

Opportunities with Options

Scenarios for guiding urban growth 2015-2050

This discussion paper presents the initial ideas for the development of a National Spatial Strategy (NSS) as part of a National Urban Policy and in alignment with the Urban National Priority Program (U-NPP). This paper aims to initiate a discussion how best to guide spatial growth of the urban population from approx. 8 million in 2015 to 26 million people in 2050. It provides an overview of urban population forecast for 2030 and 2050 in three different spatial development models. It further explains the pros and cons of each spatial development model and how it relates to the NSS, which is seeking a territorial balanced development, stimulating economic growth by promoting the opportunities of Afghanistan such as international trade and rural-urban linkages.

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Afghanistan urban population growth

In 2015, the urban population of Afghanistan reached 8.2 million people¹, growing with an average of 43,000 households per year. The urban population is expected to reach 15 million people by 2030 and 26 million by 2050. The rural population living in the rural-urban fringe (a 10-25 km range around the five main cities) is estimated to be 5.1 million in 2015 (table 1) and those villages within the 5 city regions are closely interrelated with these cities for trade and services.

The rapid urban growth and poor economic conditions with largely informal and unplanned urban areas have resulted in environmental, economical and planning challenges for the Government. With the urban population expected to continue growing at relatively high rates in the coming decades, it makes it all the more urgent to develop a strategy to have a spatially balanced and a regional development approach that maximizes the opportunities of the various regions of the country.

To promote growth in specific strategic and promising regions or corridors, cities will need to grow at different rates. A balanced regional development and city region strategy will be vital for economic development and job creation and should embrace

social, economic and environmental objectives. The possible aim of a NSS could be to reach 'Balanced Sustainable Development' to increase economic and (international) trade opportunities, promote regional balance, promote compact urban growth, strengthening rural-urban linkages and increase connectivity, protect agricultural and fragile ecological zones and create resilient and inclusive corridors, cities and settlements.² This will require a Government willing to influence the future spatial distribution of activities³.

City Regions; drivers of development

The 5 major cities in Afghanistan and their hinterland are home to an estimated 10.7 – 11.8 million people (approximately one-third of the total Afghan population). The Kabul city region area alone consists of 9 municipalities and has a total estimated population of 4.8 – 5.5 million people. Other city regions also contain a large number of people living in the surrounding areas of the main cities (table 1)⁴.

All 5 city regions can take advantage of scale economies and the international connections. While the drivers of growth will be different for the regions a common element are the large agricultural areas surrounding the urban centers.

Table 1: City regions populations

City Regions	Municipalities	Estimated Population in 2015/16 (thousands)		
		Urban ⁵	Rural-Urban Fringe ⁶	Total city Region
Kabul	Kabul, Charikar, Jabl-ul-Siraj, Mahmoud Raqi, Qarabagh, Shakadara, Bachakot, Pul-i-Alam, Maidan Shar	3,266 – 3,919	1,570	4,836 - 5,489
Jalalabad	Jalalabad, Shinwar, Torkham	342 – 410	1,199	1,541 - 1,609
Kandahar	Kandahar, Arghandab, Panjwai, Zheray	524 – 629	679	1,203 - 1,308
Herat	Herat, Injil, Gozara	798 – 957	729	1,527 - 1,686
Mazar	Mazar-i-Sherif, Balkh	620 – 744	969	1,589 - 1,713
Estimated population in five city regions		5,550 – 6,659	5,146	10,696 - 11,805
Others 41 Provincial and District Municipalities		2,838 – 3,405		
Total Population		8,388 – 10,065		

¹ GoIRA (2015) State of Afghan Cities, and GoIRA (2016) Future of Afghan Cities, (forthcoming)

² UN Habitat (2015) International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning Principles and UN Habitat (2015) Issue Paper on Urban and Spatial Planning and Design

³ European Commission (2001) The EU compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policy

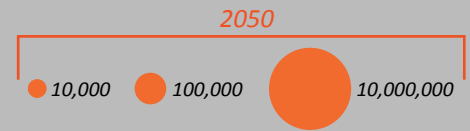
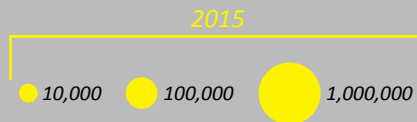
⁴ GoIRA (2016) Atlas of Afghan City Regions 2016. Forthcoming.

