

Urban Solidarity

Community-led neighbourhood upgrading by people, for people

Discussion Paper #2, December 2014

This discussion paper reflects on over 10 years of community-based neighbourhood upgrading in Afghanistan's cities. It shows the huge potential and value of citizen engagement in upgrading, promoting a culture of civic responsibility and community solidarity. It demonstrates that these experiences provide a solid foundation for up-scaling to a national urban solidarity programme to improve municipal governance and service delivery in Afghanistan's cities.

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The "People's Process"

For the last two-decades UN-Habitat has supported the Government of Afghanistan to engage urban communities in a process of organizing and planning as the basis for investing in and improving urban neighborhoods across Afghanistan. Between 1995 and 2001, 'Community Forums' for men and women were established in every urban district in the capital, Kabul and in key secondary cities around the country with the aim of 'rebuilding urban communities' after decades of war.¹ In the absence of formal urban governance and management structures, communities came together to plan, address problems, identify solutions and implement sub-projects on a range of issues including improving infrastructure and access to urban services, social welfare for vulnerable urban households, dispute resolution on land and water, and meeting humanitarian needs when faced with disasters.²

These Community Forums were the precursor to the now widely-recognized Community Development Councils (CDCs): area-based networks of men and women who, with government support, lead the process of development planning and implementation at the local level. CDCs are central to the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), a flagship initiative of the Government of Afghanistan. Under the leadership of the Afghan Government, NSP was born from these Community Forum experiences and UN-Habitat is proud to have taken a leading role in the programme design and implementation.³

Although originally intended as a national programme, NSP targets rural districts and villages, not municipalities/cities. Given that Afghan cities face immense social, economic and environmental challenges, including rapid growth,⁴ it is an opportune time to capture knowledge and review experiences with urban CDCs and explore opportunities for scaling-up.

CDCs in cities?

UN-Habitat has been supporting municipalities to engage with communities to undertake neighborhood upgrading, build social solidarity, foster increased civic responsibility, and establish a governance structure at the community level. Since 2001, over 645 male and female urban Community Development Councils (CDCs) have been established in Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Charikar and Bamyan, directly reaching over 1.5 million Afghans, nearly 20% of the total estimated urban population.⁵



People are part of the solution

"The more cities grow, the more there's a gap between inhabitants of the city and the municipality. Our pledge is that we will create elected people's councils ... and just like the national solidarity programme, we will create an urban solidarity programme so that necessary opportunities for active participation of the people is created." H.E. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai⁶

A spatial framework for people's engagement

For example, Nahia (District) 2 of Mazar-e-Sharif city has 15 CDCs and 3 GAs.



1. Cities included Kabul, Herat, Farah, Kandahar, Mazar-Sharif and Bamyan. UNHSP (Habitat) (1999) Rebuilding communities in the urban area of Afghanistan. AFG/96/005 Report.
2. One-time grants were provided to each of the Community Forums.
3. UN-Habitat remains the largest Facilitating Partners of NSP and the only UN Agency. It is active in 54 Districts in 9 Provinces, reaching over 3,500 CDCs. UN-Habitat is the chair of the Facilitating Partners Representative Group (FPRG).
4. See: UN-Habitat (2014) Afghanistan's Urban Future; Discussion Paper #1.
5. For example, see a programme overview of the Community-based Municipal Support Programme: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m_Gw2Dk9Dw&index=6&list=PLTQZbEc6Bv59WATH9qBNPDhNfraaw1Ohy
6. Ghani Ahmadzai, A. (2014) Manifesto of Change and Continuity Team. March 2014. www.ashrafghani.af

An urban CDC has on average 200-250 households living within a defined area.⁷ In conjunction with municipalities, the process is: (i) community mobilization through a series of small and large gatherings; (ii) Council elections with voting open to all residents of the neighborhood (including voting of a chair, secretary and treasurer); (iii) formal registration with the municipality; (iv) community action planning to identify local needs and priorities; (v) sub-project design, review and approval by the Municipal Advisory Board; (vi) project implementation through community contracts; and (vii) monitoring and evaluation as well as social audit.

In most cases there are separate male and female CDCs (with the same geographic boundaries for each). They share their action plans and agree on sub-projects. Some mixed-gender CDCs have been established in Kabul.⁸ Also worthy of note is that some cities have NSP CDCs which, due to expanding municipal boundaries, have been incorporated within the municipal area. Their successful functioning within such urban areas is further evidence to the viability of CDCs in cities.

A Gozar Assembly (GA) comprised of a cluster of (on average) five CDCs is the next level of the governance structure. GAs are mixed-gender, composed of representatives from the CDCs, and reflect the cultural history of the 'Wakili Gozar'. The GA mandate is to address larger-scale issues and act as the institutional link between CDCs and the Nahia (city Police District). In some programmes GAs also receive support for sub-projects at the Gozar level (e.g. upgrading of main roads).

