

# THE NATIONAL SOLIDARITY PROGRAM (NSP) AND ITS RELATION TO UN-HABITAT<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Background

The National Solidarity Program aims to lay the foundations for a long-term strengthening of local governance, to make it more inclusive, and to provide assistance for reconstruction and development of communities. As stated in the Operational Manual, the **goal** of the NSP is to reduce poverty through empowering communities with regard to improved governance, and social, human, and economic capital.

The stated **objectives** of the program are:

1. to lay the foundations for a strengthening of community level governance, and
2. to support community-managed sub-projects comprising reconstruction and development that improve the access of rural communities to social and productive infrastructure and services.

This primary aim is achieved through universal suffrage of representative community development councils that will regularly consult amongst themselves and with the community at large regarding development needs and priorities, and through this process will manage and monitor of the use of their development resources, and interface with and coordinate activities of outside agencies. The NSP grants to villages are intended to act as a catalyst in this process, and at the same time provide much needed support for local reconstruction and development activities.

The **outcomes** that the NSP aims to achieve are:

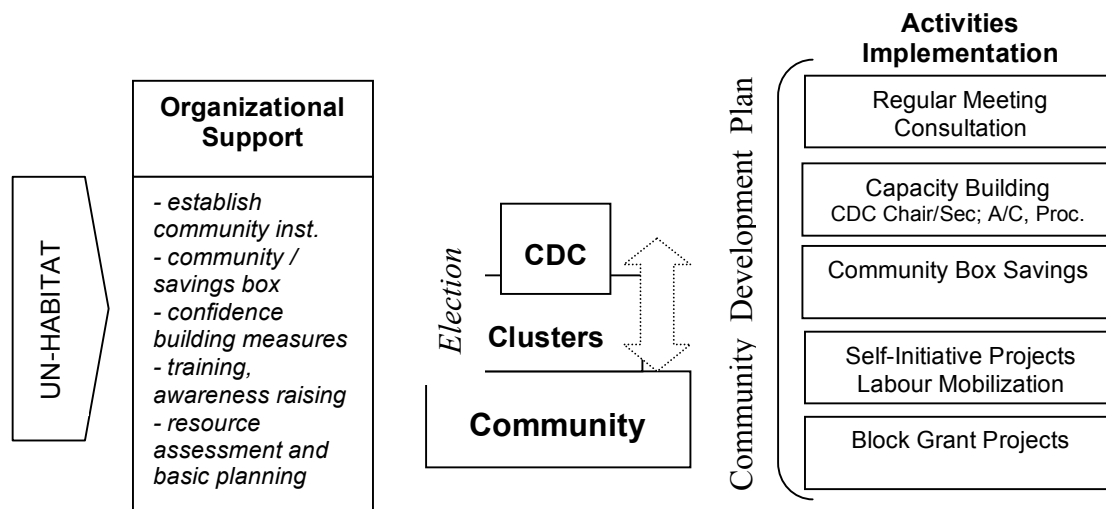
- (i) the establishment of a framework for village level consultative decision making and representative local leadership as a basis for interaction within and between communities on the one hand, and with the administration and aid agencies on the other, and
- (ii) local level reconstruction, development, and capacity building which will lead to a decrease in poverty levels.

The design of NSP consists of four core elements:

- **facilitation** at the community level to assist communities establish or strengthen inclusive community institutions through elections, reach consensus on priorities and corresponding project activities, develop eligible proposals that comply with NSP appraisal criteria, and implement approved project proposals;
- a system of **direct block grant transfers** to support the rehabilitation or development activities planned and implemented by inclusive elected community institutions;
- a series of **capacity building** activities to enhance the competence of communities (both men and women) for financial management, procurement, technical skills, and transparency that demonstrates the value of equitable collaborative action; and,
- activities **linking local institutions to government line ministries and aid agencies** with available services and resources.

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<sup>1</sup> This text is an excerpt from a larger document produced by UN Habitat for LCEP in 2005.



The goal of this approach is to ensure that communities are able and inclined to institute a broad based inclusive decision-making system (which includes women as well as members from marginalized sections of the villages) based on elected development councils and community meetings. Through this process the communities will acquire or strengthen the skills and attitudes necessary to enhance their capacity to define, manage and govern their development with regard to both locally mobilized *and* externally provided resources.

To achieve this goal, the role of UN-HABITAT, as a Facilitating Partner, has been to create an enabling environment through facilitation of inclusive community elections, community planning, technical assistance, and timely release of funds, which will make possible for the communities themselves to take a lead in planning and managing their development projects.