⁵ Based on individual dwelling counts; with a range between 7.5 and 9 persons per dwelling (see SoAC 2015 for more information on methodology).

⁶ Based on average number of Dwelling Units per hectare of residential land (DU/Ha), and assuming an average of 7.5 persons per dwelling unit.

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Legends of Estimated Population



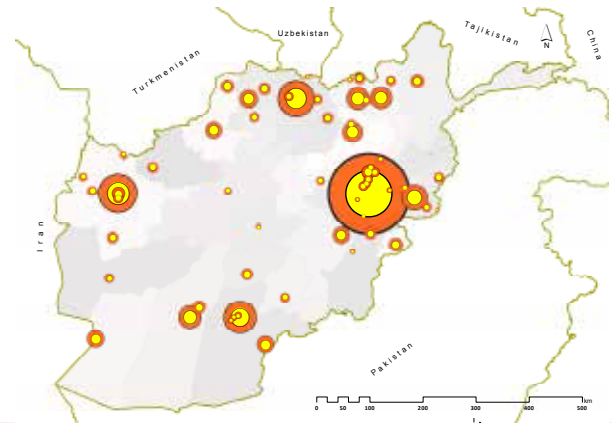
Spatial Development Models

For the spatial development of Afghanistan there are three basic models:

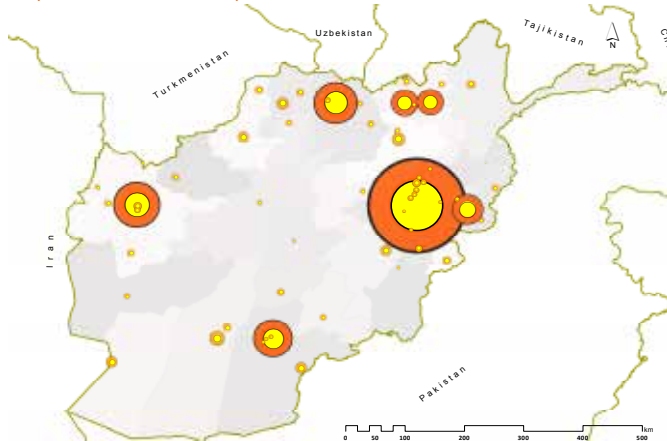
A. Dispersed Development Model

All cities grow at the same rate, no targeted public and private investment. All cities will have an equal share of the expected rural-urban migration population and annual population growth rate is expected to be 3.9 % for the period 2015-2030 and an annual rate of 2.8% for the period 2030-2050. These numbers are calculated based on the world urbanization prospects (see reference at table 2). Without a National Spatial Strategy and limited government guidance this will be the most likely forecast for the urban growth of Afghanistan, although some cities (e.g. Kabul) might grow faster than other cities. This model is missing specific development opportunities and might also result in 'over-urbanization' in cities where the employment opportunities and access to infrastructure and services are limited.

Map 1: Dispersed Development Model



Map 2: Multi-Polar Development Model



B. Multi-Polar Development Model

With growth concentrated in the main 7 city regions (Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar, Kunduz and Taluqan), this model will see rapid urban growth in these 7 cities or city regions with population growth rates of up to 4.3% per year (2015-2030) and 3.1% (2030-2050), and the remaining cities growing at an annual rate of 2.8% (2015-2030) and 2.0% (2030-2050). While large cities can benefit from agglomeration of scale, congestion, lack of basic services and an oversupply of job seekers might restrict these possibilities and opportunities of a more diversified, balanced and agricultural and trade driven development. The combination of a continuous high natural growth rate and rural-urban migration is so large that most likely concentrating growth in 7 cities will surpass the absorption capacity of these 7 cities.

