership between government and communities. CDCs will be the means by which citizens can demand services, hold line agencies accountable, and ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable can access services. By strengthening citizen engagement and monitoring in the delivery of services, it increases the chances of those services actually being delivered. The Charter is not, however, only about the delivery of services but also about the standards of service delivery citizens can expect.

CITIZENS’ CHARTER AFGHANISTAN PROJECT (CCAP) IS BUILDING ON THE NSP MONITORING SYSTEM

CCAP is developing a more robust monitoring and reporting system by building upon the existing NSP management information system and fiduciary mechanisms. A core part of CCAP will be to strengthen citizens’ monitoring and their ability to report problems at the same time as they are implementing the rural and urban grants. In addition to overseeing implementation of infrastructure projects, CDCs will monitor and report upon service delivery from other line ministries at the community level (e.g. monitoring teacher attendance, health clinic hours and services, etc.).

Building on the NSP monitoring system, CCAP is planning to introduce and use several innovative monitoring tools and procedures, including:
CITIZEN SCORECARDS
The Project will develop simple citizens’ scorecards to be completed by CDCs and Social Organizers to report upon the minimum service standards. CCAP will also track more closely, through the scorecards, regular reporting and evaluations the participation of women, poor and vulnerable groups, such as returnees and IDPs, during the project cycle.

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (MIS)
There is a bigger emphasis on improving the quality, control and analysis of the data. Additionally, to provide data faster, data will be also entered at the district level in rural areas.

MOBILE APPLICATIONS
Taking advantage of technology and high mobile access coverage in the country (85%), CCAP will explore mobile applications for reporting and grievance redress.

SATELLITE IMAGERY
The project will innovate and use the satellite imagery of the existing ARTF third party monitoring activity to validate infrastructure gaps and service delivery outputs. For example, the presence of schools and irrigation canals in a sample number of areas will be validated through satellite imagery against community monitoring reports.

THIRD PARTY MONITORING
CCAP will also take advantage of the third-party independent monitoring arrangements under the ARTF. The third party monitors, typically with better and safer access to communities, will provide critical data and a level of additional evidence from the field to complement the government monitoring systems and Bank missions. The third party monitors will also review the achievement of the service standards, social inclusion dimensions, and CDC organizational maturity.

SOCIAL AUDIT
The CCAP will leverage biannual social audits in the form of interactive community meetings in which CDC present the progress made, and the Community Participatory Monitoring (CPM) teams present their findings to the wider community. Based on the discussion and community feedback, an action plan is drawn, which is monitored by the CPM team, and discussed in the next community meeting in a six months’ time.

INSTITUTIONAL MATURITY INDEX
The CCAP will use a self-assessment by CDC members, conducted twice (after six months of the CDC establishment and after three years) for the CDC members to assess how they are performing based on expectations.

HIGH-LEVEL REPORT CHAIN
The Office of the President and the Ministry of Finance will receive semi-annual progress reports on the achievement of the service standards so they can closely monitor progress, assist with removing bottlenecks in service delivery, and allocate budgetary resources as needed.

STUDIES AND EVALUATIONS
Several studies are planned related to service delivery, CDC institution strengthening, social inclusion, social accountability, and technical quality audits. The Project will also explore the possibility of an evaluation to examine the nexus between quality of service delivery and social cohesion, an under-researched area in the global conflict literature.
One of the strengths of the monitoring system under the Community Driven Development operations has been the ability to adapt, with “growth in learning.” NSP and CCAP provide a rich environment for assessing and testing innovative approaches for monitoring community-driven development projects in fragile and conflict situations. The lessons learned up to the date include:

- Bank’s limited supervision in the field supervision due to security situation required the team to develop innovative approaches for supervision and monitoring.
- Dispersed implementation of NSP and now CCAP meant robust monitoring and evaluation is extremely important.
- Flow of information into MIS system has been difficult to manage and thus requires adequate staffing, training, and funding.
- Issues related to quality, processing and analysis of data in the MIS require stronger oversight and technical support. Lack of in-country capacity to conduct monitoring and evaluation meant that the projects needed to invest in training and piloting of new approaches.
- Security situation has made it difficult to collect data and thus it has been important to adapt the tools and introduce ICT.

### Figure 2. Citizen Scorecards

1. CDCs with the assistance of Social Organizers and FPs will complete the scorecards every six months.

2. These scorecards will be discussed with local service providers (schools, health clinics, and district line ministries).

3. They are then reported back to the district and provincial levels where results will be discussed at a forum chaired by the Governor.

4. These reports will be sent semi-annually to the Office of the President and MoF for review and comments.
In 2015 the World Bank awarded Management Systems International (MSI) a three-year contract to conduct site visits in Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) projects, including NSP and CCAP, and report on select outputs, outcomes and impacts at various lifecycle stages. The deviations detected are submitted to the World Bank and all five GoIRA ministries, and monthly coordination meetings are held with each ministry to discuss the root causes of the observed deviations and necessary corrective actions.

A number of monitoring approaches are used:

1. THIRD PARTY MONITORING
   Third party monitoring (TPM) is primarily conducted by subject matter experts in the field as well as in the office; by expats and/or locals, depending upon the expertise required. TPM provides a level of reporting detail resulting from first person observations and interviews conducted at the project site that non-experts cannot deliver. MSI is using local and expatriate subject matter experts in infrastructure, environmental, gender and social safeguards within their monitoring program.

2. PARTICIPATORY MONITORING
   Participatory Monitoring is often conducted by qualified and vetted community members selected by community leaders or increasingly through crowdsourcing methods using available communication tools. When designed, organized and managed smartly, participatory monitoring can deliver most if not all monitoring data needed by the organization overseeing the project at a fraction of the TPM cost. Because participatory monitoring utilizes community members living at or near donor project sites, this approach can also deliver monitoring results more frequently than TPM.
MSI is using participatory monitoring with qualified, local citizens selected in consultation with community leaders as well as through crowdsourcing using radio and text messages and social media. To track the progress of select, ongoing subprojects, MSI engages qualified local citizens to provide verifiable evidence in the form of geo-tagged and date-stamped photos supported by text describing the monitored activities.

COMMUNITY MONITORING WORKFLOW

3. REMOTE MONITORING
MSI using low cost sensors, satellite imagery and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV or drones). Quality control of TPM outputs using satellite imagery.