

White Paper:  
Being Smart  
about Development  
in Afghanistan

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## Executive Summary

This paper provides a concrete description of what smart, principled development programming looks like in Afghanistan and how it is already delivering meaningful change for Afghan communities.

The six organizations that collaborated on this paper have collectively partnered with more than 10 million Afghan beneficiaries in 2010, implementing projects worth more than \$200 million USD and serving more than 6000 communities in 24 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. The agencies have developed this White Paper to outline the principles that drive their work and allow them to achieve this programmatic reach and depth.

The paper identifies four principles of Smart Development: **Afghan Driven**; **Accountable**; **Impartial**; and **Sustainable**. It outlines *Why* they matter in Afghanistan and *How* the six NGOs adhere to them. The principles are often thrown around as empty buzzwords that represent a tick in the box within a crowded, competitive funding environment. This paper strives to highlight their true value through their translation from sales pitch to operating procedures. The four principles are:

**Afghan Driven** - Smart Development uses NGO national staff knowledge and acceptance, complemented by community driven programming methods, to design and deliver development efficiently. It ensures resources are targeted at projects that are appropriate, feasible and sustainable, with close oversight to mitigate the ever-present risk of corruption.

**Accountable** - Smart Development is accountable to donors and communities. By working in partnership with Afghan communities NGOs jointly maintain mechanisms to ensure that program funds are spent transparently, resulting in projects that meet real needs and are valued by communities.

**Impartial** - Smart Development in Afghanistan is independent of stabilization efforts and impartial, providing assistance based on genuine need to all populations. It translates development dollars into assistance that is accepted and makes a meaningful difference to the lives of Afghans.

**Sustainable** – The impact of Smart Development can be seen long after NGO support has been phased out. Success is measured in the increased ability of Afghan institutions to deliver and the deepened resilience of Afghan communities. By delivering vital services to the most vulnerable in collaboration with Afghan government institutions, Smart Development simultaneously provides much needed assistance while at the same time empowers these bodies to fulfill their responsibilities to the Afghan people. NGOs work together with government and civil society partners to strengthen Afghan institutions' ability to meet the needs of the Afghan people. This allows NGOs to transition away from providing direct assistance.



The paper concludes by presenting three key recommendations, built on the principles of Smart Development, which Afghan development stakeholders should consider as they strive for smarter programming and more meaningful, lasting results. These recommendations are:

- **Development is a process;** lasting development cannot be achieved through short-term engagement. This engagement must include the meaningful delivery of the principles presented in this paper. Each one is important if development is to prove sustainable in the long term. If these are hurried, or worse, skipped due to political pressure to spend or stabilize, development will falter.

*Being smart about development in Afghanistan means recognizing that short-term stabilization initiatives cannot deliver sustainable development. Development efforts must be impartial and separate from stabilization initiatives to achieve development outcomes. Furthermore, disbursing large amounts of development resources rapidly will not achieve intended results. Investment in Afghan Driven, Accountable, Impartial and Sustainable programming is not optional if development outcomes are to be achieved.*

- **Minimizing waste must be a priority,** as perceptions of wasteful interventions and corrupt officials are only furthered when projects are delivered with little concern for quality, or are abandoned prior to completion. Communities become disillusioned when the powerful few are allowed to make decisions for the voiceless many, and worse, when implementers allow development funding to be defrauded without consequence due to poor oversight.

*Being smart about development in Afghanistan means making sure development implementers are held accountable for ensuring impact, quality and ensuring broad community participation where the vulnerable are given a voice. Smart development means spending less but driving communities, implementation actors and government line ministries to achieve more by minimizing corruption, inefficiencies and waste.*

- **Genuine partnership is necessary,** as the success of any development intervention is dependent upon the investment and genuine cooperation of those that it is designed to serve. Initiatives that are designed, implemented and maintained by beneficiary communities have the greatest potential to deliver sustainable results. The long-term delivery of effective social services can only happen if programs that support them are planned and executed in concert with Afghan civil society groups and state authorities that are genuinely committed to achieving development goals for their people.

*Being smart about development in Afghanistan means investing in transparent collaboration with beneficiary communities, civil society and state authorities to ensure that development is undertaken in a manner that is Afghan Driven from the outset, Sustainable in design as well as Accountable and Impartial in its execution.*





## Smart Development – Principles and Practice

This paper provides a concrete description of what smart, principled development programming looks like in Afghanistan and how it is already delivering meaningful change for Afghan communities. It complements other writing on ‘smart development’ and independent studies that argue counter-insurgency-focused development and governance (COIN) programming is failing to deliver intended results.

