



Review

STABILISATION PROGRAMME NORTHERN AFGHANISTAN

KFW



Federal Foreign Office



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

**CHATHAM
HOUSE**

The Royal Institute of
International Affairs



The Afghan-Tajik border region

REVIEW OF THE STABILISATION PROGRAMME NORTHERN AFGHANISTAN

€105 million dispersed

423 projects completed

52 districts covered

18K+ trainings delivered

Stabilisation initiatives in fragile contexts can cut across humanitarian, security and development concerns. The term stabilisation lacks an internationally agreed definition, but covers areas such as strengthening institutions and supporting political processes to ensure good governance and service delivery, as well as support to short-term socio-economic development and livelihood opportunities. However, security challenges, including the disruptive role of armed non-state actors, can make it difficult to sustain and build on any gains. This summary review focuses on the Stabilisation Programme Northern Afghanistan (SPNA), which undertook stabilisation activities in north-eastern Afghanistan.¹

SPNA is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office (FFO) through KfW, a German state-owned development bank. Project implementation is led by the Aga Khan Foundation, in partnership with two sub-contracted partners: Mercy Corps and Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED). The project commenced on 1 July 2010 and is scheduled to conclude on 31 December 2019.

SPNA's aims were to:

- Provide basic development infrastructure,

- enhancing access to services and livelihood opportunities;
- Enhance capacity among local governance institutions for good governance and development planning; and;
- Strengthen collaboration between and among institutions within the sub-national governance system.

To date, SPNA has dispersed €105 million and, at the end of 2018, had completed 423 projects spanning 52 districts in the four northeast provinces of Afghanistan: Badakhshan, Kunduz, Takhar, and Baghlan. Construction of school and other educational facilities constituted the majority of SPNA projects (see chart below). In addition, SPNA delivered more than 18,000 trainings to individual District Development Assembly (DDA) members in governance, development planning and decision-making so they could play a leading role in the development of their districts.



Addressing local infrastructure needs.

1. STABILISATION - THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

According to the World Bank, approximately two billion people live in parts of the world affected by fragility, conflict and high levels of violence. At the international level, particularly since the conflicts that emerged from the breakup of former Yugoslavia between 1991-2001, there has been a move away from traditional non-violent modes of conflict prevention to increasingly complex, multi-dimensional and multi-faceted interventions encompassing humanitarian, development, stabilisation, peacebuilding, and/or state-building goals. Since the Balkans conflict, there have been substantial stabilisation interventions – although they are often defined in differing ways - in Haiti, Mali, Iraq, and Afghanistan, to name just a few.

How have key actors defined 'stabilisation'? The United States (US) has recently reviewed its stabilisation definition, in part based on assessments of US interventions in Afghanistan. The review found 'this lack of standardisation in definition and process leads to repeated mistakes, inefficient spending, and poor accountability for results.' The US now defines stabilisation as 'a political endeavour involving an integrated civilian-military process to create conditions where locally legitimate authorities and systems can peaceably manage conflict and prevent a resurgence of violence.' It is not defined as an end point, but rather as 'transitional in nature' and which may include efforts to establish civil security, provide access to dispute resolution, deliver targeted basic services, and establish a foundation for the return of displaced people and longer-term development.'

The European Union (EU), in contrast, does not have a clear definition of stabilisation

or a key body tasked with overseeing stabilisation initiatives. Instead the regional body works across its 'wide array of external assistance instruments' to support conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In 2014, the EU introduced the Instrument for Stability, which was later updated to the Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace in 2017 (IcSP). The IcSP provides short and mid-term assistance on conflict prevention, crisis response and peace building actions around the world in areas such as mediation, stabilisation, mine action, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

In a similar vein, at the Stabilisation Leaders' forum in 2016, Rüdiger König, Head of the Directorate-General for Humanitarian Assistance, Crisis Prevention, Stabilisation and Post-Conflict Reconstruction at the German Federal Foreign Office addressed the question of what was meant by stabilisation stating that 'for us, stabilisation is important above all after an armed conflict. We use our instruments to support political processes of conflict resolution and to curb violence. The idea is to help lay the foundations for a legitimate order. We want to prevent renewed violence.'

For the UK, the definition is pegged to national self-interest and there is an explicit understanding that stabilisation is essential in contexts where 'threats to UK national security may be emerging.' The UK explicitly notes the political nature of stabilisation initiatives in contrast to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence which underpin humanitarian interventions. However, the UK definition is so broad that activities suggested cover the gamut from security sector reform, judicial reform to infrastructure support.

