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## The National Solidarity Programme

Assessing the effects of community-driven development in  
Afghanistan

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### Abstract

This paper describes the results of an impact evaluation of the National Solidarity Programme, a community-driven development programme in Afghanistan that created democratic village councils and funded small-scale development projects. Using a randomized controlled trial across 500 villages, we find that the programme had a positive effect on access to drinking water and electricity, acceptance of democratic processes, perceptions of economic wellbeing, and participation of and attitudes towards women. Effects on perceptions of local and national government performance and material economic outcomes were, however, more limited or short-lived. We also find that the programme negatively impacted the quality of local governance as perceived by male villagers.

Keywords: community-driven development, international aid, randomized controlled trial, Afghanistan, public goods provision

JEL classification: H41, O10, O22

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## 1 Introduction

Since the mid-1980s, development agencies have increasingly utilized community-based approaches to project delivery (Dongier et al. 2002; Mansuri and Rao 2012, Wong 2012).<sup>1</sup> The popularity of such approaches—termed community-driven development (CDD)—grew in response to the perceived failure of ‘top-down’ programmatic modalities to respond to beneficiaries (Escobar 1995; Scott 1998), while also being spurred by academic literature that affirmed the ability of communities to solve collective action problems (Cernea 1985; Hirschman 1970, 1984; Ostrom 1990; Sen 1985, 1999). CDD programmes emphasize participatory planning, with community members identifying and implementing projects tailored to their specific development priorities (Dongier et al. 2002; Wong 2012; Chambers 1983). In addition to providing for better-targeted and more efficient projects, it is hypothesized that CDD may increase participation in local institutions and, with it, build social capital (Narayan 2002).

The largest development programme in Afghanistan—the National Solidarity Programme (NSP)—is based on CDD principles. Conceived soon after the institution of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, NSP seeks to extend the administrative reach of the state, build representative institutions for local governance, and deliver critical services to the rural population. In villages covered by the programme, NSP facilitates the creation of a gender-balanced Community Development Council (CDC) through a secret ballot, universal suffrage election in order to ensure that the preferences of villagers are fairly represented. Once established, the CDC drafts a community development plan in conjunction with villagers and develops proposals for village-level development projects. Provided that proposals meet certain basic criteria, NSP disburses block grants to CDCs to fund project implementation. In each cycle, the value of block grants may reach US\$200 per household up to a community maximum of US\$60,000. Since its inauguration in 2003, NSP has established 32,000 CDCs across Afghanistan’s 34 provinces and has financed nearly 65,000 development projects.

Following the implementation of the first phase of NSP from 2003 to 2007, international donors and the Afghanistan government requested that the programme be subjected to rigorous independent evaluation. In conjunction with a financial constraint that limited the number of villages in each district that could be covered by the programme between 2007-11, this led to the development of the NSP impact evaluation (NSP-IE). To provide statistically unbiased estimates of programme impacts, the NSP-IE randomized the roll-out of NSP across 500 villages in 10 districts spanning northern, eastern, central, and western Afghanistan, with 250 ‘treatment’ villages receiving NSP in 2007 and 250 ‘control’ villages not receiving NSP until 2012. Midline estimates were provided by a comparison of economic, political, and social indicators in treatment and control villages in 2009, with endline estimates provided by a comparison of the same indicators in 2011.

The results of the impact evaluation indicate that NSP has had important impacts on rural communities despite the pressing challenges presented by the country context. NSP-funded utilities projects substantially increased access to drinking water and electricity and the programme had a durable impact on villagers’ perceptions of the local economy, particularly among women. Procedures mandated by NSP for CDC elections improved acceptance of

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<sup>1</sup> As of 2012, the World Bank supported approximately 400 community-driven development projects in 94 countries (Wong 2012).

democratic processes, increasing the number of men and women who vote in national elections and the proportion of male villagers that prefer local elections over customary processes for selecting village leaders. Finally, despite cultural constraints to female involvement in the public sphere, NSP increased the openness of village men to female political and social participation, improved the access of village women to local governance services and support networks, increased the frequency by which women travel beyond their villages, and boosted female school enrolment and visits by women to medical facilities.

In many other respects, however, the impacts of NSP were more limited and sometimes negative. During project implementation, NSP improved perceptions of the central and sub-national government, but this effect faded after project completion. NSP-funded infrastructure projects, such as the rehabilitation of irrigation canals and local roads, had no observed impact on crop yields or travel times from the village to the district centre. As a result and even though the programme markedly improved perceptions of the local economy both during and after project implementation, NSP had a limited impact on objective economic outcomes such as household consumption, asset ownership, or food insecurity. Despite the positive effects observed on appreciation of democratic norms, the institutional relevance of CDCs diminished significantly following project completion and there was no evidence that the institutional innovation altered the identity of de facto village leaders. Somewhat surprisingly, we find that, following project completion, NSP negatively impacted how male villagers perceive the quality of local governance institutions.

The NSP-IE provides some instructive lessons for development interventions in fragile contexts. The relative success of utilities projects compared to infrastructure projects indicates that tangible, capital-intensive investments (such as the installation of generators) are more likely than less tangible, labour-intensive activities (such as local road rehabilitation) to benefit a broad section of villagers. Of particular importance to state-building efforts, that NSP only temporarily improved perceptions of central and sub-national government demonstrates the extent to which government legitimacy is contingent on the continued delivery of services rather than improved development outcomes per se. The durable positive effects of NSP on acceptance of democratic norms and female participation indicate that the mandating of such practices by development programmes can provide an important impetus in spurring social change. However, the relative ineffectiveness of CDC creation in changing de facto village leadership structures and the negative impact on perceived local governance quality indicates that the creation of new institutions in parallel to customary structures may not have the desired effect, particularly in cases in which the roles of new institutions are not well-defined.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the history and characteristics of NSP; Section 3 looks at the development context in Afghanistan; Section 4 presents hypotheses of how NSP was expected to impact development outcomes; Section 5 reviews the methodology and data sources used for the impact evaluation; Section 6 presents the results of how NSP impacted economic, institutional, and social outcomes; Section 7 discusses the implications of the findings for development projects in Afghanistan and other fragile environments; Section 8 places the findings in the context of other CDD evaluations and discusses the role of rigorous impact evaluations of CDD programmes; and Section 9 concludes.

## 2 Programme description: the National Solidarity Programme

NSP is executed by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, funded by the World Bank and a consortium of bilateral donors, and implemented by 8 national and 21 international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), known as facilitating partners (FPs), contracted to implement NSP in individual districts. Programme implementation is structured around two major interventions at the village level:<sup>2</sup>

- The election of a gender-balanced Community Development Council through a secret ballot, universal suffrage election centered on democratic processes and women's participation.<sup>3</sup>
- The provision of 'block grants'—valued at US\$200 per household, up to a village maximum of US\$60,000 and averaging US\$33,000—disbursed to support implementation of village-level projects designed and selected by CDCs in consultation with villagers.<sup>4</sup>

Projects financed by NSP generally fall into one of six categories: transport; water and sanitation; irrigation; power; literacy and vocational training; and other (Figure 1). Between mid-2003 and early 2013, over 64,000 projects were initiated under NSP, with a total combined budget of US\$1.01 billion. The 2012-13 Afghan government budget allocated US\$208 million in funding to NSP, making it the largest development programme in the country (World Bank 2013).<sup>5</sup>

In each village, NSP implementation takes approximately three years. The process of facilitating CDC elections usually takes about six months, after which an average of twelve months elapse before project implementation starts, as CDCs and villagers design projects, submit proposals, receive funds, and, if necessary, procure contractors. Project construction lasts an average of nine months.

