

# Review of Norwegian development assistance to Afghanistan 2011–2014



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Commission for Afghanistan

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## Abbreviations

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
ASGP	Afghanistan Sub National Governance Programme
CDC	Community Development Council
CSO	Civil society organization
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DDC	District Development Council
ECC	Education Coordination Committee
ELECT	Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Program
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GoIRA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IS	Islamic State
IWA	Integrity Watch Afghanistan
LOFTA	Law and Order Trust Fund
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEC	Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MRRD	Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NABDP	National Area Based Development Programme

NAC	Norwegian Afghanistan Committee
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
Norad	Norwegian Agency for development Cooperation
NORCROSS	Norwegian Red Cross
NORDIC +	Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Finland, and occasionally other countries
NPP	National Priority Program
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSP	National Solidarity Program
OCHA	Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
SMSG	Special Representative of the Secretary General
TMAF	Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene Education
WB	World Bank

## Executive Summary

This review was commissioned by the Norwegian Commission for Afghanistan with the aim to assess the 2011–2014 Norwegian Development Assistance to Afghanistan. The purpose was three-fold:

- 1) Provide an assessment of how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has responded to the recommendations from the 2012 Norad evaluation of Norwegian aid to Afghanistan, and how the Norwegian aid has been aligned to MFA strategies and internal guidelines.
- 2) Provide an overview of Norwegian development assistance in Afghanistan during the 2011–14 period and, where possible, identify their short and (expected) long-term results.
- 3) Provide recommendations for further development cooperation in Afghanistan.

Specifically, the teams was asked to review the management of the Norwegian Development Funds, and the contribution of implementing partners, with respect to the concrete short and (expected) long term results they have generated in the period under review.

The Terms of Reference (ToR) request an analysis of trends in the period 2011–2014 in terms of prioritization and selection of thematic focus and implementing partners. They also ask for an assessment of the degree to which these meet the overall Norwegian development goals of: 1) strengthening Afghan institutions; 2) contributing to a political settlement; and 3) contributing to sustainable and just development, humanitarian efforts, and to the promotion of the governance, human rights and gender equality agendas. Thematic priority areas were: a) good governance; b) education; and c) rural development.

Major contextual changes took place in Afghanistan during the period under review. The security situation worsened throughout the country, and the economy stagnated. Together, these changes resulted in increasing challenges for the implementation of development programmes and projects. These circumstances also applied to the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of Norwegian funded assistance.

Norwegian development funding to Afghanistan totalled NOK 5,363 million for the period 2001–2011, and NOK 3,008 million for the period 2011–2014. The annual disbursement over these last years was approximately NOK 750 million.

During the period under review, multilateral organisations (the World Bank and the United Nations Development Fund) remained the main funding channels for Norwegian development aid, receiving 55% of the total assistance. Forty per cent was channelled through Norwegian, international and Afghan NGOs partners. There was an increase in support for economic development and trade (56% of total funding), and a substantial reduction in emergency response assistance (13% of total funding) compared to the previous period (2001–2011).

A key finding from the 2012 Norad evaluation of the period 2001–2011 was that Norway's policy and interventions "match closely the international agenda for Afghanistan and within that framework its development agenda is certainly relevant". The evaluation found alignment with Afghan priorities consistently high on the Norwegian agenda, and the choice of aid channels remarkably consistent over the years. The evaluators were, however, of the opinion that "limited administrative capacity (at the Embassy) is one clear reason why policies are weak on the operational side".

The 2012 evaluation found that Norwegian development made real achievements in output terms, but that “there is still limited evidence of concrete outcomes”. The report found it difficult to identify the impact of the Norwegian assistance. Its main recommendation was that “Norway should rethink its strategy and aid programming for future engagement in Afghanistan”.

This review has found that the MFA and the Kabul Embassy adopted specific measures in response to the report. These measures included operational responses to several of the recommendations. The MFA and the Kabul Embassy, however, also disagreed with some of the findings. Furthermore, on the basis of the recommendations, they carried out a close dialogue with the World Bank (WB) managed Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) managed Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA), and the funded Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), on the need to develop a) baseline studies, b) anti-corruption strategies and tools, and c) plans and initiatives for monitoring and external evaluations. Most NGO partners report compliance with these, and some of them also developed theories of change.

This review found that there was a process under way well before 2011 to focus and reduce the number of development partners and projects involved within the given budget. There was also a strong emphasis in strategy documents, and in the Embassy’s annual “*Virksomhetsplan*” to support the dialogue with the Afghan government and to develop the capacity of its ministries “to manage their own development”. The selection of thematic focus and implementing partners in the 2011–2014 period was based on:

- 1) Adherence to the Norwegian strategy for the development assistance to Afghanistan.
- 2) Adherence to the requirements set in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF) to align donor funding with national priorities.
- 3) A wish to reduce the number of projects/programmes within the given thematic areas, and to channel more aid through trust funds in order to reduce the management burden at the Embassy/MFA.
- 4) The goal of minimizing exposure to corruption risks and allowing for a stronger focus on M&E in the remaining projects/programmes.
- 5) A reduction in the number of Norwegian staff handling the development portfolio at the Norwegian Embassy and, from 2013, a shift in the management role of the Embassy with greater responsibility shifted to Oslo (MFA and Norad).
- 6) A continuation of focus areas and aid channels, although with a higher priority on ARTF and a reduction in NGO funding.

The closure of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Faryab in 2013 meant that the Development Advisor positions in Meymaneh disappeared, thereby ending the Embassy presence in the field as well as the regular field-visits from Embassy staff. The gradual reduction of Norwegian development-related positions at the Kabul Embassy from 2013 onwards, and the abolishment of the Norwegian development councillor position since the end of 2014, reduced substantially Norway’s ability to engage in development policy processes in Kabul.

The review has found that the Embassy, MFA and Norad have had a sustained and active engagement with implementing partners, not least to ensure compliance with the TMAF. However,

the contact at/with the Embassy on development issues—as well as the capacity to take part in strategic and more technical coordination efforts—decreased after the reduction in Norwegian development staff and finally the withdrawal of the Norwegian development councillor. Several persons interviewed suggested that Norway could have taken a more proactive role in initiating independent M&E activities, including those of the Trust Funds and their implementing Ministries and partners. The Embassy suggested here to make use of Afghan consultants and research institutes, which would also contribute to build their capacity.

The review has found that Norway has been a very responsible partner of the Government of Afghanistan, through active dialogue with the administration and the various Ministries and through compliance with the TMAF. Through its involvement in and periodic leadership of the Nordic+ group of donors, Norway was able to influence development policy beyond what would have been possible had Norway acted on its own. More active use of Norad by the Embassy during 2012–2014 for advisement and process input helped in securing the quality of the development management and activities.

The review concludes that Norwegian aid was highly relevant in terms of focus and selection of intervention areas. The balance between multilateral and bilateral channels ensures support to projects of national priority and importance, while also allowing for diversification and risk reduction through the funding for NGOs. The review team's main concern is that the selection of implementing partners became less innovative over these years as no new partners (neither Afghan NGOs nor civil society organisations) were supported, but left for the civil society trust fund Tawanmandi to finance. This strategy now poses a major challenge as funding for Tawanmandi was terminated by mid-2015.

There are considerable similarities in the focus, priorities and approaches of Norway and Sweden during this period, and they also came to apply to Denmark, which concluded its direct budget support to and presence in the Ministry of Education. All three countries signed up to the TMAF and worked actively through the Nordic+ group towards its implementation. NGOs from all three countries have had a long and sustained presence in Afghanistan, and have received substantial donor support throughout the review period – including funding from different Nordic donors. The main differences are found between Sweden and Norway when it comes to the management and monitoring of the development assistance. For Sweden, the responsibility for managing development aid is primarily delegated to the Swedish Embassy in Kabul. Norway has divided this management responsibility between different sections in MFA and Norad since 2013. Sweden has five Swedish aid officials and two locally recruited development advisors based at the Embassy. Sweden therefore has more capacity to do field monitoring and to engage with authorities at different levels, generating updated information and knowledge they can bring into the dialogue with other donors and the Afghan government.

The Norwegian support for NGOs goes primarily towards projects within the three priority areas of Norwegian engagement. A review of NGO priorities and activities showed: involvement in service delivery; to varying degrees priority given to capacity building for government and Afghan NGOs and civil society; ability to build national ownership through some programmers; and varying degrees of attention to gender issues, with some very innovative projects. The NGOs have the capacity to provide flexible responses to sudden changes in the context of humanitarian assistance, for example after natural disasters and internal displacements.

With some variation, all NGOs receiving Norwegian aid undertake conflict analysis and have developed risk mitigation plans, which potentially makes them better prepared to mitigate risks and corruption challenges than they were in 2011. Most of the development oriented NGOs have done baseline surveys--including some that are very extensive and involve local communities and government representatives--, and some of these NGOs have also developed a theory of change to guide their interventions. Most of them prioritize capacity building and national ownership, although the extent of inclusion of government staff and capacity development varies. All NGOs report on results against plan, and some also report on project impact or detail the expected impact of the assistance. However, this reporting is typically more a case of isolated examples than of systematic reporting and impact assessment.