For SPNA, the definition of stabilisation used was developed by the external assessors

¹ The full review was conducted by Dr. Champa Patel, Head Asia-Pacific Programme, Chatham House based on an analysis of ARC assessments and interviews with key stakeholders

Evaluating Outcomes in Fragile Contexts

Analysis Research Consulting (ARC). Recognising there was no clearly defined concept that was universally agreed upon – and based on the literature reviewed – ARC focused on understanding how stability was experienced and understood. This is an important innovation and contribution to the field. The logic follows that if stabilisation approaches are successful, stability would increase. However, what materially constitutes stability? And how would this be measured and assessed over time, particularly given that there is a high degree of vulnerability and fluidity in conflict contexts? What makes ARC’s approach important is that it did not base its assessment in the aims, objectives or outputs of those leading the interventions, but in the *lived experience of beneficiaries*.



Provincial Council Building in Takhar province.

2. SPNA - THE ARC ASSESSMENT MODEL

ARC defined stability across four dimensions, which could then be measured:

- **PHYSICAL SECURITY:** Stability is defined by low levels of socially unacceptable violence (some forms of violence may be socially accepted and are therefore not detrimental to stability).
- **GOVERNANCE:** Stability is defined by functioning governance institutions. The more complex society and its segments get, the more important the reliable and legitimate regulation of collective tasks,

issues and conflicts becomes.

- **ECONOMIC REPRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT:** Stability of society and its segments is also defined by the ability of those segments to materially sustain themselves; economic reproduction is therefore the third defining aspect of civil stability.
- **MODERNISATION:** The three components outlined above require a vital fourth component of stability – the ability to adapt to changing environments via innovation and development. Hence, capacity for adaptive change is an intrinsic aspect of social stability. Under current conditions of internationally driven state-building, the challenge of adaptation predominantly relates to this normative concept of modernisation.

ARC, working with national partners, the ‘Afghan Human Rights Research and Advocacy Organisation’, conducted the first baseline in 2010/11 (Wave 1), a follow-up survey in 2012 (Wave 2), the second follow-up survey in 2014/15 (Wave 3), and the endline in 2017/18 (Wave 4). In each of the first three survey waves, the assessors revisited the same districts, village clusters and villages surveying between 231 and 251 villages and more than 5,000 respondents per wave. In the final wave, the assessors revisited the same 25 districts that formed the core of the survey since the baseline and added – upon the request of AKF – an additional ten districts. The total endline survey comprised 35 districts with 352 communities and 8,458 respondents. The total number of head of household interviews for the four waves amounted to 23,959 people.



Dehshana 14m long bridge 2014.

3. FINDINGS AND LESSONS

- SPNA’s focus on improving the capacity of DDAs - so that district-level representative Afghan bodies made key decisions on infrastructure and other local development – was perceived as having a positive effect on stability outcomes.
- The assessment found that the visibility of DDAs also increased over the course of the project, with between 70–80% of the district population reporting awareness of the DDAs at the end of the assessment.
- In the governance realm, SPNA had a positive effect in terms of perceived trust in district administrations. The impact was maximised because of the participatory and inclusive ways of working under SPNA – however, this did not necessarily translate into strong perceptions of national state authority. More work is needed to better understand the mechanics of the participatory approach.
- Development perceptions improved over the course of the program. Schools and health facilities that were handed over to the Afghan government upon completion were functional in the overwhelming majority of cases, although there are a few examples of where this is not the case.

- Higher awareness of DDAs and confidence in their ability to deliver development positively affected public perception of local security, the state’s care for the needs of the community, and general development, and countered the view that international development threatens local norms and Islamic values. Impacts on perceptions of stability and security may be transitory rather than transformative, though. Hence, it is important to be realistic about what is possible and develop bounded aims and objectives.
- However, two issues had a negative impact on the sustainability of the DDAs. Firstly, their status as a representative governance body was left in institutional limbo by the Afghan state. Secondly, the majority of DDAs rarely became independent development organisations delinked from SPNA.

Broader stabilisation indicators, such as the legitimacy and effectiveness of the state, declined over the course of the project. However, this can be attributed to the worsening security situation in Afghanistan and the weak presence of the state in remote areas.