C. Multi-zone or Corridor Development Model

A model that propose a concentration of population growth and development in 6 corridors (Kabul Metropolitan area, Jalalabad city region, Kandahar corridor, Herat corridor, Mazar corridor and the Northern corridor). (See Map3 on opposite page)

A corridor connects economic activities within a specific defined area. Corridors provide important connections between economic nodes or hubs centered in and around the Provincial and District Municipalities. They do not stand alone, all 6 areas have strong international connections (Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan) and large agricultural areas. These corridors can improve international trade, fostering rural-urban linkages, recognizing the strong interdependencies between cities, rural towns and the surrounding areas, and strengthening security.

Development corridors can be used as tools to improve and structure where and how activities are located spatially with access as a main requirement. The key elements which influence the function and category of a corridor are: land uses, environment,

economic factors, connectivity and transport. While equal development and making all services, facilities and infrastructure available to all Afghans will be a long term objective for the coming decades, choices need to be made regarding where the best opportunities exist for development. Targeted investment in specific corridors will not preclude growth of other cities, and if opportunities exists these cities will also expand although with a lower annual population growth rate compared to the population in the corridors.

Location of 6 development corridors

If the corridor development model is selected the population is expected to grow with 4.2% annually in these corridors for the period 2015-2030 and with 2.9% for the period 2030-2050. The urban areas outside these corridors will grow with 2.9% per year (2015-2030) and 2.5% (2030-2050). Table 2 shows the urban population forecast for the 6 corridors.

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Map 3: Corridor Development Model

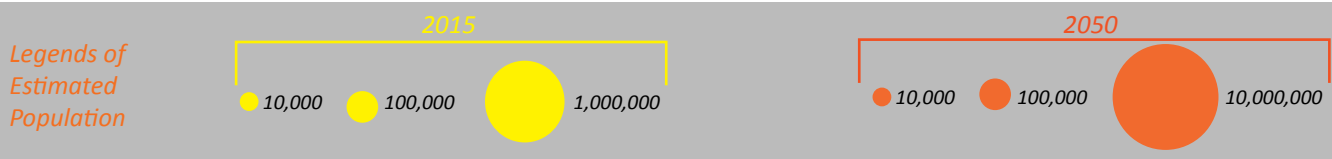
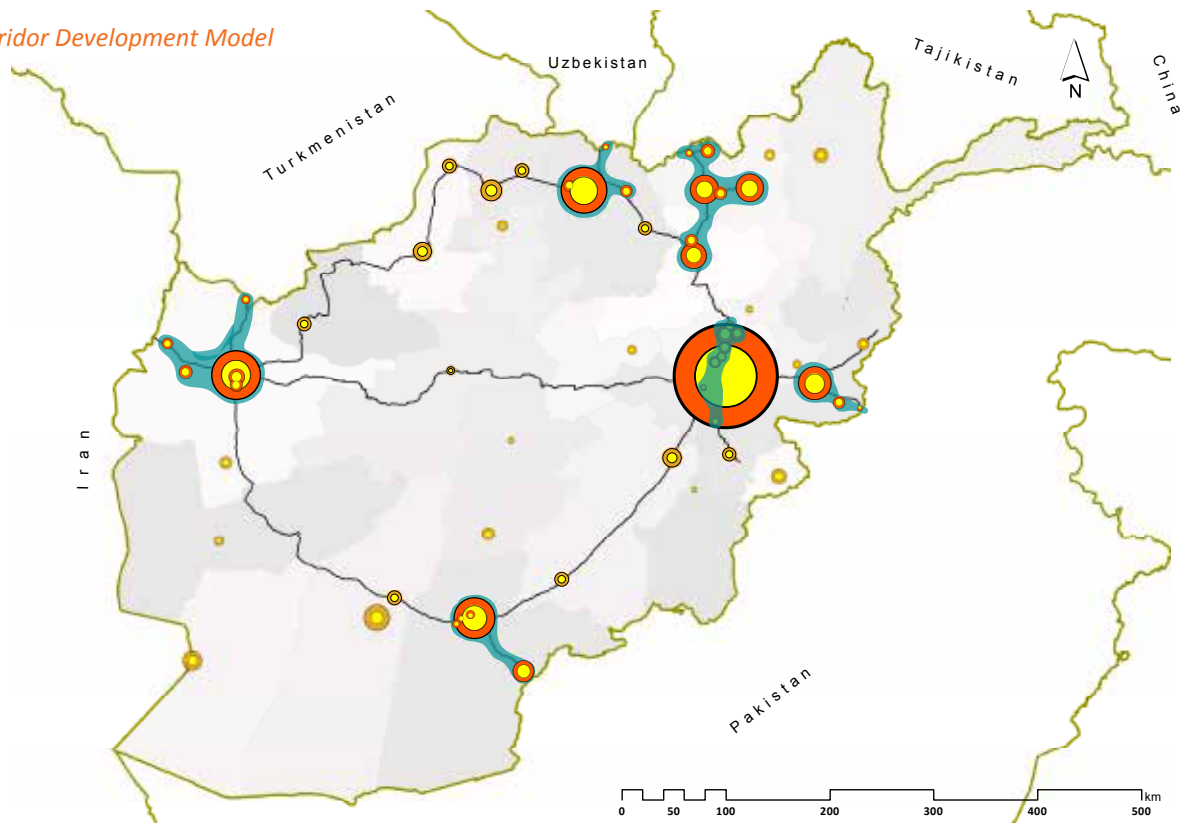