A review of the three Trust Funds supported (ARTF, LOTFA and Tawanmandi) shows more variation in the results of Norwegian support. Norwegian policy guidelines emphasize the need for funding and support for civil society. However, the support channelled to the Tawanmandi fund was terminated, effective mid-2015. The argument was that the trust fund had not delivered on program objectives and expectations, primarily due to weak performance of the management agent. Still, as stated in one of the interviews: support for Afghan media and anti-corruption organisations may have had a greater impact on fighting corruption through public disclosure, than support for anti-corruption measures provided to Afghan government institutions.

Support to ARTF and LOTFA has continued throughout the review period, despite some irregularities identified in the management of LOTFA funds. Norway played an active role together with other development partners to strengthen safeguards in LOTFA, as well as to improve M&E and reporting against results in both LOTFA and ARTF.

Overall, we find that MFA/Norad and the Embassy in Kabul have done what they could to address the shortcomings that the 2001–2011 evaluation identified in terms of M&E, impact reporting and minimizing risks of corruption, given the challenging context and limited number of staff on the ground. That said, it was noted that Norway could have done more to initiate its own M&E activities, but nonetheless the quality of partners' systems and safeguards improved during the period under review.

The team specifically reviewed support to good governance, education and rural development. We found that the interventions were relevant and that implementations progressed satisfactory and planned outputs were being achieved. The example of Integrity Watch Afghanistan is illustrative of the potential effect of what initially was just limited and time-bound Embassy support for an innovative idea.

Norway's support to the Afghan education sector was provided through the ARTF-managed Education Quality Improvement Programme (EQUIP) and NGOs, and through the Global Partnership for Education. The Embassy also participated actively in technical groups and coordination bodies until the capacity was reduced at the Kabul Embassy. Despite Norwegian and international efforts, the status by mid-2015 is a continued need for capacity development in the Ministry of Education and, equally important, for increased teacher training to ensure implementation capacity and improved quality. There is also a need for close on-going follow-up and monitoring of ARTF and EQUIP funding, to counter concerns about corruption and inflated student and school numbers, and to ensure continued attention to quality improvement.



In the rural development sector, Norway supported the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), international, Norwegian and Afghan (partner) NGOs, the UN Food and Agriculture Project (FAO) “Promoting Integrated Pest Management in Afghanistan”, and NORPLAN’s documentation of Afghan hydrogeology. We found that the international and Norwegian support for rural development has yielded extensive results, and some documented impacts, including some in the area of women’s roles and development opportunities and in the strengthening of Afghan civil society.

Taken together, there have been documented outcomes and results from the Norwegian annual development assistance of NOK 750 million, distributed through different channels and with the involvement of the Afghan government and various ministries. There is a request from partners for the continuation of predictable and flexible funding in the coming years, whereas senior Norwegian bureaucrats recommend more attention be placed on addressing corruption challenges (and on individuals influencing them) to ensure that the Norwegian assistance meets required needs and the jointly agreed development goals.

Our concern is that since 2013 Norwegian “on the ground” management capacity in Afghanistan has been reduced, and replaced by a much more fragmented aid management system. Contract responsibility has been divided between Norad and MFA, but we struggle to identify where the responsibility rests for initiating strategy debates and M&E initiatives.

This situation is a concern as we recognize two clear needs in the increasingly challenging political, security and development context of Afghanistan. The first one is that M&E should not be left as a responsibility only of Norway’s implementing partners, but should be complemented by independent field monitoring and evaluations. Norway would not have to carry out this oversight measures on its own. It is likely to have greater impact and be more cost-effective if done in partnership with other donors and using new M&E techniques, including community based monitoring. The second need is for continued on the ground strategic and project related “development dialogue” with the Government of Afghanistan, other donors, trust funds, NGOs and civil society organisations. Having sufficient and skilled Embassy staffing would help ensure that there is a capacity for learning, for making adjustments and for securing impact close to where the changes are taking place. This would contribute to making the best use of Norwegian funding in an unpredictable and constantly changing context.

## Introduction and methodology

This report is a review for the Norwegian Commission for Afghanistan on Norwegian Development Assistance to Afghanistan for the period 2011- 2014. As defined by the Terms of Reference (ToR; see Annex II), the purpose of this study is three-fold:

- 1) Assess the follow-up to the recommendations from the Norad-report, including MFA strategies and internal guidelines.
- 2) Develop an overview of the Norwegian development assistance in Afghanistan 2011-14 and, where possible, its short and (expected) long-term results.
- 3) Provide recommendations for further development cooperation in Afghanistan.

The review is based on a combination of publicly available information, documents received from the Commissions Secretariat (including the Norwegian Kabul Embassy's tri-annual strategies and annual plans), reports from the various implementing partners and interviews with key informants. Interviewees include staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) in Oslo; staff of the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul; representatives from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Oslo and Kabul; staff of the Danish and Swedish Embassies in Kabul, and World Bank (WB) staff administrating the Afghan Reconstruction and Development Fund (ARTF) in Kabul (the list of interviews is enclosed as Annex I). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which administers the Law and Order Trust Fund (LOTFA) for Afghanistan, did not respond to requests for interviews made by the Embassy in Kabul. Therefore, our assessment of LOTFA is based on reports and interviews with MFA and Norad staff.

The team operated in Kabul under the security regulations of the Norwegian/Danish Embassy. This circumstance placed significant constraints on our ability to meet with Government of Afghanistan officials and institutions that could potentially provide a more independent opinion about Norway as donor and about Norwegian assistance. Later efforts to obtain information and viewpoints about Norwegian assistance through email queries to Afghans holding key positions in Ministries, Directorates and Commissions provided limited results. Nevertheless, where relevant, we quote the responses received. The Norwegian Embassy in Kabul hosted a dinner with Afghans from varied development and policy backgrounds. This meeting provided the opportunity for an informal discussion on topics relevant for this review, including suggestions for future directions and priorities.

The triangulation of the various sources and further inquiries on some issues identified formed then the basis for our analysis. It is important to mention here that a limited review, primarily based on the organisations own reports and perspectives, is not in a position to provide any in-depth assessment of results and impacts beyond what is covered in the documents or in the external reviews/evaluations/reports identified.

The team received valuable comments and inputs to the inception report submitted in early December 2015, including limitations of some of the initial questions raised in the TOR, and to the draft report submitted in early February 2016. Elling Tjønneland (CMI) has provided quality control for the report.

## Contextual changes 2011 -2014

There were major contextual changes in Afghanistan during the period under review that in different ways influenced the security and development context, and thus posed challenges for the planning and implementation of development programmes. Some of the developments that occurred in 2015 are reflected on in order to enable a discussion on future challenges.

The **security situation** was influenced by the planned reduction in the international military presence that was announced in 2011. Most military contingents had left Afghanistan by end of 2014, only a small Norwegian mentoring force remains in Afghanistan as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Operation Resolute Support. The reduction in international forces has had a negative influence on security throughout Afghanistan, leading to an annual increase in civilian casualties due to attacks in the cities and along the highways. The departure of forces was followed by a weakened economy due to reduced military spending in general and to reduced support from Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) for development projects for many countries (except i.e. Norway and Sweden).

The worsened security situation led to gradually increased challenges for the **implementation of development projects**, as well as **for monitoring and evaluation (M&E)** of on-going projects in many parts of the country. Affected areas included previously relatively secure places such as Faryab, Kunduz, Baghlan and Badakshan. The conflict did moreover lead to increased internal displacement, and a subsequent increase in need for humanitarian assistance. Uncertainty over the security situation led many Afghans to consider migration, beyond the already existing job migrations to Pakistan, Iran and the Gulf countries. In particular, many young men have left the country over the last years, including migrants to Norway, where they have constituted the largest group of under-aged asylum seekers.

More targeted attacks in Kabul against hotels and restaurants frequented by international personnel, assassinations and an increased numbers of kidnappings (some attacks taking place close to the Norwegian Embassy, as one in early 2014) led to much stricter security regimes and limitations on travel for Embassy staff. It has also led International organisations and NGOs to reconsider their presence, travels and staffing levels in-country. The ARTF, as an example, has shifted their international staff to Dubai. The Norwegian Embassy was, for a combination of security concerns and in order to reduce costs, merged with the Danish Embassy in late 2014.

The 2014 Presidential **election** was marred by allegations of corruption, delayed transfer of power, and as a result a reduced respect for democratic institutions and processes. US political intervention in a 6 months standoff between the two main competitors, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, led to the establishment of a National Unity Government in September 2014, and to the transfer of Presidential authority from Hamid Karzai to Ashraf Ghani.