A new Central Hospital with 50 beds in Rostaq district.

ARC’s research shows that stabilisation impact (as defined across the four dimensions) is possible even if there is an overall deterioration in stability within

Evaluating Outcomes in Fragile Contexts

the country. Specifically, this was possible because of a tailored approach built on working with organisations with deep local knowledge, expertise and networks. The research also shows that, aside from the intended stabilisation effects, a participatory approach focusing on capacity-building of local governance institutions does deliver operational and high-quality infrastructure even under increasingly insecure conditions.



Girls Dormitory - Takhar province.

4. STRENGTHS OF SPNA APPROACH

The assessment approach taken combines the following strengths:

- The application of rigorous social science methods – such as quasi-experimental designs – coupled with exploratory qualitative processes to assess the perceived impact of stabilisation is an important contribution to the field of stabilisation research. In general, monitoring, evaluations and findings from independent assessments could be better aligned with each other and mutually reinforcing.
- The model is also notable for its definitional focus. Rather than focusing on stabilisation (aims, objectives and outcomes/outputs/activities), the assessment focused on the lived experience of stability and how and to what extent this was associated with SPNA's activities.

- The multi-round nature of this assessment, and the financial investment of the FFO via KfW in sustaining the assessment (over multiple rounds), strengthens the evidence associated with the assessment. ARC developed a sophisticated methodology, with academic precision and rigour, that stands out in both a global context and is remarkable given the increasing instability at district level during this assessment.



Vanj bridge connecting Tajikistan's Vanj District with Mohi-May Vulusvoli in Afghanistan.

Evaluating Outcomes in Fragile Contexts

PARTNERS



KfW is one of the world's leading and most experienced promotional banks. As an integral part of the KfW Group, KfW Development Bank carries out Germany's Financial Cooperation with developing and emerging countries on behalf of the Federal Government. The staff at its head office in Germany and in about 70 local offices cooperate with partners all over the world. Its goal is to combat poverty, secure the peace, protect the environment and the climate and make globalization fair.

Alongside KfW Development Bank, the two subsidiaries KfW IPEX-Bank and DEG also have commitments abroad: while KfW IPEX-Bank is active in international project and export finance, DEG provides financing and consulting to companies investing in developing and emerging countries.



Federal Foreign Office

The Federal Foreign Office is the federal agency responsible for Germany's foreign policy, including its relationship with the European Union.

Europe, the transatlantic partnership, the commitment to peace and security, the promotion of democracy and human rights and the commitment to equitable and sustainable globalization and a rule-based international order - these are the guidelines of German foreign policy.

Modern foreign policy encompasses more than just traditional diplomacy. With this in mind, the Federal Foreign Office in 2015 established the Directorate-General for Crisis Prevention, Stabilisation, Post-Conflict Peacebuilding and Humanitarian Assistance. Stabilisation efforts are primarily focused on crises and conflicts, especially in North Africa, the Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as crisis affected states in sub-Saharan Africa.



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

As a member of the Aga Khan Development Network, one of the world's leading poverty solutions networks, the Aga Khan Foundation helps people build better futures. Working in partnership with community, business and government leaders, we make long-term investments in innovative programmes that improve quality of life, from bringing electricity to remote villages in Afghanistan, to training thousands of nurses across East Africa, to restoring the cultural treasures of the Silk Road.

We invest in high-quality institutions such as clinics, banks and universities that anchor communities and equip people with the tools they need most, whether it's access to health care, financial credit or quality education.

For almost 50 years, Foundation has implemented thousands of projects in 30 countries around the world, reaching millions of people every year.

CHATHAM HOUSE

The Royal Institute of International Affairs

Chatham House, the home of the Royal Institute of International Affairs since 1920, is a world-leading source of independent analysis, informed debate and influential ideas with the determination to help build a sustainably prosperous, secure and just world for all. Renowned for its excellence in producing independent, original and constructive research in areas of geopolitical and geo-economic significance, Chatham House utilizes its reputation to engage some of the brightest political minds of the time. Drawing on the institute's global profile, the institute frequently hosts prominent figures for public and private events.

Chatham House's Asia-Pacific Programme explores key political, economic and social developments affecting the Asia-Pacific. Covering the region from Afghanistan to Australia, the work focuses on geopolitics, security, domestic politics, population and migration, technology and its impact on society, conflict and promoting sustainable and long-term development.