Table 2: Population growth corridor model⁷

Corridor	Municipalities	Urban Population (thousands)		
		2015 7.5 -9 P./dwelling	2030 7.5 P./dwelling	2050 7.5P./dwelling
Kabul Metropolitan Area	Kabul, Charikar, Jabl-ul-Siraj, Mahmoud Raqi, Qarabagh, Shakadara Bachakot, Pul-i-Alam, Maidan Shar	3,266 – 3,919	6,054	10,724
Jalalabad	Jalalabad, Shinwar Torkham	342 - 410	634	1,123
Kandahar	Kandahar, Arghandab, Panjwai Zheray, Spin Boldak	651 – 781	1,207	2,137
Heart	Heart, Injil, Gozara Islam Qala, Ghoryan Torghondi	896 – 1,076	1,661	2,943
Mazar-e-Sharif	Mazar-i-Sherif Balkh, Khulm Hairatan	670 – 804	1,242	2,201
Northern Corridor	Kunduz, Khan Abad Taluqan, Eman Sahab Shirkham Bander Baghlan, Pul-I Khumri	774 – 929	1,435	2,542
Total 6 Corridors		6,600 – 7,920	12,234	21,671
Others 29 PMs and DMs		1,788 – 2,145	2,868	4,699
Total Urban Population		8,388 – 10,065	15,102	26,370

⁷ UN reference, World Urbanization Prospects

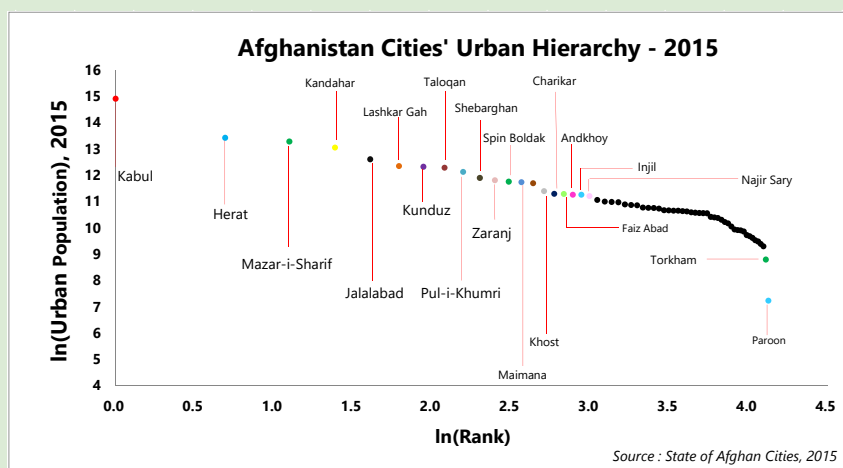
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Box 1: Hierarchy of Cities 2015 and 2050