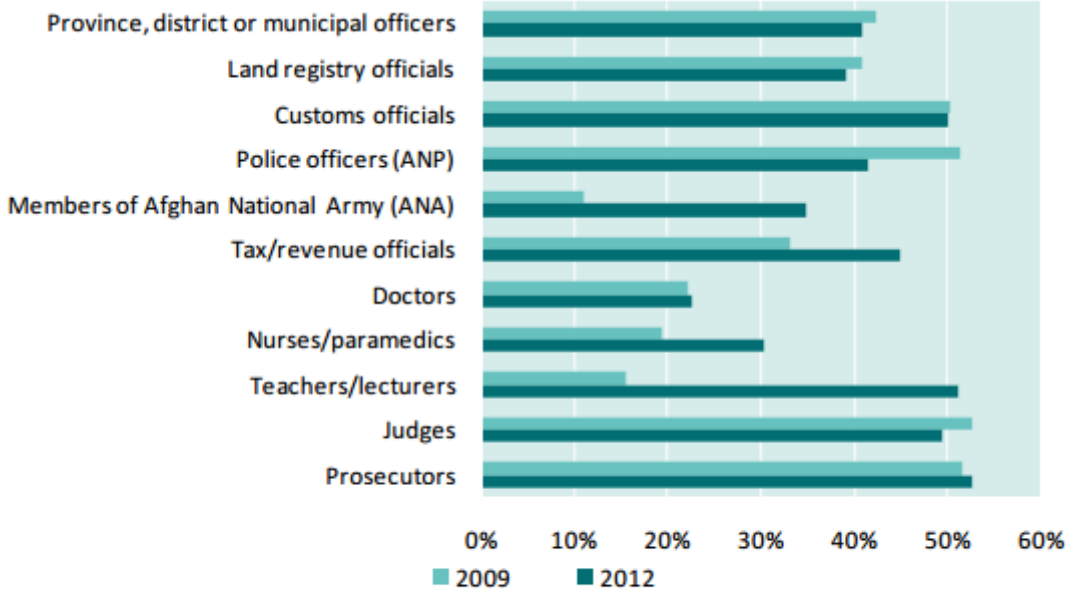
While the Karzai government had developed an increasingly confrontational relationship with the international community, the new government struggled to establish a functional administration and to agree on key positions in the Central and Provincial administrations. The complicated political situation has negatively influenced the government's ability to deliver on their promises, to get the

administration and the various ministries and commissions staffed and functional, and to gain national and international trust. This has again affected negatively economic development.

**Corruption and insufficient control of development assistance** came to the forefront in 2012 through media reports on the Kabul Bank fraud, involving close relatives of President Karzai and the then Defence Minister. In the same year, allegations emerged of mismanagement in the UNDP administered LOTFA. Frequent reports from the US Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) have continued to draw attention to the scale of the corruption, and to the lack of, and challenges related to, M&E of reconstruction and development assistance.

The illustration below on the prevalence of bribery of public officials, drawing on surveys conducted by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), illustrates the extent of the corruption challenge.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1. Prevalence of bribery, by public official receiving the bribe, Afghanistan, 2009 and 2012**



Source: General population survey 2009 and general population survey 2012

There was a gradual increase in insecurity and a worsened economic outlook from 2011 to 2014. The situation deteriorated further in 2015. This decline has major implications for the developments in the coming years. The temporary fall of Kunduz city to the Taliban and the its increased presence throughout Afghanistan demonstrated the political and military inability to address Taliban’s advances. The problem also includes the high desertion rate among battle-fatigued Afghan soldiers. The recent presence of the Islamic State (IS) in Afghanistan further increased the complexity of the military challenge, but has also led to US and NATO commitments extending beyond 2017. However, the sharp increase in the number of Afghans leaving for Europe is indicative of the challenges the Afghan government and their army are confronted with. These are challenges they so far have not been able to counter in a manner that can earn **international and national confidence and trust**.

<sup>1</sup> The 2012 UNODC report “Corruption in Afghanistan: Recent Patterns and Trends” is available at [https://www.unodc.org/documents/frontpage/Corruption\\_in\\_Afghanistan\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/frontpage/Corruption_in_Afghanistan_FINAL.pdf), visited 22.02.2016.

## Overview of development assistance 2011-2014

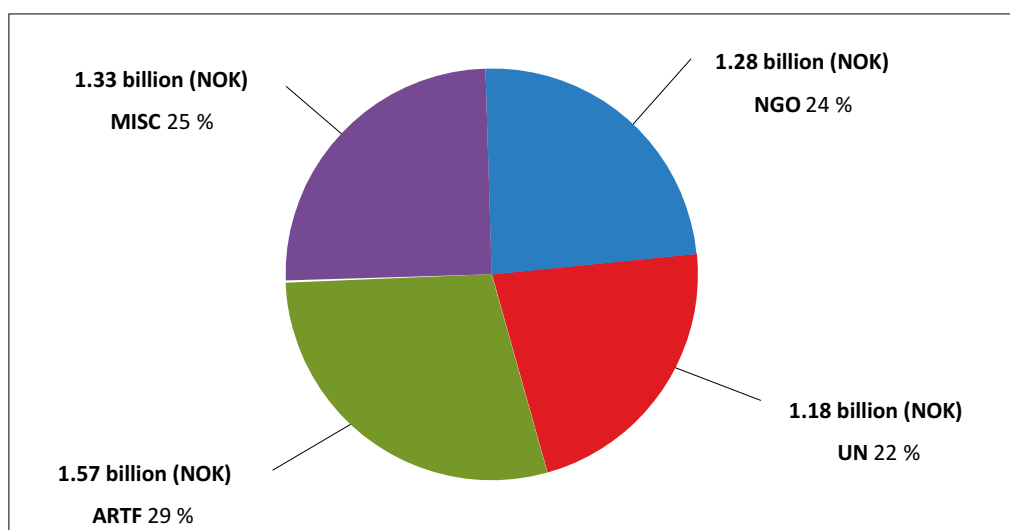
Before reviewing the Norwegian development assistance provided from 2011–2014 we will summarise the main trends in the period 2001–2011. The data is derived from the 2012 Norad evaluation and from official Norwegian aid statistics.<sup>2</sup>

Norway reported a total spending of NOK 5,363 million from 2001–2011, and then NOK 3,008 million from 2011–2014. The annual budget allocation was approximately NOK 750 million.

Figure 2 from the 2012 report documents a fairly equal distribution of funding for NGOs, the United Nations (UN), the ARTF and a miscellaneous category.

**Figure 2. Total grant value share per disbursement channel 2001–2010**

(Total = NOK 5,363 million)



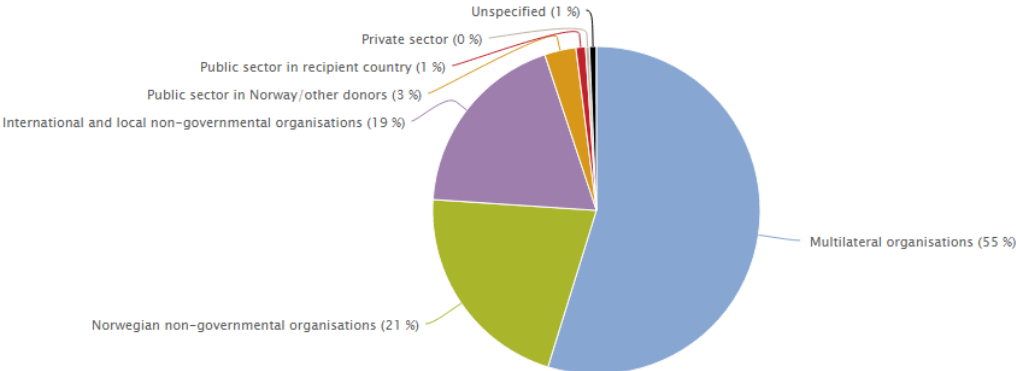
Source: Norad 2012 report.

During the 2011–2014 period, as indicated in Figure 3 below, the multilateral organisations remained the largest channel, receiving 55% of the assistance, which is a slight increase from the combined ARTF and UN funding of 51% for the 2001–2011 period. There was a slight internal shift, however, with more of the funding channelled through the ARTF. The largest change is on the NGO side, that is up from 24% to 40%, although some NGO funding might have been included in the miscellaneous category in the 2001–2011 figures.

The 20% earmarking of assistance for the Faryab province was a contributing factor to the increase, as funding to this area was channelled through NGOs. We can note here that the total number of NGO partners and projects have sharply reduced over the period, and the management of their three-year framework agreements was shifted from the Embassy in Kabul to MFA and Norad in Oslo. This change reduced considerably the management burden at the Embassy in Kabul.

<sup>2</sup> Available at <https://www.norad.no/en/front/toolspublications/norwegian-aid-statistics/>, visited 25.01.2016.