During the past year the following has been achieved through the NSP program through UN-HABITAT facilitation:

- Establishment of an *elected community development councils* (CDCs) at the village level to take charge of development priorities of the villages. In most villages, separate CDCs have been elected for men and for women.
- Emergence of a *governance pattern* comprising regular CDC meetings, regular community meetings and representative cluster meetings, advocacy of the community needs, linkages and partnership between the villagers and service providers, etc..<sup>2</sup>
- Creation of a *financial system* consisting of a savings box and/or community box to enable them to collect the community contribution for the community self-initiatives and block grant-funded projects (these are elaborated on in more detail in the description of proposed activities for economic empowerment)
- Emergence of a *management structure and decision-making processes* to facilitate the management of activities in a participatory, transparent and accountable manner. The structures include: executive committee; project management committee; community savings committee; community contribution committee; etc.
- Preparation of a *Community Development Plan* (CDP) outlining the community's major assets and challenges, its priorities for self-initiative (self-help) projects, and its priorities for externally funded projects (through the block grant)
- Implementation of *two projects*: a self-initiative project (self-help) and an externally-funded project through the block grant

## 2 Lessons Learned

Over the past two years the NSP has been established nationwide in almost 100 districts in 32 provinces by 22 NGOs and UN-HABITAT. Of these, UN-HABITAT has taken the lead with implementation in 21 Districts of five provinces, namely Bamyán, Farah, Herat, Kandahar, and

<sup>2</sup> Each village is divided into clusters of 10-30 families and each cluster elects one representative to sit in the CDC and whatever is discussed in CDC he/she has to share the information with the 10-30 families that elected him. This is called representative cluster meetings.

Parwan. UN-HABITAT has facilitated the establishment of over 1,700 democratically elected CDCs, representing men and women from 1,064 villages. In 2004-2005 UN-HABITAT will expand its coverage to include over 1,940 villages in 31 Districts in seven Provinces.

Detailed election data is available from 602 villages with a population of approximately 840,000 among whom 33.4% were eligible voters. 74.5% of the eligible voters actually voted. Although more men (58.8%) than women (41.2%) actually voted, the voter turnout was higher for women (77.1%) compared to men (72.8%) if compared against the number of eligible voters. This turnout is higher than what was expected during the design of the program. A total of 10,308 people have been elected among whom 60% are men and 40% are women.

CDC elections take place in two stages. First, cluster level elections are held. Afghan rural communities are traditionally organized on the basis of clusters of 10-30 families. Each cluster elects one male and female representative to sit on the CDC. The mandate of the cluster representative is to advocate on behalf of the cluster's interests, but also to report back to the cluster all issues discussed, decisions and any other information. A second secret ballot election is then held to establish the Executive Committee, consisting of a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. One of the first tasks of the CDC is to implement a community development project (self-initiative) without any external support. This task not only demonstrates the CDCs ability to mobilize their community, but also prepares them for the task of designing and implementing a larger project with NSP block grant funding.

It is also important to note that CDCs are formally registered with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD). The registration process gives these institutions formal recognition and status with the Government. As will be discussed below, however, the future role and legal status of these CDCs remains unclear.

Elected CDCs represent a tremendous potential for positive social change in Afghanistan for several reasons. First, experience suggests that CDCs are more representative than previous structures. While in the past, local decision-making was the preserve of only a small handful of elderly men, many of the Community Development Councils (CDCs) now include between nine and fifteen people. Second, the composition of the CDCs suggests the emergence of a new cadre of leaders, those valued for their proactive approach to development.

Table 1: Composition of CDC Executive

<i>Position</i>	Comman der	Mullah	Landlord	<b>TOTAL</b>
Chairman	1	1	2	<b>4</b>
Vice Chairman				<b>0</b>
Secretary		1	3	<b>4</b>
Treasurer		3	2	<b>5</b>
Member	1	7	9	<b>17</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>30</b>
<i>Percent</i>	0.8%	4.7%	6.2%	11.6%

As Table 1 suggests, military leaders seem make up only a small percentage of the elected CDCs. In addition, this new crop of leaders represents a new, younger generation, as reflected in Table 2. Third, and perhaps most importantly, a new space is being created for women to meet, discuss and advance their own agendas through the CDCs. In most parts of Afghanistan, we see a trend towards the creation of separate CDCs for women.

The same sample data carry an important message for the LCEP regarding literacy. Only 28% of CDC chairs, 59% of the vice chairs, 33% of the secretaries, 24% of the treasurers, and 6% of the ordinary members of CDC are literate.