Due to the large number of villages in Afghanistan and programmatic resource constraints, participating villages have only received one round of NSP related block grants. Once implementation of NSP in a village concludes, villages have no assurance of when—or if—they will receive further NSP activities, either in the form of facilitated CDC elections or block grants. In the current third phase of the programme, NSP is extending repeater block grants to around 12,000 villages mobilized in the programme's first phase between 2003 and 2007 and which have not participated in NSP for 8-10 years.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Villages must have more than 25 households to form a unitary CDC, although smaller villages may form joint CDCs with larger villages.

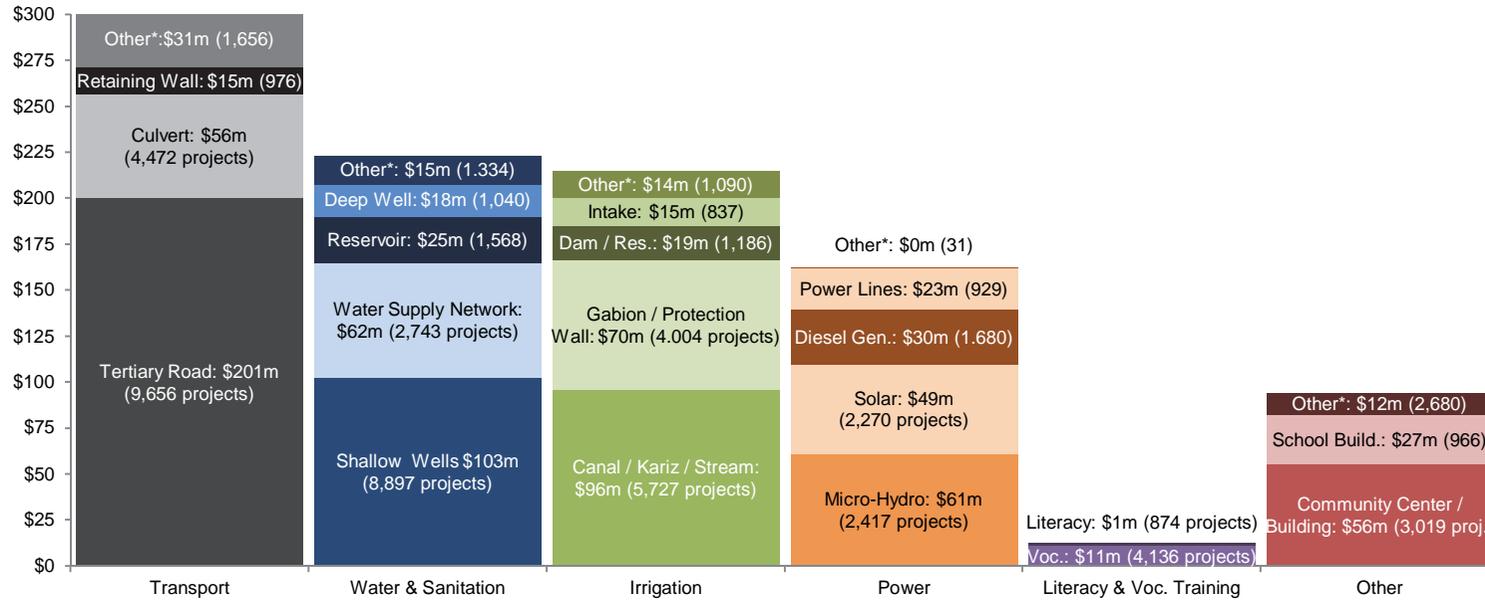
<sup>3</sup> Villages are divided into 'clusters' of between five and twenty families, with each cluster electing a male and female representative to the CDC. The CDC is headed by an executive council composed of a president, deputy president, secretary, and treasurer.

<sup>4</sup> NSP features a 'negative list', which bans certain types of projects from receiving funding (including mosque construction, land purchases, payment of salaries to CDC members, purchase of weapons, and cultivation of illegal crops). Eligible projects are generally approved by NSP provided they are endorsed through a village-wide consultation process; provide for equitable access; are technically and financially sound; include an operation and maintenance plan; and are funded by the community (including labour and material contributions) up to a level exceeding 10 per cent of the total cost.

<sup>5</sup> 73 per cent of NSP funding is allocated to block grants, 18 per cent to facilitation costs, and 9 per cent to administration.

<sup>6</sup> NSP Phase-III also intends to mobilize the remaining 16,000 villages that have yet to receive the programme.

Figure 1: Projects financed by NSP, by aggregate funding allocated



Note: Data obtained from NSP sub-project monitoring database and covers 64,188 phase I, II, and III projects initiated in 29,705 communities between 12 July 2003 and 9 January 2013. 'Other' transport projects include pathways (US\$10m, 643 projects); bridges (US\$7m, 297); and secondary roads (US\$6m, 303). 'Other' water and sanitation projects include latrines (US\$5m, 566); public baths (US\$5m, 306); and hand pumps (US\$4m, 328). 'Other' irrigation projects include water divider construction (US\$5m, 421), pipe schemes (US\$3m, 205), and aqueducts (US\$3m, 265). 'Other' other projects include livelihoods projects (US\$9m, 2,549) and health facilities (US\$2m, 122).

Source: Beath et al. (2013d).

### 3 Fragile state context

Afghanistan's population is overwhelmingly rural, with 80 per cent of the population living outside the country's regional and provincial centers.<sup>7</sup> Due to the country's topography, unreliable rainfall, and history of civil conflict, those living in rural areas suffer from tenuous agriculture-based livelihoods and limited access to basic amenities, such as clean drinking water, reliable irrigation, and electricity. During the past ten years, various donor-funded interventions have attempted to enhance food security, improve economic opportunities, and improve access to basic infrastructure. However, the incidence of poverty in rural areas remains very high, with Afghanistan ranking among the bottom 15 countries in the world in UNDP's Human Development Index.

Due to conflict and a lack of state consolidation, Afghanistan's central government has historically been weak and unable to exercise control and provide services to rural areas. In response, rural communities developed informal yet sophisticated customary local governance structures. The foundation of these structures is the local *jirga* or *shura*, a participatory council that has traditionally managed local public goods and adjudicated disputes (Barfield 1984; Nojumi et al. 2004). Council members tend to be the male elders of families in the village (Rahmani 2006). Councils convene when there is an issue to resolve and reach decisions based on consensus (Boesen 2004). In addition to councils, villages ordinarily have a headman (termed a *malik*, *arbab*, or *qariyadar*)—usually a large landowner—who liaises with the central government (Kakar 2005). The local religious authority, the *mullah*, is responsible for conducting rites and services and mediating disputes involving family or moral issues (Rahmani 2006).

In rural Afghanistan, women are generally barred from activities outside the household and hidden from public view (*purdah*) in order to preserve their honour (*gheirat*). These norms render local governance a strictly male-dominated activity (Boesen 2004). Female mobility is also constrained by customs that require a woman travelling outside her village to have a male relative as an escort. Even within the village, women often face restrictions on their movement. As a result, girls are usually prevented from attending school beyond fourth grade and, without education or mobility, they are provided with few opportunities to generate income or to exercise control over any assets they may possess.