**Figure 3. Disbursement between partners 2011–2014**

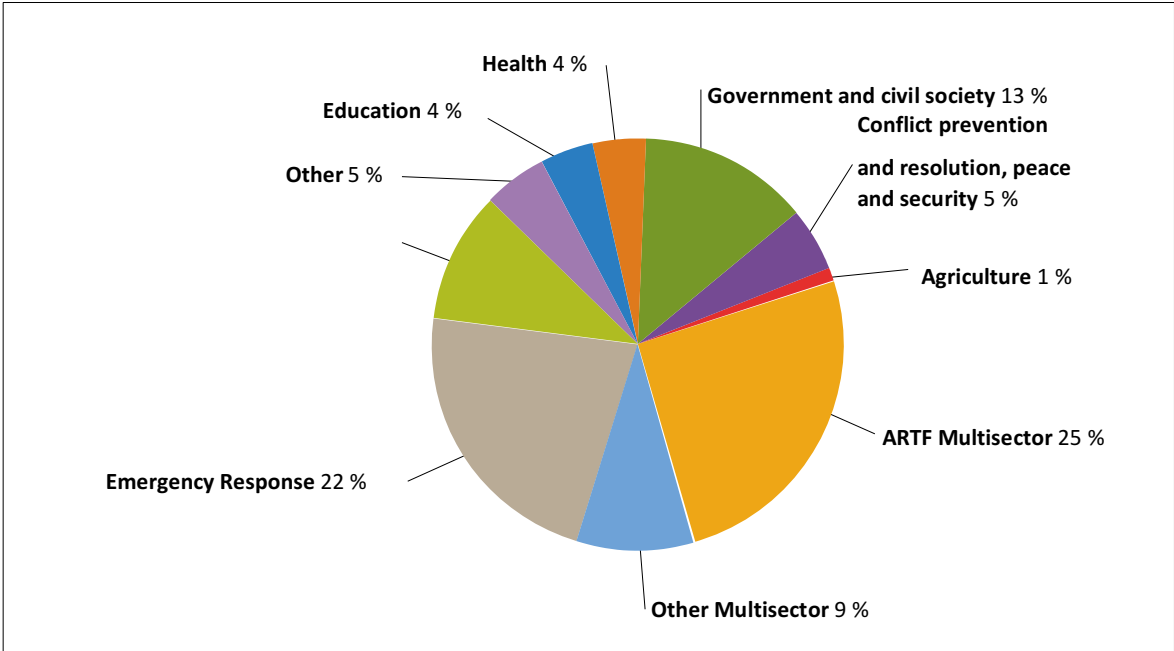


Country / region: Afghanistan  
 Norwegian development aid 2011 – 2014 by partner  
 Total 3 008.0 Million NOK

Source: Norad Aid Statistics.

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of grants between sectors for the 2001–2011 period. Multi-sector assistance, with 34 %, is the largest area, followed by emergency response with 22 %, and then support for government and civil society with 13 %.

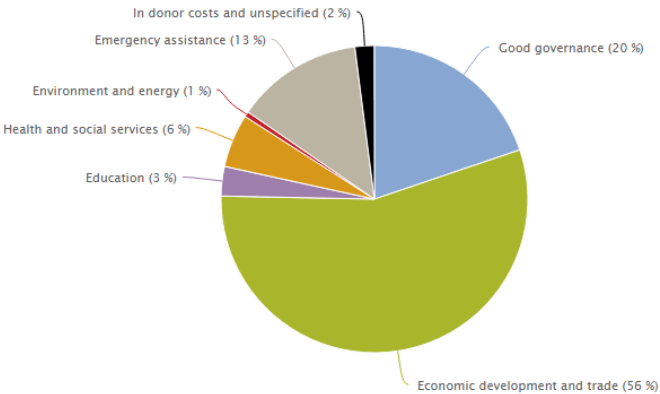
**Figure 4. Total share of grants by sector 2001–2010 (%)**



Source: Norad Aid Statistics.

Looking at figures from 2011–2014 the following pattern on distribution between sectors emerge (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Total share of grants by sector 2011–2014 (%)**



Country / region: Afghanistan  
 Norwegian development aid 2011 – 2014 by sector  
 Total 3 008.0 Million NOK

Source: Norad Aid Statistics.

What is evident, although the labelling differs, is a major increase of 22% (from 34% to 56%) for the area of economic development and trade. This is primarily multi-sector support, plus NOK 50 million for agriculture. There is likewise a substantial reduction in emergency response/assistance of 9% (from 22 % to 13 %), although this could partly be a shift from direct NGO support to a preference for funding the OCHA Emergency Relief Fund. Other sectors remain fairly equal: there is a slight 2% increase to the good governance sector (corresponding to the “government and civil society and conflict prevention, peace and security” category in the 2001–2011 listing). There is a small reduction for the education sector (from 4% to 3%), possibly because education was no longer given preference through ARTF.

We will come back to the strategies and decisions leading to these changes.

We note that from 2013 onwards the Embassy in Kabul increasingly requested advice and input to the management of the development portfolio from Norad, which to a larger extent assisted with evaluations, reviews and projects assessments. As a result, the number of external reviews, commissioned by the Embassy, were fewer than in the preceding years.

Management of contracts with Norwegian NGOs was transferred to Norad’s SIVSA department in 2013. In 2014 the remaining contracts (support to trust funds and international NGOs) were transferred to «Seksjon for Tilskuddsforvaltning» in the department for Competence and Resources. This department is part of the MFA’s central administration, not of the regional department with responsibility for Afghanistan. The section can request support from Norad on the follow-up on i.e. ARTF and LOTFA.

Norad and MFA included reviews and evaluations as a requirement in the NGO framework agreements, with the responsibility for implementation corresponding to the NGOs. The same goes for ARTF and LOTFA, where their regular review and evaluation systems was to be followed. This arrangement has led to a number of system-wide evaluations of the ARTF, in addition to programme mid- and end-term evaluations. ARTF funded programmes (such as the National Solidarity Programme) have undergone a large number of evaluations (including an impact evaluation) in addition to their regular monitoring. Norway, as part of the donor community, also pushed for more

targeted evaluations of LOTFA and EQUIP in response to concerns that had been raised, and withheld funding until satisfactory explanations or changes had taken place.

In general, it can be concluded that Norway has ensured that the “regular review/evaluation system” has been in place through the various programme contracts, but with the responsibility for implementation placed on the trust funds and NGOs. Further, these measures have been followed-up through Norway’s participation in the various steering and programme committees for the trusts funds and specific programmes. When concerns have been raised or more knowledge has been needed on specific programmes, Norway has also initiated targeted evaluations. This is discussed in greater detail below when looking at Norway’s support to the education sector. The Embassy also requested in its 2014 “Virksomhetsplan” to make use of Afghan consultants and research institutes to undertake field monitoring and evaluations as the security situation has made field visits for embassy staff increasingly difficult. It seems that this has only been actually done to a limited extent, but we have noted a Faryab study undertaken by an Afghan organisation.

However, according to one source, there is reason to be concerned because under the present structure and bureaucratic division of contracts between the MFA and Norad in Oslo, it is unclear who can and should initiate or decide on new reviews or evaluations when these go beyond the ongoing management of existing agreements.



## Assessment of the follow up to evaluation recommendations

A key document for this review is the Norad 2012 report Evaluation of Norwegian Development Cooperation with Afghanistan 2001–2011 (Report 3/2012). In practical terms, the evaluation only covered activities in the period 2001–2009 (p. xv). The aim of the evaluation was to “...assess the contributions of the Norwegian development assistance to promote socio-economic conditions and sustainable peace through improvements in the capacity of the Afghan state and civil society to provide essential public services” (page iii), applying the OECD/DAC evaluation guidelines. We will here present the main evaluation findings before discussing, first, how they were addressed and followed up by the MFA, the Embassy and Norad, and afterwards, how this was done by the various implementers of Norwegian-funded assistance.

A key finding from the evaluation is that Norway’s policy and interventions “match closely the international agenda for Afghanistan and within that framework **its development agenda is certainly relevant**”. Moreover, that “the focus on governance, gender equality, education and community development has been consistent over the years, just as consistent as the choice of channels and partners” (p.133). The evaluation found alignment with Afghan priorities consistently high on the Norwegian agenda, although there is a concern that it primarily was the international community that defined the Afghan priorities, which then limited Afghan participation and ownership. The report points out that as only NGO funds remain earmarked for the Faryab province, with ARTF and EQUIP no longer being preferences for the province, the provincial government feared about reduced ownership and about needed capacity strengthening of the provincial administration.

Another finding is that Norwegian policy towards Afghanistan and the choice of aid channels (trust funds, UN organisations, NGOs and civil society organisations) has been remarkably consistent over the years (which was found to reflect a political consensus across two parliaments). The report noticed that “apart from increased funding for ARTF there is remarkably little change over the past decade” (p.134).

The evaluation made the following observation on predictability and relevance, and the underlying analysis (ibid.):

On the one hand Norway is a good example of predictability of resources and clear commitment to internationally agreed goals and therefore Norwegian assistance is definitely relevant. On the other hand, the use of underlying analysis remains weak and does not seem to inform policy choices, which may weaken the relevance of Norwegian assistance.