The paper does not speak directly to the efficiency or effectiveness of program approaches that prioritize attaining security or stabilization goals, but rather seeks to offer guidance as to the principles that underpin successful development initiatives around the world and how this applies to the complex operating environment in Afghanistan.

In offering this guidance, the paper identifies four principles: **Afghan Driven**; **Accountable**; **Impartial**; and **Sustainable**; outlines *Why* they matter in Afghanistan and *How* six NGOs adhere to these. These principles are often used as empty buzz words which represent a tick in the box within a crowded, competitive funding environment. This does not mean that they are without value; indeed they are critical to the delivery of Smart Development. However, this value comes from their translation from sales pitch to operating procedures in the complicated, messy and conflicted environment in which NGOs work throughout Afghanistan. These principles are mutually reinforcing and throughout the document their inter-relationships are highlighted.

### Afghan Driven

Afghan Driven means programs are led by Afghan staff and communities. This results in programming which is based on contextual realities, has strong oversight and responds to a broad cross section of community needs.

The six NGOs that collaborated on this paper have more than two decades of experience working in Afghanistan and are led by a staff that is 98% Afghan. The NGOs have invested in their Afghan staff and they now occupy senior management and program leadership roles. Afghan program implementation staff are recruited from the areas where they work and are not brought in from other parts of the country. As a result, they understand local power structures, know how to operate effectively within them and are not seen as outsiders by communities or local partners. Local Afghan NGO staff can access communities on a regular basis even in insecure areas using low profile techniques, including traveling in unmarked vehicles, dressing in a manner acceptable to communities and not carrying items such as laptops and identification cards which identify them as being associated with international organizations. This allows for regular and reliable oversight of programs by NGO staff and ensures that problems are addressed in their early stages before they can undermine or derail programming. It also protects communities in particularly insecure areas from unwanted attention brought by ‘militarized’ visits from outsiders that can easily increase their vulnerability to Armed Opposition Group (AOG) threats.

Local recruitment and regular visits mean NGO staff have well established relationships with communities in their area of operation. They have a strong understanding of need, capacity, opportunities and the power equations of the communities, broader tribes and local government. This provides a solid knowledge base for program design and establishing effective program management systems.



During the design phase national staff lead the identification of needs, carry out assessments, identify program areas and design activities. International staff more often than not play a supporting, facilitation role and focus on bringing international best practice into program design. Afghan staff are empowered to lead and assure quality within these programs with support and mentoring from experienced international staff.

Afghan-led also means placing communities in a leadership role so that they 'own' their own development. NGOs achieve this through leveraging global expertise in supporting community prioritized and managed programming. This is not simply asking the most powerful community members what they want and delivering it. Instead, NGOs work with communities to establish broad based community engagement in developing and implementing programs, including in-kind or financial contribution. NGOs' locally based staff have in depth understanding of community dynamics which allows NGO programs to work within power structures to gain support for the wider involvement of community members. This allows the participation of marginalized groups while also leveraging the support of power structures for program acceptance. NGOs work with this more inclusive group to identify priorities that respond to broad-based needs, rather than targeting resources to the needs and/or interests of the most powerful and affluent.

NGOs work with communities to analyze their needs and how best to address them. This process helps guide communities to prioritize needs, as well as mobilize resources to address them. This includes coordinating community contributions, engaging with local authorities to obtain direct support and/or ensure projects are consistent with district development plans and supported by relevant line ministries. This ensures that resources are used for projects communities can manage and are **Sustainable**.

NGOs work with communities to establish mechanisms for participant monitoring and leadership, complemented by robust NGO monitoring systems and staff oversight. Engaging beneficiaries in program design and in leadership roles strengthens community ownership of program activities and results. Communities hold themselves **Accountable** for the effective use of program resources through participating and leading program activities. Examples of this NGOs enabling this approach include community members sitting on beneficiary selection committees, identifying locations for water points with engineers, developing and implementing project maintenance plans, joining water management committees, volunteering homes to host community based classes and leading School Management Committees. Communities have identified what they need and then are asked to commit to making projects work; as they have the best knowledge and skills to make things happen in their community. NGO staff are then in a position to support communities to use program resources effectively, providing technical and fiscal oversight. Regular monitoring and field visits from NGO staff allow for close oversight of program resources with systems in place to encourage their transparent use. This includes community held records for the use of program materials, publicly displaying project expenditure in the community and recording the receipt of assistance. As locally recruited NGO staff are able to visit regularly this provides a deterrent against the misuse of resources while also ensuring that any misuse is identified and dealt with as quickly as possible.