### 4 Hypotheses

The goals and structure of NSP, as well as existing qualitative research on the programme, provide five broad categories of outcomes of interest: (i) access to services, infrastructure, and utilities; (ii) economic welfare; (iii) local governance; (iv) political attitudes and state-building; and (v) social norms. The hypotheses on the direction of these effects, given the inputs and processes of NSP, are described in the respective sections below.

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<sup>7</sup> Icon Institute (2009: 11).

#### **4.1 Access to services, infrastructure, and utilities**

NSP disburses block grants to finance village-level projects focused on transportation, water and sanitation, irrigation, or electricity.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, NSP generally, and the completion of NSP-financed projects specifically, is expected to improve the following outcomes: access to clean drinking water; access to electricity; access to irrigation; and village accessibility and mobility. The use of participatory processes in project selection should also enable NSP to successfully meet the ex-ante project preferences of villagers.

NSP may also indirectly affect outcomes pertaining to services facilitated by NSP activities, but not directly related to NSP projects. The creation of a gender-balanced CDC may improve women's access to informal counselling networks by providing a venue whereby village women can legitimately gather. Children's access to education may also improve as a result of transportation projects, as well as due to impacts of NSP on local security, educational outcomes, and the value placed on male and/or female education. Similarly, NSP may improve access to health services and health outcomes due to the effects of water and sanitation projects on the incidence of water-borne diseases; the effects of transport projects in reducing travel times to administrative centres; and the effects of the creation of gender-balanced CDCs in expanding general female mobility.

#### **4.2 Economic welfare**

NSP activities may impact broader economic outcomes in the short term due to the 'stimulus' effect from the infusion of block grants (which average US\$33,000) and in the medium term due to the completion of village infrastructure projects. In the short term, the infusion of block grants should increase local disposable income through activities such as the payment of wages to labourers and procurement of raw materials.<sup>9</sup> This effect is expected to be temporary in nature, but may nonetheless contribute to inducing short-term increases in economic perceptions, income security, consumption, and household assets, while reducing the incidence of borrowing for food and medical needs, food insecurity, and out-migration from the village.

In the medium-term, the completion of infrastructure projects should produce general improvements in economic outcomes. Increases in the availability of irrigation should increase land use, agricultural productivity, yields, and thereby farm income. Improvements in road and bridge infrastructure should reduce the cost of transporting goods to the market, increase commercialization of agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, and increase sales revenue. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that, in the medium term, NSP will improve both productivity and access to markets in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, which in turn will produce improvements in economic perceptions, income security, consumption, and household assets, while reducing borrowing for food and medical needs, food insecurity, and out-migration from the village.

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<sup>8</sup> Transportation projects encompass tertiary resurfacing and rehabilitation and the construction of bridges and culverts; water and sanitation projects include well-boring, latrines, and supply systems; irrigation projects cover flood protection walls, water reservoirs, dams, canals, *kari*; and power projects include diesel, solar, and micro-hydro generators and power lines. In addition, NSP also regularly finances literacy and vocational training courses and the construction of community centres.

<sup>9</sup> Data from Male Focus Group respondents indicates that treatment villagers received an average of US\$10,067 (median is US\$1,800) during the past three years in wages paid for project construction/implementation, with per household payments averaging US\$58 (median: US\$12).

### 4.3 Local governance

A key objective of NSP is to build local governance structures centered on democratic processes and female participation. The creation by NSP of gender-balanced CDCs through secret-ballot, universal suffrage elections represents a decisive change in local governance structures, both by mandating the participation of women in local decision-making and by affiliating existing and/or new local leaders with the new institution. Accordingly, the creation of CDCs is expected to induce an immediate change in the structure of local governance in Afghan villages by incorporating new individuals into the local leadership; affiliating village leaders with representative assemblies; and increasing female representation in local institutions.

By imposing electoral accountability, CDCs are expected to induce local leaders to increase the provision of local public services. In addition, NSP is also expected to increase the involvement of representative assemblies, such as CDCs, in local governance services. While it is feasible that NSP may worsen local governance by inducing the return of malign local actors or weakening constraints on elite behaviour through the diffusion of institutional responsibility across multiple local bodies,<sup>10</sup> it is hypothesized that the overall effect will be positive, principally by empowering a more responsive cadre of local leaders and/or improving the behaviour of existing leaders. Thus, NSP is expected to improve overall perceptions of the quality of local governance and reduce informal taxation by village leaders. Through a positive demonstration effect, NSP is also expected to increase demands for the involvement of representative assemblies in the provision of local governance services and increase the participation of villagers in local governance activities.

### 4.4 Political attitudes and state-building

Customary local leaders in rural Afghanistan ordinarily inherit their positions or are chosen by existing local elites. By mandating the selection of local leaders by secret ballot, universal suffrage election, NSP directly involves villagers in a historically unprecedented application of democratic procedures.<sup>11</sup> Assuming that CDC elections meet with the satisfaction of participating villagers,<sup>12</sup> NSP has the potential to increase knowledge and appreciation of the use of democratic or otherwise participatory processes in political decision-making and leader selection. If successful, NSP may also indirectly increase participation in national elections and/or villagers' civic knowledge.

The volume of resources provided by NSP block grants is also historically unprecedented. Given the distrust of the central government in rural Afghanistan, NSP serves an implicit state-building function. If positively received, NSP should thus improve perceptions of central and sub-national government, as well as government-allied actors such as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and NGOs. Greater support for the

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<sup>10</sup> For discussion of the constraints imposed by customary authorities in rural Afghanistan and how CDC creation may weaken these, see Brick (2008). Persson et al. (1997) formalize how diffusion of institutional responsibility worsens governance outcomes.

<sup>11</sup> Former Minister of Finance Ashraf Ghani writes that '[t]he intent of [NSP] was to address the process of democratization from the group level up, in parallel to the process of constitution making and rule writing at the center' (Ghani and Lockhart 2008: 206-8).

<sup>12</sup> Monitoring data from CDC elections in treatment villages indicates that is overwhelmingly the case. See Beath et al. (2008b) and Beath, Christia, Enikolopov, and Kabuli (2009a, 2009b).

government may in turn increase acceptance of central government authority and engagement between villages and government agents. Such changes in the perceptions of government and acceptance of government authority may occur in the short-term as a direct response to the infusion of block grant resources or in the longer term as NSP-funded projects effectively improve development outcomes.

If successful in improving perceptions of the government and/or government-allied agents, NSP may concomitantly reduce sympathies for insurgents that exploit popular dissatisfaction with government policies.<sup>13</sup> As per counter-insurgency doctrine,<sup>14</sup> insurgents are ordinarily dependent on local populations for recruits, asymmetric intelligence, and shelter, such reductions in popular support can cripple the capability of insurgents to mount attacks in the surrounding area. This should, in turn, reduce localized violence and improve perceptions of security. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that if NSP improves perceptions of the government, this should be accompanied by a reduction in expressions of insurgent support by the population, such as payments of informal taxation to insurgents, by reduction in localized violence, as well as by improved perceptions of the local security situation.

#### **4.5 Social norms**

A key aspect of NSP—as with CDD programmes generally—is the use of inclusive, participatory practices (such as elections, consultation meetings, referenda, and community contributions) to propose, select, and implement projects. In bringing villagers together to make important decisions and work collaboratively to improve village infrastructure, NSP may thereby improve social cohesion within villages, which should manifest itself in increased levels of interpersonal trust, while reducing the overall number of disputes among villagers.