The evaluators are, however, of the opinion that “limited administrative capacity (at the Embassy) is one clear reason why policies are weak on the operational side” and that “follow-up on identified risks is not always satisfactory”. While they argue that the reasons for such an unsatisfactory follow-up is not clear to them, they identified that “pressure to disburse large amounts of funds is a contributor, given the limited staff and effects of the security situation on working conditions” (ibid.).

Turning to effectiveness of the assistance their finding is that “in output terms, **real achievements** can be reported to which Norway had contributed” (ibid.). Referring here to a range of development and governance achievements, as school enrolment figures of 7 million children by 2010 (of which

37% were girls), which – to place it in context – is up from less than 1 million in 2001 (and very few girls). They, however, go on to conclude that “...there is still **limited evidence of concrete outcomes**”, except for “improved access to services (such as midwifery) and enhanced pedagogical skills of teachers” (p. 135). There is, according to their assessment, not sufficient evidence to outweigh that “the overall quality of newly constructed schools is poor, literacy remains low and school dropout rates are high, governance remains poor and gender equality is still far from reality.”

Following a discussion on the elusive prospect for a sustainable peace, the evaluation found that “donors, including Norway, made attempts to reduce corruption, but despite all efforts corruption remains endemic and negatively affects the attainment of real outcomes” (ibid.). They go on to identify the “weakness of monitoring and evaluation systems” to be “the main reason why there is so little good quality information about outcomes.” Arguing that by the start of the century all agencies were so preoccupied with getting activities up and running “that M&E was one of many important design considerations that were sacrificed in favour of speed. Gender was another” (ibid). This, according to the evaluation team, “meant that virtually no baseline were done and, as M&E gradually improved, there was nothing to measure progress against.” As security declined after 2005, “M&E has become increasingly problematic logistically and insecure for staff to visit project areas”.

The evaluation concluded that “the overwhelming reasons for the limited results is poor governance and corruption.” It goes on to state that “donors have known about, tolerated, and in some cases exacerbated these for many years in spite of simultaneous efforts to bring improvements” (ibid.). This could be a result of “lack of agreement among donors about how to go about state building and governance agendas” (p.136). Turning specifically to the role of Norway (ibid.), the report says:

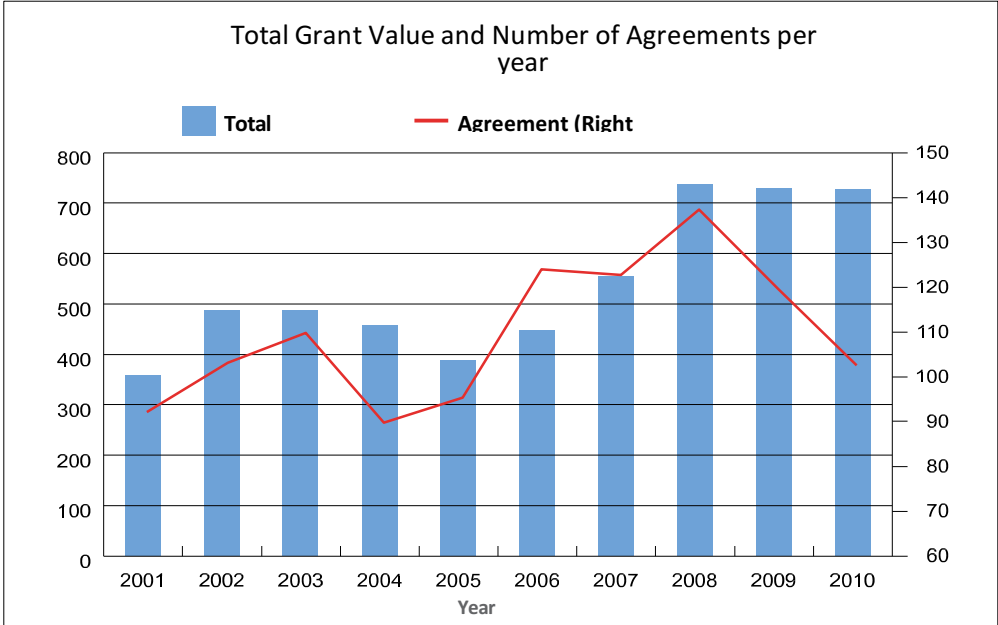
Although the MFA has systems in place to prevent corruption, and requires its partners to have anti-corruption policies and strategies, these may go some way to minimising, though not eliminating, corruption at the lower level but they have no effect on the far more damaging grand corruption which takes place in some of the ministries. ARTF has not proved able to manage these and the lack of monitoring is a contributory factor. All donors have taken enormous risks which have increased with the increase in budgets.

The evaluation found the assessment of efficiency problematic due to weak M&E and the lack of data, and therefore concluded that “no reliable assessment can be made to compare the efficiency of various aid channels or aid partners” (p. 137). Although they state that “ARTF as a multi-donor mechanism appears to be a relatively efficient undertaking when viewed from the perspective of fund management and administration”. They moreover draw attention to the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul’s increased management responsibility since 2005, in 2011 managing two thirds of the Norwegian aid budget, and observed that “this has created a heavy management burden for an Embassy that is chronically understaffed”. This leads the evaluators to conclude that “the management of such a complex portfolio in a very complex environment has received insufficient attention”, finally stating that “for a portfolio of this size, the human resources at the Embassy are wholly inadequate.”

We can see two trends in this area. One trend, as documented in Figure 6 below, is that the number of agreements (and partners/projects) was gradually reduced from 2007 onwards. The second trend,

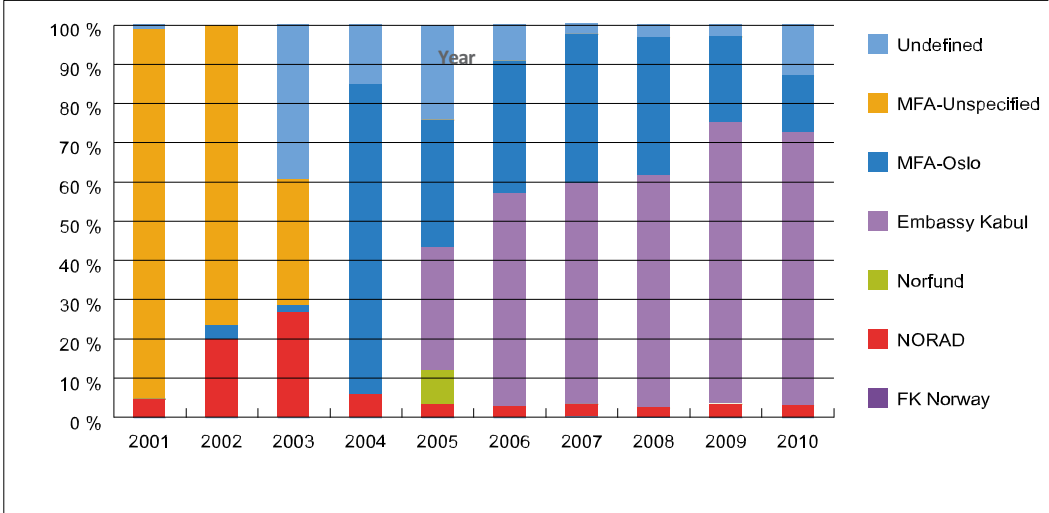
in Figure 7, is that increasing responsibility for handling the development portfolio was placed at the Embassy in Kabul until 2010.

**Figure 6: Norwegian development assistance to Afghanistan 2001–2011 (million NOK)**



Source: Norad 2012 report.

**Figure 7: Share of total value of grants per extending agency per year**



Source: Norad 2012 report.

The evaluation finds sustainability a difficult concept to define in the context of Afghanistan, and therefore does not attempt to substantially address the issue. However, they make the claim that the sustainability of the Norwegian assistance “has not been the most important concern for Norway and has often been sacrificed where higher priority is placed on other objectives” (ibid.).

They find it difficult to identify the impact of the Norwegian assistance but make a more general observation of the situation as of 2011 (ibid.):

Governance has been poor and, by most accounts, is getting worse. It is often cited as a greater threat to the future of the country than security. The local political economy--manifested in corruption and use of patronage networks--has worked against international objectives. Poverty has been reduced for some people but has increased for many, especially in the face of deteriorating security across the whole country. There has been some progress on some of the human development indicators but Afghanistan continues to be one of the very poorest countries in the world with the majority of people illiterate and some of the more extreme forms of gender inequality.

Turning to Norway's achievements, they argue that they emerge primarily through "being a consistent and reliable donor within the framework of the international engagement", where Norway has succeeded "to put the principles of harmonization and alignment into practice". They observe that "Norway has a very good reputation based on its commitment, its consistent and reliable funding and its modest approach. The implication is that the visibility of Norway is not very high".