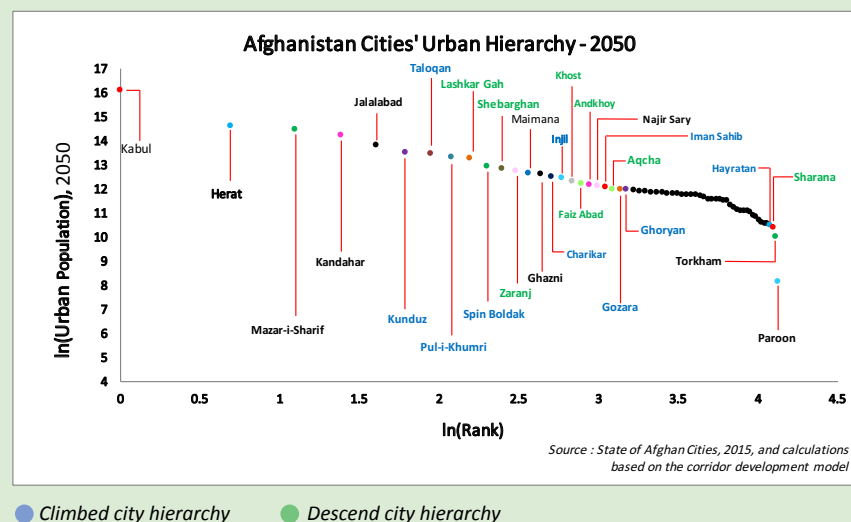
Graph 2 shows the possible urban hierarchy of cities in 2050, if the corridor model is promoted. Fostering these six corridors will boost economic growth as these regions connect economic nodes centered in and around the Provincial and District municipalities. These corridors also have international linkages with Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, which can improve international trade, fostering rural-urban linkages, recognizing the strong interdependencies between cities, rural towns and the surrounding areas, and strengthening security.



Graph 1: Afghanistan Cities' Urban Hierarchy - 2015



Graph 2: Afghanistan Cities' Urban Hierarchy - 2050



Ways forward

- Initiate a discussion and build consensus within government, private sector, and community representatives on the development and direction of a National Spatial Strategy as part of a National Urban Policy and aligned with the Urban National Priority Program (U-NPP) to address the long-term challenges of population growth, spatial distribution, economic development and targeted public investments.
- Develop Goals, Objectives and Phased interventions to implement the NSS.
- Promote inter-municipal cooperation and multi-level governance systems, supported by appropriate regulatory framework and financial incentives, particularly for metropolitan (Kabul) and regional planning (other 5 corridors).
- Define, implement and monitor decentralization policies and strengthen the role, responsibilities, planning capacities and resources of Municipalities.
- Develop and promote the system of cities and urban corridors concepts.
- Consider ecosystem and ecological dynamics as important spatial elements and integrate this perspective into the development of an NSS.



The Future of Afghan Cities (FoAC), is a government-led programme of MUDA, IDLG/GDMA, Kabul Municipality and ARAZI that focuses on the development of a Urban National Priority Programme (U-NPP) that will set Afghanistan's urban priorities for the coming decade. To support this, FoAC will also undertake a detailed analysis of five city regions and at least 20 strategic district municipalities to provide key data and recommendations for policy and programme design.