Literacy and vocational training courses, which accounted for 16 per cent of projects in NSP-funded villages, may improve basic reading comprehension among women, to whom they are ordinarily targeted. Vocational training courses, which impart a wide range of skills, may also improve the ability of women to complete basic calculations. In addition to these direct impacts, the participatory nature of project implementation and management prescribed by NSP may indirectly improve (or ‘resurrect’) literacy and computational ability among both male and female villagers. Accordingly, NSP is hypothesized to improve literacy and mathematical ability.

Given the cultural constraints that often preclude female involvement in local public affairs in rural Afghanistan, NSP makes provisions to ensure that women are not excluded from programme processes. These include mandating female participation in CDC elections, reserving half of CDC positions for women, and requiring at least one project per village to be prioritized by women. Such provisions provide female villagers with an opportunity to exhibit their capabilities while demonstrating the unfounded nature of the pretexts used to justify exclusionary practices. As such and given complementary evidence in other contexts, (Beaman et al. 2009; and Bhavnani 2009), NSP may induce a general relaxation of restrictive attitudes toward female participation in local governance, political affairs, and general economic and social activity, while also easing objections to the education of girls.

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<sup>13</sup> In rural Afghanistan, this includes the Taliban and paramilitary commanders and accompanying militias that opt to align either with the government or with insurgents and which regularly switch alliances.

<sup>14</sup> See U.S. Army/Marine Corps (2006) and Berman et al. (2011).

If successful in easing cultural constraints to female economic, educational, social and political participation and absent other prevailing constraints, such attitudinal changes should be accompanied by improvements in gender outcomes. Specifically, women should be increasingly involved in local governance beyond the immediate remit of the CDC. In addition, female social activity and mobility would be expected to improve, as would female participation in economic activity and decision-making. Finally, if NSP is indeed successful at improving access to services, increasing participation in local governance, and building social cohesion, it is hypothesized that this may also result in an increased level of reported happiness of male and female villagers.

## **5 Methodology and data sources**

The NSP impact evaluation (NSP-IE) is based on a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of the second phase of NSP. In mid-2007, 500 villages eligible for the programme were selected jointly with NSP and implementing partners for participation in the impact evaluation. The 500 villages are equally spread across 10 districts in Balkh, Baghlan, Daykundi, Ghor, Herat, and Nangarhar provinces. With the exception of the south, the sample covers all major regions of the country. The ten districts also provide a depiction of Afghanistan's ethno-linguistic diversity, with five predominantly Tajik districts, four predominantly Pashtun districts, and one predominantly Hazara district. The districts of Balkh and Gulran also contain significant numbers of Uzbek and Turkmen minorities, respectively.

Using a matched-pair cluster randomization procedure—facilitated by a constraint on NSP funding that necessitated rationing of programme implementation across eligible villages—250 of the 500 villages were randomly selected to receive NSP in 2007 and comprise the treatment group for the study, with the remaining villages assigned to the control group.<sup>15</sup> The matched-pair cluster randomization facilitates a transparent and unbiased estimation of programme impacts by ensuring that the background characteristics of the treatment group are, on average, identical to the control group. Accordingly, any differences that arise between the two groups of villages are attributable to NSP.

Baseline, midline, and endline surveys administered between August 2007 and October 2011 provide data for the study. Collectively, the surveys comprised over 25,000 household interviews with male and female villagers, as well as more than 2,600 focus groups with male village leaders and women. The midline survey is used to estimate impacts of NSP two years after the start of NSP implementation and after all treatment villages had elected CDCs and selected projects, but prior to the completion of 82 per cent of NSP-funded projects. The endline survey is used to estimate impacts four years after implementation and after 99 per cent of NSP-funded projects had been completed, but prior to the implementation of NSP in control villages.

Treatment villages in the sample commenced NSP implementation following the baseline survey in late 2007, with almost all treatment villages completing the programme in 2011. As is the case with most other villages mobilized by NSP across rural Afghanistan, treatment villages have to-date received only one phase of the programme. Although the third phase of NSP proposes to provide follow-up block grants to villages previously mobilized by the

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<sup>15</sup> Villages assigned to the control group received NSP in 2012.

programme, it has not yet been determined when this will occur for treatment villages in our sample.

## 6 Results

This section presents estimates of the midline and endline impacts for the 21 groups of indicators across the five categories listed in Table 1 and presented in the hypothesis section above.

Table 1: Families and groups of indicators

Access to utilities	Economic welfare	Local governance	Political attitudes	Social norms
Utilities	Perceptions	Structure	Democratic values	Social cohesion
Services	Stocks and flows	Function	State legitimacy	Literacy and math
Infrastructure	Production and marketing	Quality and participation	Perceptions of government	Happiness
Project preferences	Migration	Village benefit dist.	Conflict	Gender attitudes
				Gender outcomes

Source: Beath et al. (2013d).

### 6.1 Access to utilities, services and infrastructure

NSP improves the access of villagers to basic utilities. NSP-funded drinking water projects increase access to clean drinking water, with the programme increasing usage of protected sources by 15 per cent at endline. NSP also induces a 5 per cent reduction in the time that households spend collecting water, although it has no lasting impact on perceived water quality or on the incidence of water shortages. NSP substantially boosts electricity usage, which rises by 26 per cent on account of the programme. The size of these effects is substantially higher if we analyse impacts of NSP-funded water and electricity projects specifically, rather than the impact of NSP generally.

NSP also increases access to services, including education, health care, and counselling services for women. As NSP does not usually fund such services, these impacts appear to indirectly arise from other changes induced by NSP. While there is no impact on boys' school attendance, NSP increases girls' school attendance and their quality of learning. NSP further increases child doctor and prenatal visits and the probability that an illness or injury is attended to by a medical professional, although it does not affect other health outcomes. Finally, NSP more than doubles the proportion of women who have a group or person with whom they can discuss their problems.

NSP-funded infrastructure projects in irrigation and transportation, however, appear to be less successful. Specifically, irrigation projects have no impact on the ability of land-holding villagers to access sufficient irrigation. Although there is weak evidence that transportation projects increase village accessibility at midline, the impact does not persist and there is no evidence of impacts on transportation costs or times or on the mobility of male villagers.

There is weak evidence to indicate that, once complete, NSP-funded projects fulfil the development needs of male villagers, as measured by relative changes in the types of projects that are identified as being most needed by the village. NSP particularly reduces the need for drinking water projects, which were identified as necessary by a higher proportion of male villagers than any other projects at baseline.

The size of the impact of these results in the aggregate categories of indicators is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Test for aggregate impact of NSP on access to utilities, services and infrastructure

	Endline		Midline	
	Coefficient	<i>p</i> -Value	Coefficient	<i>p</i> -Value
<u>Access to utilities</u>	0.071	0.006	0.058	0.018
Access to clean drinking water	0.064	0.028	0.060	0.023
Access to electricity	0.108	0.045	0.051	0.300
<u>Access to services</u>	0.055	0.000	0.022	0.065
Access to female counseling	0.192	0.001	0.219	0.000
Access to education	0.058	0.035	-	-
Health outcomes/access to health services	0.009	0.013	0.040	0.597
<u>Access to infrastructure</u>	0.005	0.872	0.023	0.209
Access to irrigation	0.015	0.696	-	-
Village accessibility and villager mobility	0.026	0.669	0.202	0.174

Note: Coefficients and *p*-values for the mean average treatment effect for all indicators grouped in the hypothesis or in hypotheses that pertain to the particular group or family.

Source: Beath et al. (2013d).