Arguing that donors in general are rethinking their strategies, and referring to literature that "points in the direction of more focused and better strategies that are based on sound theories of change" their main conclusion is that "Norway should rethink its strategy and aid programming for future engagement in Afghanistan" (p. 138). However, the evaluation did not provide any suggestion on the direction and content of such a strategy, or how the aid programming and selection of channels and partners should be changed. Neither did they give any specific recommendations for development of theories of change, despite their concern over their absence.

Our assessment of the follow up to the recommendations from the Norad-report, including MFA strategies and internal guidelines, can be divided in two parts. One question is how the MFA, the Kabul Embassy and Norad followed up on and operationalized the recommendations. The second is how the implementers of Norwegian development assistance, the Embassy and Norad, either on their own or on advice and follow-up from the MFA, responded to and took on-board the recommendations. It should be noted here that several persons interviewed for this review commented that many of the findings in the 2012 Norad evaluation were very general, as were the recommendations, and that they had expressed disagreement with some of them, e.g. that NGOs lacked contextual knowledge. The vagueness of the report made it difficult to identify clear and detailed initiatives for the Embassy to follow-up.

Many NGO representatives, on their part, had taken note of the requirement for a baseline to facilitate impact documentation, of the need for better M&E instruments, and for routines to prevent corruption and to ensure the expected outcomes.

The Embassy in Kabul did, as would be expected, develop a follow up plan for a selected set of recommendations detailing: a) concrete measures, b) who was responsible for implementation, c) timeframe and d) report in progress according to plan.

The document identified four main recommendations for follow-up:

1. An urgency to establish effective routines for follow-up and evaluation of development assistance.
2. Clarification of the WB's Country Assistance Strategy and results framework.
3. Increased priority on the strengthening of Sub-National Governance.
4. NGOs selection of projects and programmes must be based on conflict analysis and knowledge of local context.

The plan included eleven sub-priorities and a further number of activities, and specified whether the responsibility rested with the Embassy, the MFA (and with which department), or Norad.

The follow-up report was regularly updated and approved by the MFA; the latest one found being from 6 March 2015. At the time it was reported that 11 activities aimed at addressing the recommendations were completed, while nine were still in process (with some having taken longer time than anticipated). Further details will follow in the next chapter. However, the follow up from the Embassy side went further than the recommendations provided in the evaluation report and deeper into the challenges identified. We find reference to (or overlap with) the main recommendations, as well as those made by the Office of the Auditor General of Norway, in the Embassy's three-year plans (2011–2103, and 2012–2014) and in the annual "Virksomhetsplaner" (2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014).

These documents expose a more detailed context analysis than what was described in the 2012 evaluation, suggest a number of measures to address identified challenges, and provide a realistic assessment of the Embassy's ability to meet their goals—accompanied with well argued requests for budget allocations and human resources. One observation though is that we do not find any suggestion from the Embassy or demand from the MFA to develop a "theory of change" or revise the one constructed by the evaluation team.

From our interviews we can document that there has been a consistent follow-up, over time, from the Embassy, the MFA and Norad with their implementing partners on key issues. They have been raised in dialogue and negotiation on framework agreements, in annual meetings and in meetings held at the Kabul Embassy. The discussions have included the need for a) baseline studies, b) anti-corruption strategies and tools, and c) plans and initiatives for monitoring and external evaluations. It has, as we can judge from various reports, consistently been followed up with ARTF (including the commissioning of external studies) and with LOTFA, substantially after the exposure of management and corruption concerns.

An issue that was highly emphasised in the evaluation report and addressed in all Embassy annual plans was the request for increased staffing to handle the Embassy's development portfolio. This matter will be addressed in the next section.

The NGO partners report extensive work on developing baselines (some doing it jointly with their implementing partners and some involving local communities and government representatives), improving M&E procedures and practises, and introducing or developing further anti-corruption guidelines and measures discussed later in this report. However, it seems that much of these efforts were already recognised and planned for when report was released, although the report was in some cases a trigger to accelerate their processes.

## Management of Norwegian Development Funds

In this chapter, we will analyse and discuss how Norwegian development assistance developed and was managed in the period 2011–2014; what were the bases for the adjustments; how recommendations were followed-up on; the interaction with and support for implementing partners; the involvement in aid coordination, and finally develop a comparison with Denmark and Sweden.

### Trends, prioritisation, thematic focus and implementing partners

The TOR request an analysis of trends in the period 2011–2014 in terms of prioritization and selection of thematic focus and implementing partners, and also an assessment about the degree to which they meet overall Norwegian development goals for Afghanistan. It is important to note here that throughout the period there have been three overarching goals for the Norwegian assistance to Afghanistan:

- 1) Strengthen Afghan institutions.
- 2) Contribute to a political settlement.
- 3) Contribute to sustainable and just development, humanitarian efforts, and promote the governance, human rights and gender equality agendas.

The third development goal had three defined thematic priority areas:

- 1) Good governance.
- 2) Education.
- 3) Rural development.

These priority areas were, as we have been able to establish, prioritized based on earlier agreements between donors on how to divide thematic responsibility, as well as on Norway's continued emphasis on gender, human rights and education. Arguably, support for good governance is essential if Afghan institutions are to be strengthened and gain the confidence of the population. A strong government would likely also be in a better position to ensure a lasting political settlement. Education is a long-term investment, and meets the critical need for more girls (and boys) to be educated in order to be able to take on larger responsibilities in their communities and in Afghan institutions, and is essential for the promotion of the human rights and gender equality agendas. The priority given to rural development is a recognition of the need to provide livelihood for the 5 million Afghans that after 2002 have returned from neighbouring countries, and of the opportunity to support local governance structures, and thereby peoples' engagement in governance.

Before getting into specifics, we need to recall the existing strategy, the directions already set and the on-going debates in 2011, as well as the further strategic and practical steps that were taken until the end of 2014. We are specifically drawing on two three-year plans (2011–2013 and 2012–2014) and the Embassy in Kabul's annual "Virksomhetsplaner" for 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014, and the MFA's corresponding "Tildelingskriv".

The decisions made with regards to development assistance seem based on three main factors. The first one is the overall direction and aid volume established in the Norwegian National Budget (with

Stortingsproposisjon 1, 2010–2011, as the starting point). The second factor is the alignment with international/Afghan driven processes and meetings (such as the London and subsequent Tokyo meetings), and not least the Tokyo Mutual Agreement Framework (TMAF). The third factor is the aim to ensure compliance with specific UN resolutions, such as Resolution 1325.

Important to notice here is that the 2011–2013 plan (from 2010) refers to a decision to reduce the number of partners and consolidate the development portfolio, and to ensure regular evaluations of the partners. The plan points out that the number of partners and agreements had been reduced by 50% since 2007. This fact suggests that the decision for reduction in number of partners was in place beforehand.

The 2011–2013 plan indicates two overarching directions for Norwegian development assistance. One is to increase the funding channelled through the ARTF, and support the establishment of a Nordic civil society trust fund, while reducing the aid disbursed through the UN and NGO channels. A second direction involves a shift to more non-earmarked funding. It was noted that these changes depended on the Afghan government's commitment to address corruption. The same plan emphasises concentration on higher education and management of natural resources, in parallel with a continuation of the prioritisation of good governance and education. The Embassy plan signals a continuation of support for the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) and the National Area Based Development Programme (NABDP), support through NGOs for the Faryab province, as well as support for human rights with a reference to a newly developed action plan.

The 2011 "Virksomhetsplan" is in line with the three-year strategy. More emphasis is placed on maintaining a high profile on anti-corruption initiatives, and on strengthening Embassy competence in this field. The Embassy also planned for a higher priority on humanitarian assistance, and consequently participation in UNAMA and OCHA coordination efforts. The Embassy moreover invited MFA for a discussion of the exchange of one of the Norwegian advisor positions against recruitment of three national development and security experts, which was also to ensure a larger degree of staff continuity at the Embassy.

The 2012 "Virksomhetsplan" maintains the 2011 priorities but notes a delay in what is referred to as the "Kabul process" causing a challenge to the ARTF agreement. This was the result of the Kabul Bank corruption scandal and of a lacking of agreement between Afghanistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). More efforts were made to ensure Nordic collaboration on UNWOMAN and on a joint Nordic effort with the United Kingdom to establish a civil society trust fund (Tawanmandi). The Embassy maintained the priority for good governance (including an increase in support for LOTFA), education (including EQUIP) and rural development (including in Faryab). Involvement in the energy sector was put on hold awaiting clarifications from involved Afghan ministries.

This planning took place in light of an MFA decision to reduce Norwegian presence in Afghanistan, including a number of staff positions in 2012 and 2013, assumingly linked to the reduced military presence. The implication, according to the Embassy, was to reduce the ambitions of being a development policy actor and dialogue partner in Kabul and to drop the engagement in health related activities. The Embassy maintained a request for the recruitment of an Afghan development expert.

The “Virksomhetsplan 2013” maintained the priority areas for development assistance, but also reports several developments and initiatives that influence the planning and implementation of the development assistance.