Considering the importance of these positions, notably that of treasurer, literacy and numeracy skills development would be extremely valuable. Such training, moreover, is clearly in demand. Data from Herat, for example, demonstrates that over the three implementation cycles, the demand for literacy classes (total of 110 projects) and Holy Quran courses (75 projects) remained at a consistently high level. Over 6,000 women are estimated to have participated in these courses.

Table 2: Age Distribution within the CDC Executive

Positions	AGE						
	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s	NA
Chairman	2	6	6	4	5	1	
Vice Chairman	6	7	9	3	0	0	
Secretary	2	6	9	5	1	1	
Treasurer	2	5	7	7	2	1	
Member	12	36	37	31	29	7	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>
Percent	9.3%	23.3%	26.4%	19.4%	14.3%	3.9%	3.5%
Chair Woman	6	6	7	3	1		1
Vice Chair Woman	16	3	3	1			1
Secretary	12	6	4	1			1
Treasurer	3	10	8	1	1		1
Member	25	48	60	26	6	1	12
			74.7%				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>16</b>
Percent	22.6%	26.6%	29.9%	11.7%	2.9%	0.4%	5.8%

While there is a clear unmet demand for literacy and numeracy within CDCs, the NSP is providing some important capacity-building support to these fledgling institutions. Through the NSP process, CDCs will have participated in the following trainings:

- Conducting Elections, including the importance of secret-ballot processes and the importance of proactive and accountable leadership;
- Community Planning, including asset mapping, problem identification, prioritization of development challenges to be addressed independently and with external support;
- Procurement Training, including purchasing, record keeping and inventories;
- Chairperson's Training, including service-oriented leadership and the facilitation of participatory decision-making;
- Treasurer's Training, including cash book and petty-cash management, cash receipts and invoice vouchers;
- Secretary Training, including minute taking, record keeping, reporting and dissemination of CDC and other information.

Nevertheless, there remain many areas in which local governance can be strengthened. Furthermore, experience in implementing the NSP in its first year suggests some important lessons relevant for the development of the economic empowerment component of the LCEP:

- *Strong Linkage between Savings and Credit, Governance and Management:* Through the NSP, UN-HABITAT has been able to promote the establishment of savings boxes. Experience suggests that savings activities require communities to come together on a regular basis to contribute their savings, review their income, decide how it should be spent, ensuring management and maintenance of their asset, etc.. The process of savings and credit gives communities the tools and capacity to take on more challenging projects in the future.
- *Strong Demand for Income Generating Activities:* NSP communities everywhere have expressed a real demand for income generation activities. Their rationale is quite pragmatic. They do not feel certain that they will receive such an opportunity in the future and wish to use their block grant in such a way that it generates future revenue for the community. This revenue can then be used to fund development activities.
- *Women's Empowerment:* Income generation activities are one of the most effective means of involving women in a way that does not threaten men. Carpet weaving and tailoring rooms

also create a “space” for women to come together and discuss other issues and become the platform for addressing other concerns such as health, hygiene, literacy, etc.. Experience shows that it is not simply the weaving trainees, for example, that gather around the looms; income generation projects are a magnet for bringing together women in a non-threatening way.

- *Distinction between Community Assets and Businesses:* Community assets are collectively-owned and managed activities that also generate revenue through their operations. In this case, the user-fees are set at a level designed to ensure cost-recovery and the majority of any profits are plowed back into the community box. Business enterprises, on the other hand, are individually owned and managed, with perhaps a small portion of the profits fed back into the community box. As the section below will illustrate, the capacity to manage community assets is relatively strong (Afghan’s appreciate very well the concept of cost-recovery), the capacity to develop new business models based on market demand is not as advanced.
- *Capacity Strengthening a Priority:* While UN-HABITAT has promoted the establishment of savings boxes through the NSP, and while some types of income generating projects may be eligible for block grant funding, there is a three-fold need. First, savings are irregular both in time and amounts contributed. The discipline of regular savings is essential for generating sufficient experience and revenue to capitalize and maintain a savings and credit system. Second, there is a concurrent need to diversify income generating activities away from the traditional models for carpet weaving and tailoring. There is neither sufficient market demand to absorb the number of products being produced, nor are the products of the necessary quality. There is a clear need for new business models, coupled with business development and marketing support. Finally, given the narrow range of income generating activities permissible under the NSP, there is a need to expand the range of possible activities to effectively respond to the demand.