## 6.2 Economic welfare

NSP impacts the economic perceptions and optimism of villagers, particularly women. Female villagers exhibit improved perceptions of the current economic situation and are more optimistic about future changes in the local economy, both at midline and endline. The economic perceptions and optimism of male villagers improve at midline, but there is only weak evidence of an impact at endline on optimism and no evidence of a longer-term impact on perceptions.

Despite the notable changes in economic perceptions, few impacts are observed on objective economic outcomes. At midline, there is weak evidence that NSP induces small increases in the diversity of household income sources and in caloric intake, although both impacts do not persist after project completion. At endline, there is weak evidence of impact on the amount borrowed by households. NSP appears to have no robust impacts at midline or endline on income levels, income regularity, consumption levels, consumption allocations, assets, or food insecurity.

There is also no evidence that NSP impacts general production and marketing outcomes. NSP has no discernible impacts on agricultural yields, productivity, or the proportion of harvests

sold, although the programme induces a fleeting increase at midline in agricultural sales revenue. NSP also does not affect whether households sell animals or animal products or the revenue derived from such activities. While NSP increases handicraft sales and sales revenue at midline, these impacts disappear following project completion.

At endline and midline, there is evidence that NSP increases net household migration, although both results lose statistical significance if migration patterns at baseline are controlled for. In addition, there is no evidence at endline that NSP induces any changes in net within-household migration.

The impacts of NSP on economic welfare appear to be driven primarily by the infusion of block grant resources rather than by broader impacts of completed projects on economic activity. This underscores the absence of positive effects of infrastructure projects on agricultural productivity and access to markets and that other more successful types of projects (such as water and electricity) do not induce changes in objective economic outcomes. However, the sustained positive impact on female economic perceptions demonstrates the broader improvements brought to women's lives by female participation in CDC activities and by NSP-funded drinking water projects. The size of the impact of these results in the aggregate categories of indicators is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Test for aggregate impact of NSP on economic welfare

	Endline		Midline	
	Coefficient	<i>p</i> -Value	Coefficient	<i>p</i> -Value
<u>Perceptions</u>	0.080	0.001	0.118	0.000
<u>Stocks and flows</u>	0.016	0.204	0.021	0.048
Security of household income	0.023	0.355	0.049	0.059
Household consumption expenditure	-0.008	0.781	0.007	0.796
Household assets	0.020	0.428	0.013	0.553
Borrowing for food and medical needs	0.056	0.168	0.009	0.721
Food security	-0.004	0.831	0.016	0.282
<u>Production and marketing</u>	0.202	0.174	0.026	0.669
Agricultural productivity	0.411	0.163	0.034	0.773
Non-agricultural productivity	-0.007	0.843	0.018	0.358
<u>Migration</u>	0.061	0.116	0.090	0.009
Net migration of households	0.164	0.080	0.187	0.026
Net migration of household members	-0.036	0.161	-	-

Note: Coefficients and *p*-values for the mean average treatment effect for all indicators grouped in the hypothesis or in hypotheses that pertain to the particular group or family.

Source: Beath et al. (2013d).

### **6.3 Local governance**

NSP impacts the structure of local governance by increasing by two-and-a-half times the proportion of local assemblies that contain at least one female member. CDC creation also causes customary leaders to affiliate with representative assemblies during project implementation, although this effect is not sustained beyond project completion. There is no evidence that NSP changes the composition of local leadership or introduces new leaders into the core group of village decision-makers.

The creation of CDCs by NSP induces an increase at midline in the provision of local governance services, the activity level of customary authorities, and the role served by representative assemblies in providing local governance services. These impacts generally do not persist following the completion of NSP activities in treatment villages, although NSP does increase the number of meetings held annually by representative assemblies. There is also strong evidence that NSP induces a durable increase in the provision of local governance services specific to women.

NSP increases villager participation in local governance at midline, as measured by meeting attendance and a desire to change leader decisions, and increases demand for the involvement of representative assemblies in local governance. However, while the desire to change leader decisions persists beyond project completion, NSP has neither a durable impact on the probability of villagers attending assembly meetings nor on the extent to which they believe assemblies should be involved in local governance.

At endline, NSP has a negative impact on local governance quality as perceived by male villagers, reducing satisfaction with the work of local leaders by 8 per cent and almost doubling dissatisfaction with the recent decisions or actions of village leaders. While NSP induces an increase at midline in the extent to which village leaders are perceived as being responsive to the needs of women, this effect is not persistent. The size of the impact of these results in the aggregate categories of indicators is presented in Table 4.

### **6.4 Political attitudes and state-building**

The evidence of NSP's impact on democratic values is mixed. There is strong evidence that NSP increased voting in the 2010 parliamentary elections, with the proportion of male and female villagers who claimed to have cast a ballot being 4 and 10 per cent higher, respectively, in treatment villages. NSP also appears to raise appreciation of democratic elections, at least as manifested by a 24 per cent increase in the proportion of male villagers who prefer that the village headman is elected. However, NSP has no effect on female views on democratic elections or participatory decision-making procedures or on the already-high proportion of male villagers who believe the president or provincial governor should be elected; who believe it appropriate to publicly discuss governance; or who support the participatory resolution of major village issues.

Table 4: Test for aggregate impact of NSP on local governance

	Endline		Midline	
	Coefficient	<i>p</i> -Value	Coefficient	<i>p</i> -Value
<u>Structure</u>	0.135	0.000	0.226	0.000
Composition of village leadership	0.009	0.769	0.001	0.977
Affiliation of leadership with representative assemblies	0.043	0.193	0.172	0.000
Female representation in local governance	0.894	0.000	1.261	0.000
<u>Function</u>	0.038	0.014	0.074	0.000
Provision of local governance services	0.009	0.636	0.030	0.054
Activity of village leadership & institutions	0.067	0.013	0.112	0.000
Role of representative assemblies	0.022	0.376	0.061	0.002
<u>Quality and participation</u>	-0.016	0.245	0.033	0.004
Participation in local governance	0.082	0.001	0.096	0.000
Perceptions of quality of local governance	-0.073	0.002	0.012	0.430
Informal taxation by village leaders	-0.037	0.426	-	-
Preferences for representative assemblies	0.031	0.149	0.045	0.029

Note: Coefficients and *p*-values for the mean average treatment effect for all indicators grouped in the hypothesis or in hypotheses that pertain to the particular group or family.

Source: Beath et al. (2013d).

There is only weak evidence that NSP increases the legitimacy of the central government. In particular, NSP has no impact on whether villagers believe that the government should exercise jurisdiction over local crimes, set the school curriculum, issue ID cards, or collect income tax. Furthermore, NSP has no impact on whether villagers prefer a centralized state or a weak federation or identify primarily as Afghan or a member of a specific ethnic group. At midline, treatment villages experience an increase in linkages with government officials and representatives of the Afghan National Security Forces, although these effects do not prove to be durable beyond the period of project implementation.

There is strong evidence that NSP improves perceptions of government at midline, but only weak evidence of an impact at endline. During project implementation, NSP induces a highly significant increase in the reported benevolence of a wide-range of government entities, but this impact mostly fades following project completion, with weak positive impacts observed only for the President and central government officials. This pattern is also true for NGO officials, although NSP has a durable positive impact on perceptions of ISAF soldiers. While the impacts of NSP on perceptions of government at midline indicate that the programme is generally perceived as government-owned, the reversion of villagers to original attitudes vis-à-vis the government once project funds are expended seems to imply that government legitimacy is tied more to the regularized provision of public goods than to development outcomes *per se*.