*Smart development uses NGO Afghan staff knowledge and acceptance, complemented by community driven programming methods, to deliver development efficiently, ensuring resources are targeted at projects that are feasible and sustainable with close oversight to mitigate against misuse.*

### ***Afghan Driven - Case Study***

*Widows are a marginalized group within Afghanistan but an NGO's Afghan Driven programming has empowered widowed women to lead activities. Widows are able to advocate on their own behalf in their communities and achieving greater success as a result.*

What began as an emergency program that carried out food distribution for vulnerable widows in Kabul has now grown into an advocacy program run by widows themselves. With the NGO's support, mobilisers have helped widows establish neighbourhood solidarity groups providing training and on-going capacity building to help members address the issues that concern them most. To date they have helped form 590 widows' neighbourhood solidarity groups across five districts who work together to address issues that matter the most to members. Since the start of the program over 9000 widows in Kabul - approximately 20% of the estimated widow population in Kabul - have joined these groups. Women have also worked with religious leaders and community elders directly to gain their support for the program.

The NGO's Afghan staff has worked closely with widows since its start in 1994 to ensure that activities met the priorities of the women. It has evolved to decrease widows' reliance on food assistance through literacy classes, vocational training, savings and credit groups. Following feedback from participating women the program also began working with men in the community, along with religious elders, to increase acceptance for the widows' participation in the program. This also helped the program to strengthen women's social and economic position in the community.

Building on this success the program, run by an all Afghan team, launched the Widows' Association for Advocacy in Afghanistan (WAFAA) in December 2008. The program supports the widows to address issues that are of greatest concern to them through collective action. The project works with widows to strengthen their understanding of rights and to support them to raise these with decision makers to push for action. The program relies on a team of mobilisers to support neighbourhood groups, all of whom live in the communities where they work. The vast majority of mobilisers are widows themselves.

Thanks to its Afghan leadership and close rooting in the community structures the project has seen great success. Widows' groups have been able to resolve highly sensitive issues such as forced marriages, property rights and alimony on behalf of their members. They have engaged with government offices and are a respected voice with policy makers and within their communities. This success is due to ensuring women were able to decide what issues needed to be addressed, and giving them the support to address these, in a manner that worked with community power structures to address the needs of the most vulnerable.



## Accountable

Accountability in development programs is built on relationships between donors, the community, government, the private sector and NGOs, where all actors have incentives to fulfill their responsibilities. By linking programming with government plans, NGOs create incentives for government agencies to participate and meet their responsibilities, by providing the opportunity and support for them to build credibility with their constituents. Programs that employ the principles of Smart Development deliver impact efficiently as all actors are accountable for program resources and results.

NGOs have built relationships of accountability with communities over the decades they have been working together through Afghan-led programming. NGOs are accountable to communities to provide assistance that meets their priorities in a manner that is culturally acceptable, Impartial and does not jeopardize the security of communities. In return, communities allow NGO access as well as assuring NGO staff security – often escorting staff from district centers to field sites, calling NGO staff to let them know when it is secure for them to travel, or vouching for staff if AOGs approach them. If NGOs fail to fulfill their responsibilities, communities often refuse to allow NGOs in their community or to support their security. In turn, communities are accountable for the safety of NGO staff and effective use of resources in their communities. Communities know that the terms of this agreement is not met, then NGOs will reconsider their engagement. If communities are not fulfilling their commitments or responsibilities, for example refusing to let girls attend community classes, or misusing program resources, then NGOs will revise their approach, for example pausing activities until meaningful community buy in and support is secured or re-targeting resources towards communities that are willing to meet their responsibilities. Accountability means program funds are directed where they can make a difference, not wasted through corruption or indifference.