CDCs and GAs regularly assume other functions beyond sub-projects. For example some have taken the initiative to develop neighborhood conflict resolution sub-committees, livelihoods support projects, support vulnerable households, and implement literacy skills development initiatives. Rather than a parallel structure, CDCs and GAs are locally accepted institutions that help build municipal capacity for inclusive service delivery. This is indeed the ultimate objective: strengthening municipalities and fostering a sense of civic responsibility for improved state-society relations.

Community contribution is an important component of urban upgrading and a demonstration of increased civic responsibility. Contribution can be cash or in-kind. Experience has shown that in low and middle income neighborhoods, contributions of between 25% - 40% of total sub-project cost are possible if the residents lead the process, trust the facilitating partner, and see for themselves the direct results from their investment. In high income neighborhoods the contribution requirement and potential is higher. Ironically, securing contribution from the wealthiest neighborhoods proves more difficult whereas the poorest residents are usually more willing and ready to contribute. This can partly be attributed to the fact that urban upgrading increases de-facto tenure security so that the poorest, living under fear of eviction and social exclusion, are more motivated to be officially recognized by the municipality and engaged in settlement regularization and upgrading.

Community-based urban upgrading

Similar to village CDCs, urban CDCs are supported with mobilization and establishment, action planning, sub-project implementation and social audit.



Upgrading in CDC 11, District 5, Jalalabad

- CDC #11 is located in District 5 of Jalalabad. It has 2,657 people/296 households living in the area.
- The project cost was 165,769 USD, comprising the donor investment of 107,750 USD (45 USD per person), and community contribution of 35% (58,019 USD); each house contributed on average 196 USD.
- 2.2 Km/12,634km² of paved streets were laid. The average cost was 13 USD per m².
- The project was completed within 19 months (5 months community mobilization and action planning, 3 months project preparation, 11 months construction).



7. An online 'googlemaps' tool that shows the CDCs and Gozar boundaries, and their sub-projects, was recently launched. See for example: <https://mapsengine.google.com/map/edit?mid=zj74xe8ugu5w.kqa1KjDxLS34> The vision is that this tool will be scaled-up to include all urban programmes within cities to improve transparency, accountability and monitoring of urban development interventions.

8. UN-Habitat (2014) Mixed-Gender CDCs in the Programme "Community driven settlement upgrading to reintegrate Returnees and IDPs 2012-2014". Internal Report, UN-Habitat: Kabul.

Achieving impact

Beyond the concrete and physical outputs, the wider impacts of community-based urban development demonstrate that the approach is a very cost-effective, efficient, and contextually appropriate way to address the critical challenges facing Afghanistan's cities.^{9 10} Additionally it establishes the governance mechanism for people to be responsible to manage their affairs.

Because the process is just as important as the outputs, it directly builds sub-national governance capacities and legitimacy and leads to important social benefits and impacts. These include (i) improved community cohesion and solidarity with reduced ethnic tensions and greater sense of national unity¹¹; (ii) the sustainable (re)integration of IDPs and returnees¹²; (iii) increased sense of belonging in cities and improved relations with municipality; and (iv) an improved engagement of women and youth in civic life and decision making. Because communities lead the process, and invest their own resources, they feel a sense of ownership over the improvements and ensure adequate maintenance.

Economically, the community-led approach harnesses significant community contributions to project costs (on average 30%), creates jobs, strengthens livelihood assets, and stimulates the local economy. It is estimated that the community-led approach is only half of the cost of 'top-down' urban upgrading programmes. Regularisation and formalisation through incremental upgrading increases de-facto tenure security which is a catalyst for private sector investment. When residents feel secure they improve their houses, open businesses, and use their dwellings as productive assets. Upgraded streets and greater access to services improves resident health, wellbeing and safety; reduces travel time; and improves the overall quality of life. State legitimacy is increased as municipalities are seen to deliver services as improved access increases the mobility of police and state authorities in previously neglected and socially excluded neighbourhoods.

Challenges and lessons learnt

There are several notable challenges with community-based urban upgrading. First, the current approach is too piecemeal. There is insufficient connection of CDC plans and projects with broader city infrastructure and planning. For example, a secondary drain in one CDC only functions effectively if it is connected to the primary municipal drain. Cascading spatial plans are needed (Municipal, Nahia, Gozar and CDC levels) to ensure effective city functioning, management and sustainable use of development investments.

Second, it is important to highlight that community-based upgrading takes time, particularly for community mobilization and the building of trust (between partners and within communities). While rural NSP villages typically have strong

Urban solidarity reach in numbers

For over a decade, UN-Habitat has been directly supporting the Afghan government and municipalities with community-based neighbourhood upgrading at scale:

1.5 million Afghans directly engaged through **645 CDCs** equating to over **170,000** households; an estimated **19%** of the urban population. Over **75,000,000** USD invested through community block grants with **average** of **23%** community contribution equating to over **17 million USD mobilised**.