With respect to security, NSP does not appear to impact the likelihood of villages suffering violent attacks, at least as reported by villagers, at midline or endline. There is also no evidence that NSP affects the ability of insurgent groups to expropriate harvests. However,

NSP improves perceptions of the local security situation among both male and female villagers at midline, although only those for male villagers persist at project completion.

The size of the impact of these results in the aggregate categories of indicators is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Test for aggregate impact of NSP on political attitudes and state-building

	Endline		Midline	
	Coefficient	<i>p</i> -Value	Coefficient	<i>p</i> -Value
<u>Democratic values</u>	0.033	0.004	0.023	0.004
Acceptance of democratic norms	0.022	0.076	0.033	0.001
Electoral participation/political knowledge	0.054	0.014	0.004	0.801
<u>State legitimacy</u>	0.041	0.050	0.066	0.000
Acceptance of central government authority	0.028	0.093	0.009	0.454
Linkages between villages and government	0.071	0.245	0.201	0.000
<u>Perceptions of government</u>	0.038	0.051	0.063	0.000
Perceptions of central government	0.036	0.080	0.051	0.000
Perceptions of sub-national government	0.050	0.147	0.120	0.000
Perceptions of government-allied actors	0.034	0.102	0.058	0.005
<u>Security</u>	0.042	0.126	0.041	0.091
Violent incidents	0.042	0.495	0.023	0.665
Informal taxation by insurgent groups	-0.042	0.266	-	-
Perceptions of local security	0.045	0.168	0.061	0.030

Note: Coefficients and *p*-values for the mean average treatment effect for all indicators grouped in the hypothesis or in hypotheses that pertain to the particular group or family.

Source: Beath et al. (2013d).

## 6.5 Social norms

In line with observations that the public resource decisions can sometimes aggravate intra-communal divisions, we find weak evidence that, during project implementation, NSP increases the incidence of disputes and feuds, while reducing resolutions rates. Once projects are complete, this general effect disappears, however, and there is weak evidence that NSP slightly reduces intra-village disputes at endline. There is also some evidence at endline that NSP increases interpersonal trust among male villagers, although no evidence of a midline impact for male villagers or an impact at midline or endline for female villagers. Given the small magnitude of the observed changes, there is no overall evidence of a discernible impact of NSP on social cohesion.

During project implementation, NSP improves basic literacy and computation skills of male and female villagers, although these impacts do not last. There is also some evidence that

NSP makes villagers happier. Specifically, there is weak evidence of a reduction in the proportion of female villagers who report that they are unhappy, a result that could be caused by increased availability of counselling services for women, increased female participation in local governance, and/or increased access to basic utilities and services.

NSP increases men's acceptance of female participation in political activity and local governance. Specifically, the programme increases male acceptance of female electoral participation, national candidacy by women, and women holding civil service or NGO positions by 3, 4, and 6 per cent respectively. NSP also causes a 22 per cent increase in acceptance of female membership of village councils and a 15 per cent increase in acceptance of female participation in the selection of the village headman. The impact of NSP on women's views on female participation in political activity and local governance is more marginal. NSP also appears to have limited impacts on reducing cultural constraints limiting female educational opportunities.

Beyond attitudes, NSP has positive impacts on gender outcomes. NSP has durable positive impacts on the participation of women in local governance. Specifically, a 21 per cent increase is observed in the participation of women in dispute mediation and a 14 per cent increase is observed in the involvement of women in aid allocation. Although NSP does not appear to impact intra-village mobility of women, female socialization, or female participation in economic activity or household decision-making, it does produce a durable increase in the ability of women to travel beyond their village. Specifically, women in NSP villages are 13 per cent more likely to have visited the nearest village in the past year and 11 per cent more likely to have visited the district centre in the past month.

The size of the impact of these results in the aggregate categories of indicators is presented in Table 6.

## **7 NSP context**

The above findings indicate that despite certain notable limitations, NSP has had important successes in a challenging security and cultural environment. Years of conflict have severely damaged Afghan social and economic opportunities while severing ties between the village and the central, provincial, and district government. Further, local governance within Afghan villages has often been dominated by village elders, and thus offers little opportunity for representative or participatory decision-making. Finally, Afghan culture has entrenched a limited social and political role for women.

NSP has responded to these challenges by focusing on village-led, participatory programming. The fruits of this approach—are illustrated by the findings of this study, in particular the significant positive effects on access to drinking water and electricity, acceptance of democratic processes, perceptions of economic wellbeing, and participation of and attitudes toward women.

Table 6: Test for aggregate impact of NSP on social norms

	Endline		Midline	
	Coefficient	<i>p</i> -Value	Coefficient	<i>p</i> -Value
<u>Social cohesion</u>	0.007	0.695	-0.005	0.778
Disputes and resolution rates	-0.009	0.800	-0.060	0.096
Interpersonal trust	0.018	0.363	0.032	0.044
<u>Literacy and computational ability</u>	-0.001	0.966	0.057	0.003
<u>Happiness</u>	0.035	0.113	0.022	0.284
<u>Gender attitudes</u>	0.037	0.000	0.016	0.010
Acceptance of female political participation	0.046	0.005	0.006	0.535
Acceptance of female economic and social participation	0.031	0.075	0.019	0.183
Cultural constraints to education of girls	0.017	0.220	0.007	0.273
Acceptance of female participation in local governance	0.059	0.001	0.029	0.026
<u>Gender outcomes</u>	0.034	0.012	0.046	0.000
Women's involvement in local governance	0.079	0.000	0.041	0.000
Social activity among women	-0.017	0.303	0.006	0.417
Women's mobility	0.039	0.185	0.120	0.000
Participation in economic activity and HH decision-making	0.003	0.905	0.001	0.967

Note: Coefficients and *p*-values for the mean average treatment effect for all indicators grouped in the hypothesis or in hypotheses that pertain to the particular group or family.

Source: Beath et al. (2013d).

The following sections discuss implications of the results for other development projects in post-conflict settings, with a focus on how projects can best enhance government legitimacy, strengthen local accountability and participation, and facilitate the acceptance of the participation of marginalized groups in local public affairs.

## 7.1 Implications for programme scale-up and lessons for other programmes

NSP has been active in all of Afghanistan's provinces and is continuing to cover remaining villages as well as re-engage many villages that have already benefitted from the programme. The first phase of NSP, concluded in early 2007, included 17,200 villages in 279 of Afghanistan's 398 districts. The second phase of NSP was designed with an interim goal of mobilizing 4,300 new villages over the course of two years—2,000 of which were located in districts containing villages that had received NSP, with the remainder located in 74 'new' districts containing no villages that had previously received NSP. The third phase of NSP, which started in 2013, intends to implement the programme in villages that have yet to be covered while also giving follow up grants to certain villages that were mobilized in the first phase of NSP.

Nonetheless, NSP will face sizeable challenges in sustaining progress and coverage. While the evaluation has found positive results in the north, east, and west of the country, there is limited data on the efficacy of NSP in the more conflict-impacted south. The difficulties in

carrying out community development during periods of violence may be heightened with the potential for greater insecurity throughout the country following the ISAF drawdown in 2014. Beyond potential instability post-2014, any drawdown in international assistance for NSP will pose financial constraints as it seeks to cover all of the communities in Afghanistan and revisit many of the villages that have already received grants. The programme is also likely to face challenges from Afghan government agencies as well as local elites seeking to maintain their historical positions of strength in Afghan communities. Finally, the findings of this evaluation are suggestive of the negative implications resulting from the drying up of funds.