- The first issue is that the reduction of development projects/agreements has continued, in order to safeguard sufficient management capacity. By the end of 2012, 25 agreements were to be terminated; efforts were underway to improve the Embassy’s “forvaltningsrutiner”; recruitment of a new national development expert was planned; and they contemplated a larger use of Norad expertise.
- The second one is the priority of and involvement in the “Tokyo Conference” held in mid-2012, including the dialogue processes between the international community and the Afghan government before and after the conference.
- The third issue is the management response to the Norad 2012 evaluation report, a micro risk assessment of the development work, and the planning of a strategy seminar (see below).
- A fourth one is a plan to pay further attention to the coordination of the humanitarian assistance, the development of an Emergency Relief Fund, and a continued attention to the corruption allegations against LOTFA.

The December 2012 strategy seminar is of interest to this review, as it was an attempt by the Embassy (with MFA and Norad participation) to address development challenges identified in the Norad 2012 evaluation report and the Tokyo process. A key issue was how to ensure a policy dialogue with the Afghan government on how to meet (and report on) the target set for a 50 % on budget support and an 80% alignment with National Priority Plans (NPPs). A more practical issue was whether part of the management of the development portfolio could be shifted to Oslo, so that the Embassy could (in our translation): “ensure a better follow-up of the development projects, be a distinct development actor in the external debates, use development assistance more effectively, while at the same time aiming to reduce the number of agreements to ensure a more manageable development management.”

The seminar does reflect moreover that the Ambassador, who took up his position in September 2012, had a development background, with a special concern for the quality of the development assistance. He had an expressed intention to draw on external resources and expertise (as in Norad) to ensure that Norway met its development goals.<sup>3</sup> This was then done over the coming years, with very specific assistance requests made to Norad.

In the “Virksomhetsplan for 2014” we can identify some visible results of the strategy work and the prioritisation made. Although the three priority areas for development assistance remained the same, defined as part of three strategic goals, they appear here slightly extended from the original wording:

- 1) Contribute to the strengthening Afghan institutions for the country to ensure own security and development.

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<sup>3</sup> We have not had access to any notes from the meeting but several of those interviewed point towards the seminar as an important event, both in shaping the development agenda and in bringing the various actors more closely and constructively into the process over the coming years.



- 2) Contribute to a political settlement, including strengthened regional cooperation.
- 3) Contribute to sustainable and just development, humanitarian efforts, and the promotion of the governance, human rights and gender equality agendas.

The 2014 plan noted that the civilian coordinator position in Faryab was terminated the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, 2013, while an additional position as migration attaché was established at the Embassy from 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 2014.

It is evident from reports and interviews that the Embassy had allocated substantial resources and time during 2012 and 2013 to ensure planning and implementation of the TMAF in consultation with the Afghan government. This activities included preparations for the Senior Officials meeting in Kabul within the Nordic+ framework, follow-up to the LOTFA, and an active engagement to further education through support and stakeholder dialogue on the ELECT II programme, while also engaging very actively on human and women rights issues.

By the end of 2013, the Embassy took a sober look at realities and advised the MFA that uncertainty over the Afghan presidential elections in April 2014, and the pull-down of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) by end of 2014, might lead to a considerable change in the framework for Embassy activities during 2014.

We can therefore conclude that there was a process well in place before 2011 to focus and reduce the number of projects and agreements in the development portfolio. It included a strong emphasis on support for dialogue with the Afghan government, and for the development of its capacity “to manage their own development”, while at the same time Norway signalled a will to challenge them on corruption, gender and human rights issues. They were prepared to engage strategically, for example through the ARTF, to fund activities in support of these priorities. Ensuring sufficient Embassy staffing for the handling of a large development portfolio was consistently brought up in the dialogue with the MFA, as was the way in which the tasks and responsibilities for the development portfolio and partners could be divided between Oslo and Kabul/Meymaneh.

The document review identified some main trends with regards to the prioritisation and selection of thematic focus and implementing partners, and to the fulfilment of the overall Norwegian development goals for Afghanistan:

- 1) Adherence to the Norwegian strategy for the development assistance to Afghanistan.
- 2) Adherence to the requirements set in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF) to align donor funding with national priorities. Specifically, to ensure that 50% of Norwegian funds were “on budget” and 80% were aligned with the National Priority Programmes. This took considerable time and resources in a dialogue with the Afghan government, within the Nordic + framework and with other donors.
- 3) A deliberate reduction in the number of projects/programmes within the given thematic areas, including the termination of funding to the Afghanistan Sub-National Governance Programme (ASGP) and the exit from a planned energy programme. Priority was on channelling aid through trust funds (ARTF, LOTFA and Tawandandi) in order to reduce the management burden at the Embassy/MFA.

- 4) A planned reduction in the number of Norwegian staff handling the development portfolio at the Norwegian Embassy, complemented by an increase of national staff, and the shifting of management responsibility from 2013 onward to MFA (international NGOs) and Norad (Norwegian NGOs). However, the termination of the Norwegian development councillor position in Kabul at the end of 2014, and the potential consequences for aid management and coordination/dialogue, is not addressed or discussed in available Embassy plans or in other documents reviewed. Increased security concerns during early 2014, is cited in interviews as a possible reason for the decision to terminate the international development advisor position.
- 5) A continuation and no change in selection of focus areas and channels, although with a shift of priority between channels, giving higher priority to ARTF and reducing NGO funding.

Our assessment, both based on the document review and the Norad evaluation report, is that both thematic areas and the implementing partners selected contributed to the Norwegian development priorities set for Afghanistan. The Embassy efforts in the TMFA process then helped shape and influence implementation. There is a noted consistency in the three-year and the annual plans in ensuring adherence to these goals, and alignment with (and support for) goals commonly agreed between the Afghan government and the international community – notably the TMAF. The reason behind this consistency is discussed further below.

#### Bases for adjustment of themes, partners and funding

The period under study had a planned reduction in the number of Norwegian partners and projects, while the funding remained constant (except for a reduction in educational support of NOK 50 million in 2013 due to non-compliance from the Afghan government with respect to adherence to the TMAF).

The termination of the PRT in Faryab in 2013 ended the position of a Meymaneh based Development Advisor, and thereby the MFA/Embassy field presence that had secured the ability to coordinate partners and projects in the field, and to maintain direct contact and dialogue with provincial authorities. The termination of the position did not lead to any change in themes, partners or level of funding, but it was indicative of the increased “remoteness” from the field activities of the Norwegian Embassy since 2013 (when field monitoring ended). Followed by a reduced ability from late 2014, when the Development Councillor position was terminated, to engage substantially in development policy processes in Kabul.

#### Extent of follow-up of the 2011 evaluation and internal strategy/plans

The Norad evaluation and its main findings were introduced in the previous section. The TOR for this review asks for a more in-depth assessment of the following points to determine the extent of follow-up to the 2011 evaluation and internal strategies/plans:

- Development of a theory of change of the overall Norwegian contribution.
- Improved contextual analysis, conflict sensitivity and risk mitigation.
- Anti-corruption procedures.

- Monitoring and evaluation systems.
- Internal human resource allocation and administrative capacity.

We noted above that MFA/Norad and the Embassy in Kabul have reported systematically on the actions taken to respond to the recommendations from the 2012 Norad evaluation report.

The Embassy reported on the follow-up on four of the recommendations:

1. **Establishment of effective routines for monitoring and evaluation of development assistance:** A number of initiatives are reported as completed and there are on-going activities at MFA, Norad and the Embassy. These include dialogue with ARTF and NGOs on how they can strengthen internal routines and a suggestion from the Embassy to introduce a “supervisory- model” as part of the anti-corruption procedures.
2. **Clarification required on the WB’s country strategy and results framework:** It is reported that some activities have been completed, and others are still on-going.
3. **Prioritise higher the strengthening of district and province administration:** All activities are reported as completed, with the exception of the continuous follow-up required on the TMAF.
4. **NGOs selections of programmes and projects must be based on conflict and contextual analysis:** The majority of recommendations are reported as implemented while some are on-going, including having NGO partners develop an exit strategy.

ARTF and the partner NGOs interviewed report that they have addressed most of the recommendations under the five focus points, including preparation of Theories of Change (ToC) (overall and for particular development interventions), although with varying degrees of detail. An example of a NGO developed ToC is provided in Annex V.

All implementing partners report to have undertaken more extensive baseline studies after 2012. These baselines can thus both constitute a short-term tool for improved monitoring and enable necessary project adjustments. We therefore expect that NGOs over the coming years will provide more detailed and community-verified impact measurements.

All implementing partners report to have M&E mechanisms in place (see separate analysis). There has been a continuous discussion between the MFA/Norad and the Embassy, and their various partners, on how to secure quality of assistance, prevent corruption and document outcomes and impact.

All implementing partners report to undertake contextual analysis and risk mitigation initiatives as an integrated part of their own program implementation and, for donor NGOs, to ensure it is part of their implementing partners’ planning processes. This is presented in more details in the NGO review.