NGOs are also accountable to donors for the delivery of programming against targeted results. Through grant, cooperative agreements and payment on delivery contracts, NGOs are held accountable in meeting their commitments to donors and beneficiaries. If NGOs do not meet their commitments they suffer financial consequences, for example through disallowed costs, inability to invoice and jeopardizing future funding. As a result NGOs have financial incentives to propose and deliver appropriate, feasible and sustainable programs.

NGOs design programs based on relationships of accountability, and are able to do this through their nuanced understanding of community structures through Afghan Driven programming. Within communities, NGOs ensure that leaders are held accountable for the use of resources through transparent communication mechanisms. NGOs' ability to deliver impact is reliant on this accountability. An example of this is where Community Development Councils (CDCs) publish how project resources are used and CDC monitoring committees provide oversight to ensure the effective stewardship of project funds. The longer term engagement of NGOs with communities allows time to invest in establishing these mechanisms. Government authorities at the sub-national level are engaged in programming, bringing citizens closer to government officials, with both having incentives to fulfill their responsibilities, through accountability relationships, strengthening Sustainability. When the government is engaged in programming, communities are better able to hold them accountable for delivering on their commitments.

*Smart Development delivers impact because it is accountable. By working in partnership with Afghan communities NGOs jointly maintain mechanisms to ensure that program funds are spent transparently resulting in projects that meet real needs in a manner that communities will value and therefore sustain.*



### **Accountable - Case Study**

*The National Solidarity Program (NSP) promotes Afghan-led community development by placing responsibility for the management of funds with communities. It has disbursed over 700 million USD to more than 20,000 communities in Afghanistan for approximately 50,000 sub-projects. It is able to deliver impact because it has robust mechanisms in place that ensure stakeholders are accountable for how funds are spent.*

NSP is delivered through a partnership between the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), NGO partners who work directly with participating communities, and the communities themselves. NGOs provide training to communities, offer technical advice and assure compliance within the process of community driven development. The foundation for the use of project funds is the Community Development Plan (CDP) that outlines community needs and priorities, directing where project funds should be targeted. The CDP is prepared at the community level, facilitated by NGO partners, where a minimum of 60% of the community must attend. This broad-based participation is documented by NGO partners and subsequently reviewed and approved by MRRD.

Elections are then held for Community Development Council (CDC) members who are responsible for managing the implementation of projects. Again this process is documented and unless it is completed communities cannot move further in the program and access project funds. CDCs then work with NGO staff to develop proposals based on the CDP. MRRD reviews proposals to ensure costs are appropriate and technical standards are met. Once they are satisfied, approval is given for funds to be disbursed to the community's bank account. For any expenditure over 5000 Afs (approximately 100 USD) there must be documentation, either in the form of bills or procurement forms – documenting that a competitive process has taken place and that goods are of an appropriate quality.

Once the community has spent 70% of their first installment of project funds they are able to apply for the second (final) installment, through the NGO partner. NGO staff firstly review all the community's documentation and if they find inappropriate or undocumented expenditure they will not process the second installment request. During project implementation information regarding project progress and the use of project funds is displayed in a public place where all the community has access to ensure CDC accountability to their community. Once communities have completed their projects, the NGO partner works with communities to prepare and submit project completion documents that justify project expenditure and demonstrate quality. NGO payment is reliant on communities progressing through all the stages of NSP and this being robustly documented. Through these mechanisms communities are held accountable to manage project funds effectively and NGOs are held accountable to ensure correct procedures take place and funds are not misused.

*One NGO is building on its work with NSP to strengthen sub-national governance at community, cluster, and district level to make institutions more transparent and accountable. As a result they are able to play an effective role in development and governance.*

Social audits aim to make local governance institutions, in particular CDCs, more accountable to their own constituencies. Selected audit committee members check the records and receipts of CDC members, visit project sites to assess the quality of sub-projects funded by block grants, and present their findings to an open forum of community members. Community members can question their CDC members openly and receive responses on project and site selection, choice of contractor and quality of materials, and explanations on detailed budget lines. After the audit, the community and audit committee vote on recommendations to improve weaknesses and correct any financial irregularities identified. This process is facilitated prior to the re-election of CDCs, and provides community members with important information that helps them to select their leaders based on performance.