The study's results provide a rigorous assessment of the absolute impact of NSP on a broad set of outcomes sourced both from NSP's formal 'project development objectives' and areas of general academic interest. Nonetheless, comprehensive though they may be, there are inherent limitations in the means by which the results may be applied. In the absence of the results of other comparable evaluations on other development programmes in Afghanistan, the results do not provide a basis for comparing NSP's effectiveness with that of other project delivery mechanisms or interventions. For the same reason, it is very difficult to make qualitative judgements concerning the relative size of the observed impacts or whether they collectively might be used to designate NSP as a 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' project.

The results nonetheless point to several areas of success for NSP that could be exported to other development environments and several areas of concern for NSP and similar CDD programmes elsewhere. The positive effects of NSP on subjective economic outcomes indicate that the development impact brought by drinking water and electricity projects has been fundamental in improving villagers' lives. Likewise, the success of NSP in improving a wide range of outcomes for women and in lessening cultural constraints to female participation in governance activities is an important achievement. However, the relative failure of NSP-funded infrastructure projects in delivering impacts is troubling, particularly given the large proportion of block grants they consume. Finally, the observed worsening of local governance quality underscores the importance of assessing whether the presence of CDCs may be inadvertently diffusing institutional accountability in Afghan villages and enabling customary leaders to engage in opportunistic behaviour.

## **7.2 Aid modalities**

NSP is funded by the World Bank and bilateral aid agencies, managed by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, and implemented by 29 NGOs (8 national and 21 international), which are contracted by NSP as 'facilitating partners'. This arrangement has allowed NSP to benefit from the substantial local knowledge and expertise built up by the NGO sector in Afghanistan during the two decades of conflict the country suffered prior to 2001, while also clearly linking the programme with the Government of Afghanistan.

The impact evaluation results suggest that, while NSP increase the favourability of individuals' views toward representatives of the Afghanistan government, this effect largely fades after the completion of NSP-funded projects. This indicates that villagers perceive NSP as a government-sponsored intervention and that government support is contingent upon the continual provision of public goods and services, such as development projects. Thus, even though NSP-funded projects deliver a development impact in improving access to utilities, this is not sufficient to improve perceptions of government unless there is an expectation of

future service provision.<sup>16</sup> As such, the NSP-IE results suggest that the effects of development interventions on government legitimacy in post-conflict settings are maximized by instituting a regularized and frequent pattern of project activity.

### **7.3 Local ownership**

Local ownership is a core principle of NSP, with the mandated election of CDCs and the participatory selection of public goods projects financed by NSP block grants. The process of establishing CDCs and involving villagers in project selection have produced a number of positive effects, such as increasing the number of meetings held by village assemblies, increasing participation in preferences for democratic elections, increasing female participation in local governance, and liberalizing men's attitudes to female participation in local governance.

Despite these positive effects, however, the study finds that, once NSP-funded projects are complete, the overall effect of NSP on male perceptions of the quality of local governance deteriorates. In addition, the institutional relevance of the CDC—relatively strong at midline—fades substantially following project completion. These results suggest that the diffusion of institutional authority created by the co-existence of CDCs with local customary institutions and the ambiguous mandates of CDCs following project completion may produce perverse effects on local governance. The results underscore the need to provide new local institutions with a clear mandate and to not inadvertently undermine the accountability of existing local customary institutions.

### **7.4 Project design**

The most positively surprising set of results in the study are those pertaining to the durable impacts wrought by NSP on perceptions of gender roles and on women's lives generally. Of particular note is that while other impacts—such as those on perceptions of government—are not sustained beyond project completion, the effects on gender norms and gender outcomes do not fade. These results provide a strong vindication of NSP's policy of mandating female participation in CDC elections, CDC composition, and the selection and management of sub-projects, which have produced changes in women's lives that extend far beyond both the scope of programme activities and the lifecycle of programme implementation. Accordingly, similar approaches might be adopted in development projects in other post-conflict environments to facilitate acceptance of democratic norms and participation in public affairs of women and other marginalized groups.

### **7.5 Timing and duration**

The timing and duration of the project—in particular the three-year implementation phase and the subsequent lack of guaranteed follow-up funds—is likely important for understanding why many outcomes improved at midline and then began to decline by endline. For example, while NSP has unambiguously positive impacts on perceptions of government and acceptance of democratic processes, some of these governance effects are confined mostly to

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<sup>16</sup> Given the uncertainty over the future schedule of NSP block grant disbursement, villagers are unlikely to expect the implementation of further NSP-funded projects once the village's block grant allotment is completed.

the period of project implementation and fading following project completion. This pattern suggests that certain effects of the intervention were tied to the actual implementation of the project and disbursement of funds; once these funds dried up, many attitudes and outcomes began to revert to pre-intervention levels. Moreover, it may be that a three year project is simply too brief to significantly impact concrete economic outcomes (although it may improve perceptions of economic wellbeing). Both of these points suggest that long-term success will require consistent provision of aid.

## **8 Results of CDD impact evaluations**

The first wave of research on the efficacy of CDD programmes was mainly observational, but recent years have seen an increased use of rigorous methodologies to evaluate programme impact. A number of these studies, both experimental and quasi-experimental, are summarized below.

### **8.1 Experimental studies**

In addition to the NSP-IE, three large-scale RCT-based impact evaluations of CDD programmes have been completed, covering CDR in Liberia, GoBifo in Liberia, and *Tuongane* in the eastern Congo.

Fearon et al. (2009) randomized the NGO-funded and -implemented Community-Driven Reconstruction (CDR) programme across 83 communities in two districts in Liberia. The study measures outcomes six months after the completion of the programme using both household survey data and the results of a public goods game. On economic outcomes, the study estimates that CDR improves access to local public goods and education, but finds only weak evidence that it increases employment and asset holdings. On social and institutional outcomes, the study finds that CDR has no impact on notions of decision-making or villagers' sense of personal efficacy, but does increase use of democratic processes for selection of community representatives and of projects, increases trust in community leaders, reduces social tension, and increases acceptance of marginalized groups.

Casey et al. (2011) randomized the World Bank-funded, government-implemented GoBifo programme across 236 villages in two districts in Sierra Leone. The study uses household survey data, focus groups, and 'structured community activities' to assess impact four years after the start of implementation. On economic outcomes, the study finds that GoBifo had a positive effect on economic wellbeing by increasing market activity, asset ownership, and improving the quality and quantity of public goods provision. On social and institutional outcomes, the study finds that GoBifo does not impact trust or collective action beyond the sphere of the project or induce greater participation or empowerment of women or youths in local affairs and decisions outside the project.

Humphreys et al. (2012) randomized the DfID-funded, NGO-implemented *Tuongane* programme in four regions in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The study uses survey data to evaluate economic impacts and deploys an unconditional cash transfer scheme across 560 villages to assess impacts on local governance. On economic outcomes, the study finds no evidence that *Tuongane* positively impacted income, productivity, agricultural productivity, assets, housing quality, school attendance, sickness, or village services. On social and institutional outcomes, the study finds no evidence of impacts on transparency or

capture, although there is evidence of an impact on bottom-up accountability and a small impact on gender-inclusion. Although *Tuungane* is found to increase trust in ex-combatants, few other impacts are discerned on within- and between-village cohesion.