Economic impact of upgrading¹³

As part of the Kabul Solidarity Programme (KSP), in September 2012 eight CDCs and two GAs were established in District 9, Kabul. Improving the main roads and drainage was prioritized by the male and female CDCs. In total 4.2Km of concrete streets were laid. The community contributed 25% of the project cost equating to 308,489 USD. The project was completed within 18 months.



Impacts include:

- 50% reduction in transport costs: standard taxi fares dropped from 200 to 100 Afs;
- 3x the number of shops and bakeries (nanwai) as residents felt secure to invest and as their customer base increased;
- Reduction in household medical costs as fewer number of health cases as a result of the cleaner environment;
- 1/4 of households invested in housing improvements such as renovations and additions due to improved de-facto tenure security;
- Improved functioning of local businesses (large and small), including longer opening hours due to improved safety and accessibility.

9. The benefits of a community-based approach are also evident in the latest evaluations of the National Solidarity Programme: ATOS Consulting (2014) NSP – Phase III Financial and Economic Analysis, Final Report. ATOS Consulting, August 2014

10. See for example these video clips from the Community-Based Municipal Support Programme (CBMSP): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eit7Wk4Qy04>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wfe9fijyMA>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JQtZmWGgU>

11. European Union (2013) "Monitoring Report of Community driven settlement upgrading to reintegrate Returnees and IDPs Programme, 2012-2014 MR-146307.01" 26 July 2013

12. See programme overview here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D66otYRx-q5U&list=PLTQZbEc6Bv59WAtH9qBNPDhNfraaw10hy&index=5>

13. <http://unhabitat.org/publications/streets-as-tools-for-urban-transformation-in-slums/>

14. NSP Facilitating Partners Representative Group (2014) Sustaining Solidarity. Independent Report, November 2014

historical social ties between community members, this is not always the case in cities. It can take a year or more to mobilize communities and build trust; this process cannot be expedited.

Third, we lack a clearly defined institutional/regulatory framework for urban CDCs. CDCs in Municipalities are not legally recognized as a sub-national governance entity and limited national guidance exists on their formation and functioning, which hinders the replication and scaling up of the approach. Furthermore, variable requirements/standards for the percentage of community contributions in different donor-funded projects undermines the work of all actors, is unfair for communities, weakens state legitimacy, and can be a driver of conflict.

Fourth, there has been a disproportionate focus on civil engineering sub-projects. An urban solidarity programme needs to be more than concrete roads and drains. It should also consider local economic development and productive infrastructure, and environmental and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) interventions. Furthermore, while some progress has been made, there remains insufficient meaningful engagement of women, youth, IDPs, and other vulnerable and marginalized groups who have not been systematically brought into the process and participating to their full potential. This needs to be rectified in future programming.

Shifting from communities to governance

While the "People's Process" is effective in 'getting things done', UN-Habitat advocates for a shift toward institutionalizing people's participation within a more responsive governance framework whereby the state asserts and fulfills its primary role in service delivery. Although people's participation is important, citizens should not completely assume what are essentially the responsibilities of the state. Linking CDCs with Municipal Advisory Boards (MABs), which are essentially interim municipal councils, is one step forward and is showing positive results.

CDCs and Gozars should be officially recognized, strengthened and institutionalized. Institutionalizing CDCs means moving beyond CDCs as the time-bound vehicles to implement sub-projects. It means they should hear and articulate citizens' needs and priorities to the Nahia, Municipality (including the Municipal Advisory Boards) and line departments for improved service delivery. In the short term, in the absence of an effective tax system, CDCs should support through the mobilization of community contributions to build a sense of ownership that helps to finance projects. CDCs should take a role in oversight and monitoring, holding state institutions accountable, and proactively foster a culture of civic responsibility and national unity. This proposed shift toward institutionalization of CDCs is also the case in districts and villages with the NSP.¹⁴

Ways forward

- Recognize and value the enormous potential of citizens to contribute to urban development and to be drivers of neighborhood upgrading and regularization, and give them the opportunity to do it in a structured manner;
- Draw lessons from the rural National Solidarity Programme (NSP) but recognize that there are considerable differences between urban and rural areas. A simple 'copy-paste' of the NSP to cities will not work because cities are far more complex, socially heterogeneous, dynamic, and pressured by market forces than villages;
- Undertake a thorough assessment/evaluation of the lessons learned and impact from a decade of urban solidarity programming to contribute to new and comprehensive programme and policy design;
- Improve the policy and regulatory framework to institutionalize CDCs, including legalizing CDCs as a key sub-national governance entity and develop guidance/by-laws on urban CDCs and standard community contribution rates;
- Invest in improving municipal capacity, which is a pre-requisite for institutionalizing community development and community-based neighborhood upgrading.

UN-Habitat recognises the development partners that have supported urban CDCs and upgrading over the past decade:



The State of Afghan Cities 2014/15 Programme is a one-year programme supported by the Government of Australia and implemented in conjunction with the Government of Afghanistan, that aims to improve knowledge and information on urbanization in Afghanistan by undertaking a detailed review of all 34 provincial capitals. A detailed State of Afghan Cities 2014/15 Report will be published mid-2015.

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