## Impartial

Impartial development programs are need-driven and respond to the development priorities of Afghans, rather than security goals. Building on the principal of **Afghan Driven**, where programs respond to real priorities and needs of Afghan communities, they are welcomed and supported by communities. In an environment of ongoing violent conflict, impartiality is vital for the security of both NGO staff and participating communities. Communities will not support programs if they fear reprisals from conflict actors. In turn conflict actors increasingly understand NGO impartiality, and while tragic isolated incidents do occur, on the whole conflict actors allow NGOs to deliver programs in insecure areas which are inaccessible to other development actors that are seen to be part of the war effort. This impartial stance has allowed many NGOs to work in areas long considered unsafe for those viewed, rightly or wrongly, as actors in the ongoing conflict and has given them unparalleled access to the most vulnerable communities.

NGOs work to ensure that programs are impartial and are perceived as such. In Afghanistan the six NGOs who have authored this paper do not travel with armed security or military actors and avoid areas where military actors are present, to ensure their roles are not confused. NGOs communicate to communities the aims of their programs and their separation from the conflict. NGOs often work with religious leaders, as respected community leaders, to gain support for program activities and to better communicate with community members. This ensures that they understand NGO impartiality and that they are not being asked to 'take sides'. In insecure areas, when communities recognize that programs are based on their needs and priorities, and are not part of the conflict, they are willing to participate. They are able to provide the security required for NGO staff and resources, negotiating with conflict actors for their participation, as well as being willing to participate fully in programs and ensure the transparent use of resources. In turn AOGs recognize that NGOs are not part of the military effort and allow communities to work with them. This has been demonstrated in Logar Province where AOGs have ordered communities not to work with PRTs but many have continued to allow communities to participate in National Solidarity Program.

Impartial programming is reliant on geographic equity, with Afghan provinces receiving resources based on need, not on security goals. Furthermore, within provinces, resources are targeted equitably and not just towards those districts considered most insecure or strategic. Impartial programming responds to need within volatile locations, and builds upon the development opportunities presented by more secure areas. Impartial programs have greater access to areas under AOG influence, as communities are in a stronger position to negotiate their participation with AOGs. This provides NGOs with greater access to populations in need.

Smart, **Afghan Driven** development provides a peace dividend to those communities who have worked to prevent conflict in their area. It does not punish these communities with a peace penalty, denying them assistance while rewarding those areas where conflict is worse. Building on the principle of **Accountability**, NGOs target resources towards those communities which are committed to their development and withdraw from those areas where insecurity prevents the safe and effective use of development funds.

NGOs make long-term commitments to homogeneous groupings of communities that are collectively large enough to gradually demonstrate a critical mass of development change. This measurable development encourages neighboring communities to take part in similar project efforts. This step-by-step process of building momentum brings districts on to a positive and **sustainable** development trajectory.

*Smart development in Afghanistan is independent and impartial, and provides assistance based on genuine need. It translates development dollars into assistance that is accepted, valued and makes a meaningful difference to lives of Afghans.*



### ***Impartial - Case Study***

*An NGO has been working with rural communities in Helmand province since 1988. The NGO relies on experienced local staff, proven community-led engagement methods, a community acceptance, low-profile approach to security, and well-established relationships with community leadership structures and partners to implement programs.*

Despite the ongoing conflict in Helmand, from 2007 – 2010, the NGO implemented a multi-component agricultural livelihoods program in three districts of the province. Working with communities to provide targeted trainings to improve agriculture practices and rehabilitate community and agriculture-related infrastructure, the program increased production, sales and income of Helmand farmers.

Communities agreed to participate and contribute to program activities, as well as guarantee the safety and security of NGO staff and project sites because the NGO is respected and viewed as an impartial actor which supports need-driven activities. Communities regularly advised NGO staff of changing security conditions and when travel to communities or project sites was not advised. When AOGs stopped project activities and threatened NGO staff, community representatives negotiated with the AOGs to allow project activities to continue and NGO staff safe access to project sites. AOGs acknowledged the NGO-community partnership and that the NGO worked for the benefit and under the protection of the community.

Due to this community access and participation, the program worked directly with over 20,000 farmers and supported 100 infrastructure projects ranging from the construction of large-scale protection dikes and intakes to the repair of culverts, water gates and access roads. In total, over 64,000 individuals directly benefited from program activities through improved irrigation, water management and increased access to main transport routes and markets. Participating communities and households realized a 31% increase in the amount of land under irrigation, 18% increase in production and a 33% increase in sales.