## 8.2 Quasi-experimental studies

In addition to the RCTs, various quasi-experimental studies have succeeded in plausibly projecting the counter-factual. These include impact evaluations of KDP in Indonesia, BRA-KDP in Aceh, and KALAHY-CIDSS in the Philippines.

Voss (2008) evaluates the World Bank-funded, government-implemented Kecamatan Development Programme (KDP) in Indonesia. The study uses propensity score matching and data from the 2003 census to select a control group of communities, with a total sample of 300 communities across 17 provinces. Using panel data from household surveys in 2002 and 2007, the study constructs difference-in-difference estimates of the impact of KDP. The results indicate that KDP produces substantive increases in consumption and reduces poverty in the poorest communities, but has no impact on economic outcomes in less poor communities or among disadvantaged groups. KDP is found to produce a general reduction in unemployment across the sample, while also increasing access to health services. Enrolment rates were, however, not impacted by the programme.

Barron et al. (2009) evaluate the World Bank-funded, government-implemented Community-Based Reintegration Assistance for Conflict Victims (BRA-KDP) programme in Aceh, Indonesia. The study uses propensity-score matching and instrumental variables (IV) to form a control group and household and village head surveys for data. On economic outcomes, the study finds that BRA-KDP increases asset ownership, agricultural activity, and economic perceptions, but has no impact on employment, access to health and education, or on the level of community infrastructure.<sup>17</sup> On social and institutional outcomes, the study finds no evidence that BRA-KDP impacted associational activities, trust in institutions, acceptance of returning groups, social tensions, conflict, or community efficacy. According to the study, BRA-KDP lowered levels of acceptance of ex-combatants by conflict victims, although the programme is also associated with increased participation in women's groups.

Edillon et al. (2011) evaluate the World Bank-funded, government-implemented *Kapit-Bisig Laban Sa Kahirapan*-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (KALAHY-CIDSS) programme in the Philippines. The evaluation was designed in 2003 and employed cluster analysis to form a control group, with surveys administered in 2003, 2006, and 2010 across a panel of households in 135 communities. On economic outcomes, the study finds that KALAHY-CIDSS increased per capita consumption, employment, diversification, access to markets for agricultural produce, visits to local health facilities, and access to clean drinking water. On social and institutional outcomes, KALAHY-CIDSS resulted in increased participation in local governance activities, knowledge of public affairs, organizational membership and interpersonal trust, but negatively impacted collective action.

Unlike the three other experimental studies, the NSP-IE identified significant impacts on female participation, attitudes to female participation, and support for democratic norms. These differences may potentially be due to differences in programme design or the context

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<sup>17</sup> This result is explained by the fact that a majority of BRA-KDP villagers opted to use block grants for cash distribution, which is unusual for CDD programmes.

in which the programme was evaluated. For instance, the GoBifo and CDR programmes evaluated by Casey et al. (2011) and Fearon et al. (2009) respectively did not prescribe a universal suffrage election or require local councils to have a set number of female members.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, while the *Tuongane* programme evaluated by Humphreys et al. (2012) mandated elections and female parity on village committees, the lack of significant effects on attitudes toward women's roles may be due to the local context. Specifically, in the eastern Congo, women were already relatively well represented in absence of the intervention (making up approximately 30 per cent in villages where female parity was not mandated), which obviously represents a strikingly different situation than rural Afghanistan.

### **8.3 Implications for future research on CDD programmes**

The differences in findings point to the need for a more comprehensive research approach to the study of CDD programmes. Developing such a body of knowledge requires a number of deliberate steps by academics and practitioners studying CDD outcomes.

First, studies must clearly account for the specifics of the intervention being evaluated and the context in which it is implemented. As noted in the previous section, variation in the quality and quantity of programmatic components (including the longevity and frequency of interventions, the intensity of facilitation, and the nature of programmatic procedures) and pre-existing social and economic structures can result in pronounced differences in estimated impacts. By clearly categorizing such variations with the class of CDD programmes, policy makers are able to weigh individual results in terms of their relevance and make informed programmatic design decisions.

Second, academics and practitioners must overcome differences in their incentives to produce research designs that are best geared toward understanding the long-term impact of CDD programmes on outcomes of interest to policy makers. While academics are rewarded for original experimental interventions with relatively short gestation periods, practitioners and policy makers are often interested in understanding impacts on outcomes that may take many years to evolve and in establishing whether similar programmes have common impacts across different contexts.

Third, the ability to rigorously isolate the impact of CDD programmes—and to help them improve—is often obfuscated by under-developed logical frameworks that either fail to adequately define distinct and quantifiable outcome indicators that the programme aspires to impact or which are based on unspecified and/or overly ambitious assumptions concerning the ability of an intervention to spur behavioural change. When outcome indicators are not well-defined ex-ante by the programme, ex-post disagreements may arise between researchers and practitioners about whether a given outcome was measured correctly. Failures to adequately specify assumptions underlying a logical framework may meanwhile inhibit researchers from being able to isolate why a particular intervention failed to have the desired effect and thereby provide recommendations to improve the effectiveness of future CDD programmes.

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<sup>18</sup> However, GoBifo project facilitators did require that at least one woman be a co-signatory to the bank account that held aid funds and women were requested to develop their own plans and discuss these with the male leadership.

Fourth, given the complexity and fluctuating nature of development and conflict environments, studies need to focus more on assessing the extent to which programme impacts are conditioned by the institutional context in which the programme is implemented. To this end, the laboratory for causal inference that RCTs provide must be matched with micro-level qualitative and ethnographic work to carefully assess how CDD programmes interact with pre-existing social and political structures.

## **9 Conclusion**

By embracing bottom-up approaches to development, CDD empowers local communities to select and manage projects which best address local priorities. NSP, the largest development programme in Afghanistan, has brought CDD to all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces and in so doing has overcome vast challenges posed by insecurity, prevailing gender norms, and suspicion of the central government. The NSP-IE provides a rigorous, large-scale quantitative evaluation of the impacts of NSP across a wide range of economic, institutional, and social outcomes and can potentially serve as an important tool for policymaking, for CDD and other programmes in Afghanistan and in other post-conflict settings.

The findings of the NSP-IE identified some aspects in which NSP is succeeding and other areas where performance has been more limited. Specifically, the results show that NSP positively affects the access of villagers to drinking water and electricity, increases acceptance of democratic processes, improves perceptions of economic wellbeing, and lessens institutional and cultural constraints to the participation of women in public affairs. However, positive effects on attitudes towards central and sub-national government fade quickly following the completion of NSP-funded projects. Moreover, NSP negatively affected perceptions of local governance quality among male respondents, while the composition and behaviour of the customary village leadership appears to be unaffected by the intervention.

The results provide important lessons for development interventions in post-conflict contexts. First, the positive and durable impacts observed on norms of female participation and acceptance of democratic processes are a vindication of the somewhat 'radical' stance taken by NSP in mandating female participation and democratic CDC elections in a context in which such practices ran sharply contrary to local customs. The results indeed suggest that development projects can provide a vehicle for effecting social change. Second, the positive but temporary impact of NSP on perceptions of central government indicates that development projects can assist in building government legitimacy in fragile states, but that such improvements in legitimacy are reliant upon a predictable and continuous stream of public goods and services provided by the central government. Finally, the finding that local governance as perceived by male respondents did not improve provides a call for caution when establishing new local institutions in parallel to customary structures. Particular care must be paid, to ensure that the new local bodies are provided with specific mandates distinct from those of existing institutions.

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