*In northern Afghanistan, an NGO was working in a fragile area with a large opium economy, largely controlled by narco-traffickers. The NGO engaged with grass roots communities, but did not have strong relationships with local commanders, religious leaders or local government officials. Without this solid relationship base, the NGO was targeted in a number of violent incidents, and a pull-out was contemplated.*

Rather than pull out of the area the NGO invested more heavily in building relationships with those who threatened the program. The NGO first built an understanding of the influential local political and religious figures who could play both a positive and negative role. It engaged intensively with these leaders, including with the District Governor and the Police Chief of the district where its workers had been targeted. This was only possible because the NGO was acknowledged to be an impartial actor.

Following this engagement, the district elders and District Governor requested the NGO to work in the district. Three months after the most severe violent incident, the NGO began its first project there, using infrastructure as an entry point. It recruited staff from the program areas, including influential leaders, giving them a stake in success. Local commanders sat on development committees alongside Community Development Council members, prioritized projects, and took responsibility for security, development and program monitoring. Local leaders met with AOG representatives and requested them not to harm the NGO workers.

The NGO started by building two bridges in the district, and now works in agriculture, irrigation, health and education. Through its impartiality and long-term strategic approach, it has been able to build trust and work effectively with local communities in the area.



## Sustainable

Sustainable programming recognizes that while NGOs have a long term commitment to Afghanistan their role is to help build the capacity of Afghan institutions to deliver services, as well as support the development of civil society and the private sector in order to break the cycle of assistance dependence. Success is not measured in the delivery of outputs or the amount of money spent, but the increased ability of Afghan institutions to deliver and the deepened resilience of Afghan communities. Programming is designed with sustainability as its end goal so that program results and impact continue long after projects are completed and Afghan institutions are able to lead future development.

NGO programs provide technical assistance to support and extend the delivery of basic government services predominately in the social sectors of health, education, water and sanitation. NGOs deliver services in line with government development strategies, link social service providers with communities and support these bodies to eventually manage services independently. Programs are designed with this long-term view in mind, with NGOs supporting the development of policies and establishing procedures to support government agencies to eventually assume the management of services.

NGOs play a central role in supporting the emergence of a robust and energetic Afghan civil society that can represent and respond to the needs of its constituents. INGOs partner with Afghan institutions in a manner that builds technical capacity and operational strength. NGOs mentor Afghan organizations in program implementation and provide financial and training resources to help them operate independently so that they can become an effective partner for the Afghan government while also fulfilling the vital role of a check and balance on the state.

*Smart development does not happen overnight, but its impact can be seen long after NGOs have phased out assistance. By delivering vital services to the most vulnerable in collaboration with the Afghan institutions Smart Development simultaneously empowers these bodies to fulfill their responsibilities to the Afghan people.*

### **Sustainable - Case Study**

An NGO is delivering a sustainable agriculture program by working with local governance bodies, the private sector as well as farmers to increase agricultural production and quality.

The NGO uses a cluster approach that targets resources in selected geographic clusters. The clusters are geographic areas which share market centers, similar livelihood opportunities and constraints, natural resources, farm and livestock services. Each cluster includes at least one CDC, which provides support and facilitates community buy-in for program activities.

In each cluster NGO staff works with a critical mass of farmers to select value chains, develop lead-farmer demonstration plots, and provide inputs and training to farmer groups. All training and inputs require farmer commitment and contribution. At the same time the NGO works with agriculture and livestock suppliers and service providers in the cluster area to increase the number of providers and improve the quality of their stock and services so that farmers have access to a range of quality inputs.



Instead of relying on direct, no buy-in distributions, the NGO uses a voucher system that transfers the purchasing decision to each participating farmer and requires a farmer contribution of a minimum of 30%. This system promotes competition between vendors, accommodates increases in demand and supply for high quality goods and services, strengthening the relationship between farmers and suppliers, and strengthening the private sector. This reduces reliance on non-market, donor support and enhances sustainability.

In Badakhshan province, the NGO is currently targeting training and inputs in two districts incorporating 38 clusters, 16 market centers and 413 CDCs. The number will be expanded to a total of 12 districts, 68 clusters, 28 markets and 842 CDC by 2011/12, potentially benefiting 181,096 families.

*An NGO is partnering with Afghan NGOs to build their capacity to deliver rapid humanitarian assistance to populations affected by conflict and natural disasters. This provides life saving assistance while also building the capacity of Afghan agencies to be able to respond to humanitarian crises in the long term.*

An NGO operates a humanitarian response program in partnership with Afghan NGOs across Hirat, Khost, Logar, Paktya, Nangarhar and Laghman provinces. Emergency response teams are comprised of international NGO and Afghan NGO staff. The INGO works with its Afghan NGO partners in each step of the program from assessments, through to responses and reporting. Each partner has a capacity building plan designed so they gradually assume responsibility for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Partners have worked with the INGO in carrying out emergency assessments of households affected by natural disasters and displacement due to conflict and together they have delivered life saving assistance and monitored the result of this assistance. This in-service learning is supported by formal training to build technical skills to manage emergency response activities. The INGO is also supporting the overall institutional development of Afghan partner NGOs through supporting training in a variety of areas including financial management, procurement, security management and fundraising.

To date the INGO has partnered with 4 Afghan NGOs and together they have responded to the emergency needs of over 32,000 crisis affected people in 2010.

A consortium of NGOs has worked closely with the Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) to expand access to primary education in rural areas and support the MoE to ultimately assume responsibility for classes established by NGOs.

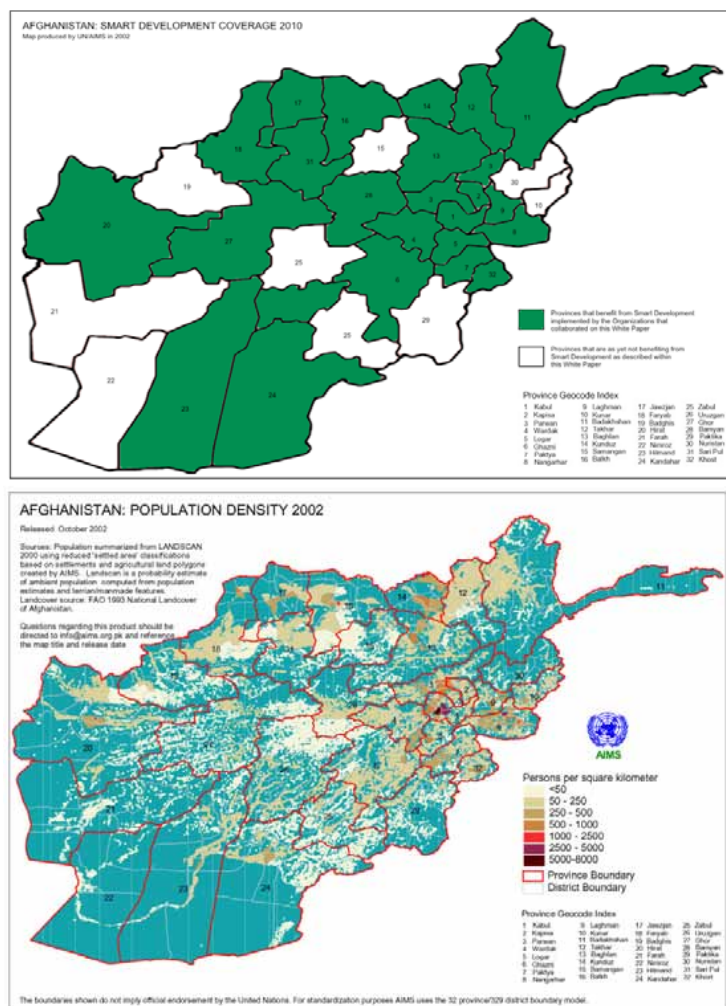
An NGO consortium has worked with the MoE to establish primary Community Based Education (CBE) classes in rural areas across 93 districts in 18 provinces. To date more than 94,000 children, over 64,000 of who are girls, have had access to primary education as a result. To support the sustainability of these efforts, the consortium has worked with the MoE at the national, provincial and district level to strengthen their ability to assume responsibility for NGO implemented CBE classes and to integrate them with the formal education system. This has including supporting the MoE to form a CBE policy which outlines how all NGO education providers should establish and manage CBE classes to support their subsequent handover to the government. These efforts have meant 1,623 classes established by the NGO consortium alone have now been successfully integrated into the MoE system and are serving 44,337 children a year, 29,459 of them girls.





## Smart Development - Scale and Sophistication

Six Non Government Organizations collaborated to co-author this white paper to highlight the principles upon which all of their development activities in Afghanistan are founded. The principles not only ensure sustainable impact and quality, and safeguard NGO staff and beneficiary community members, but also allow programs to be delivered at scale across Afghanistan.



During 2010, the six organizations will collectively partner with more than 10 million Afghan beneficiaries to implement projects worth more than 200 million USD. Activities will serve more than 6000 communities, within 24 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces – districts are prioritized on the basis of vulnerability levels and population density as highlighted above. This area of operation is based on need and long term programming commitments, not security access and stability goals.

NGO efforts build on smart development principles to deliver sophisticated, high quality programming within eight technical sectors. These sectors are Education, Health, Water and Sanitation, Emergency Humanitarian Response, Agriculture, Community Driven Development, Economic & Livelihoods Development and Civil Society Development.

The NGOs assure quality within this large portfolio with a staff of 5512 which is overwhelmingly Afghan led – 98% or 5380 staff members are Afghan, while the remaining 135 international staff focus on providing technical support and financial stewardship.



## Being smart about development – Key considerations

Development in Afghanistan can become smarter if international donors and development institutions consider the following key recommendations as assistance funding is disbursed:

- **Development is a process**; lasting development cannot be achieved through short-term engagement. This engagement must include the meaningful delivery of the principles presented in this paper. Each one is important if development is to prove sustainable in the long term. If these are hurried, or worse, skipped due to political pressure to spend or stabilize, development will falter.

*Being smart about development in Afghanistan means recognizing that short-term stabilization initiatives cannot deliver sustainable development. Development efforts must be impartial and separate from stabilization initiatives to achieve development outcomes. Furthermore, disbursing large amounts of development resources rapidly will not achieve intended results. Investment in Afghan Driven, Accountable, Impartial and Sustainable programming is not optional if development outcomes are to be achieved.*

- **Minimizing waste must be a priority**, as perceptions of wasteful interventions and corrupt officials are only furthered when projects are delivered with little concern for quality, or are abandoned prior to completion. Communities become disillusioned when the powerful few are allowed to make decisions for the voiceless many, and worse, when implementers allow development funding to be defrauded without consequence due to poor oversight.

*Being smart about development in Afghanistan means making sure development implementers are held accountable for ensuring impact, quality and ensuring broad community participation where the vulnerable are given a voice. Smart development means spending less but driving communities, implementation actors and government line ministries to achieve more by minimizing corruption, inefficiencies and waste.*

- **Genuine partnership is necessary**, as the success of any development intervention is dependent upon the investment and genuine cooperation of those that it is designed to serve. Initiatives that are designed, implemented and maintained by beneficiary communities have the greatest potential to deliver sustainable results. The long term delivery of effective social services can only happen if programs that support them are planned and executed in concert with Afghan civil society groups and state authorities that are genuinely committed to achieving development goals for their people.

*Being smart about development in Afghanistan means investing in transparent collaboration with beneficiary communities, civil society and state authorities to ensure that development is undertaken in a manner that is Afghan Driven from the outset, Sustainable in design as well as Accountable and Impartial in its execution.*

## Endnotes

1) Where NGOs operate in the same province, especially in capacity building partnerships with government agencies, these beneficiaries may be the same, benefiting from multiple interventions in different sectors.

2) Oxfam America – Field Report from Afghanistan, Smart Development in Practice Series. March 2009

3) Andrew Wilder, Feinstein International Center at Tufts University – an independent nation wide study summarized within an Op-ed entitled ‘A “Weapons System” based on wishful thinking’ published in the [Boston Globe on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2009](#).

4) NSP Monthly Program Report: Meezan 1389 (23<sup>rd</sup> September – 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2010)  
[http://www.nspafghanistan.org/files/Program%20Report%20Oct%202010%20\\_30%20Meezan1389\\_.pdf](http://www.nspafghanistan.org/files/Program%20Report%20Oct%202010%20_30%20Meezan1389_.pdf)

5) Agha Khan Foundation, CARE International, CRS, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, and Save the Children

6) Where NGOs operate in the same province, especially in capacity building partnerships with government agencies, these beneficiaries may be the same, benefitting from multiple interventions in different sectors.

# White Paper

Being Smart about Development in Afghanistan

developed by:



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