#### Engagement with and support and evaluation of implementing partners

All NGO staff interviewed, as well as the ARTF, report that the Embassy, MFA and/or Norad have had an active engagement, beyond annual meetings, on program/project direction and dialogue on how

to ensure compliance with the TMAF. The project/ programming dialogue has, however, decreased following withdrawal of the Norwegian Development Counsellor. Regular security meetings taking place at the Embassy are welcome as they serve as a venue for information sharing amongst NGOs.

ARTF regard Norway as an active donor, in particular on thematic issues such as gender, but note more generally that the participation/involvement has decreased over the last year. Reporting of results is, as reported above, part of the dialogue with the NGOs where they are encouraged to improve M&E routines and activities, and where the possibility for introduction of a “supervisory agent” is under discussion at the Embassy.

Several of those interviewed suggested that Norway could have taken a more proactive role in initiating independent monitoring and evaluations as the level of insecurity increased and placed restrictions on Embassy staff travels, including in ARTF supported channels/activities. This could have helped to ensure a more systematic verification of results and impact and provide a check on possible mismanagement and corruption throughout the entire development chain. This raises important issues on the development and use of monitoring mechanisms and evaluations in an increasingly challenging security environment, including issues of remote and/or community monitoring – which are a common concern among donors.<sup>4</sup>

There is an emerging experience and literature on those types of community based monitoring;<sup>5</sup> Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA), discussed later in this report, has been a pioneer in this field.<sup>6</sup> We can broadly divide that type of monitoring into two categories. One is the more technical approach with the use of images, being that from satellite pictures, drones or by on the spot pictures/videos (with location tagging) that can document the physical presence of a development funded objective – as a school, a clinic, a bridge or an irrigation structure. SIGAR has had a number of reports where they have tried to locate US funded infrastructure projects through satellite pictures and field-visits, with mixed results. In several cases the infrastructure existed but location coordinates were wrong (and several others, including one located in the Mediterranean, probably did not exist). Such images can document the quality of the infrastructure only to a limited degree, and can hardly assess the quality and impact of the activities that take place in or result from the structure built.

The later kind of confirmation requires in-person monitoring, both to complement the remote monitoring and to ensure that the infrastructure meets the planned specifications. That planned activities are taking place for the persons/groups intended, that these meet quality requirements, and that both infrastructure and activities are maintained and sustained over time, also require on site verification. A school is a typical example: buildings need to be maintained; there needs to be teachers with required qualification in place; they should be supplied teaching materials; and the planned number of students need to obtain the type and quality of teaching required for their age group. Such monitoring can be done through self-monitoring, e.g. by NGO’s, NSP’s and EQUIP’s own

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<sup>4</sup> This was a topic of discussion in a meeting with the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) in Washington in 2013, attended by one of the authors and a Norad Senior Advisor.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance the report “Afghanistan: Innovative Risk Management Approaches for Local Aid Delivery” which formed the basis for a presentation and discussion with SIGAR and USIP in Washington D.C. in 2014, <http://www.cmi.no/publications/publication/?5130=afghanistan-innovative-risk-management-approaches>, visited 13.02.2016.

<sup>6</sup> IWA has a dedicated webpage for community monitoring, including a handbook, available at <http://communitymonitoring.org>, visited 13.02.2016.

monitors, or by external and independent monitors that can review different aspects of the activities against the implementation plan (and over time against the baseline). These can report either to the implementing agency or the donor, or to the community and the local government (though this does not always take place). This type of oversight should be a regular and structured process, but can and should be complemented by unexpected inspections. Some programmes and several of the Norwegian funded NGOs have community complaints mechanisms that when activated should trigger an inspection.

A different type of oversight mechanism is community based monitoring, where either intended beneficiaries with knowledge of the programme or a hired person in a neighbouring community are tasked to monitor the progress and quality of a programme. This type of mechanism is increasingly used in areas with high insecurity (as are inspections done by Afghan staff), and ideally complemented with visits from the M&E staff of the implementing agency as well. IWA has learned that that training of the monitors is crucial for ensuring accurate monitoring and reporting, as crucial as it is to find ways to avoid the monitors to come under pressure from either implementers or influential persons in the community.

#### Norway's ability to respond to changing circumstances affecting development assistance

Norway emerges as a very responsive partner to the Government of Afghanistan by ensuring compliance with the TMAF. The efforts put into Nordic + and the active leadership role there emerge as important. This contribution ensured both a dialogue between donors and government, and made Norway a highly relevant policy actor towards other donors, including the US, with a "proactive" adaptation to new realities. We confirm this circumstance in the "Virksomhetsplan 2014", where the planned development activities are grouped (and assessed) according to the strategic objectives. That Norway is given recognition as an active partner by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA) is confirmed by a written response from a former Minister from the period under review, in which he stated that: "With adequate justifications, Norway has always made attempts to adapt and display a degree of flexibility in its role as a direct and bi-lateral partner to the GoIRA."

One question is whether the Norwegian strategy, development priorities and partners should have been adjusted in accordance with the contextual changes. Our opinion is that, on the strategic side, there was no reason to change the overall Norwegian aim of 1) strengthen Afghan institutions, 2) contribute to a political settlement and, 3) contribute to sustainable and just development, humanitarian efforts, and promote the governance, human rights and gender equality agendas. Rather, these strategical aims became even more relevant throughout the period.

The second question is whether changing circumstances warranted changes to the development priority areas of good governance, education and rural development. Again, it is our assessment that these priority areas remained highly relevant throughout the period under study, although for changing reasons. The efforts to improve governance are key for the GoIRA's ability to properly handle their development assistance and provide basic services to their population, and to curb the nepotism and corruption that reduces the value and impact of the assistance. Many of these challenges could only be addressed by and through changes in the GoIRA. Education, and especially education for girls, not only helps to close the existing education gap, but ensures in the longer run a better educated and skilled Afghan workforce. A continuation of the support for rural development acknowledges that the majority of Afghans secure their livelihoods and jobs outside the cities, and

assistance might help to stem an extremely high urbanisation rate. While not assessing the quality and impact of each of these interventions, we are of the opinion that they remained valid for meeting the needs on the Afghan side, and that they were in alignment with, and in support of, the achievement of the overall Norwegian strategic goals.

We have mentioned discussions in the Embassy about potentially prioritising other development activities. The energy sector was under consideration for several years, but was in the end decided against for three reasons. The first one was the mixed experience with support for the establishment of the Afghan mining law, and the subsequent bidding process administered by the Ministry of Mines that did not adhere to agreed procedures.<sup>7</sup> A second reason, as reflected in several “virksomhetsplaner”, was the lack of clarity on which Ministry would be responsible for managing the energy sector. And a third reason was the Ambassador’s concern that, given the uncertainty over responsibility and the resources required at the Embassy to see the project through, such a project might not meet the required standard and that it would be difficult to provide quality assurance. Among other projects discussed, according to national staff at the Embassy, was one to map and help increase the water supply in Kabul, given the positive response to the NORPLAN project from several Ministries.

The third question is whether there should have been further changes to aid channels and partners between 2011 and 2014. There was already a deliberate policy in place to reduce the number of partners (primarily NGOs) and projects, and a budget shift towards trust funds and non-earmarked funding. That shifted the management burden and responsibility for M&E to the WB, the UNDP and the British Council (Tawanmandi), who have such mechanisms in place. However, Norway continued funding through a selected number of Norwegian and international NGOs, including support in the Faryab province. It was a secure, but not very innovative policy, and might have missed out on opportunities to develop more Afghan-led development and civil society organisations.

With this caveat, the decisions to reduce the numbers of partners but to maintain a diversity of channels appears as sound, in the light of the contextual challenges outlined in the previous chapter and of the Embassy’s management capacity. There is, however, a noted concern over how support for Afghan civil society organisations can continue after the termination of the civil society trust fund Tawanmandi in mid 2015.

### Norway’s coordination with other donors

The responses we received about this question were mostly positive. Norway is seen as active at a strategic coordination level, in international donor meetings (e.g. Tokyo and the biannual follow-up meetings), in the ARTF steering committee, and not least in the follow-up to LOTFA. Particular importance is placed on the role played in the ARTF thematic sub-committees and in education committees, arenas used to ensure that strategy and policy (in areas like education and gender equality) is turned into practice. Norwegian work on and in the Nordic+ coordination group emerges

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<sup>7</sup> For details see the 2010 study *Afghan hydrocarbons: A source for development or for conflict? A risk assessment of Norwegian involvement in development of the Afghan oil and gas industry*, available at <http://www.cmi.no/publications/publication/?3763=afghan-hydrocarbons>, visited 15.02.2016

as highly important and influential in both policy and practical terms. It enabled Norwegian influence on key strategic issues far beyond what could have achieved otherwise.

At the national level, there was on-going coordination with the GoIRA and with other embassies on a range of activities, including a leading role on AIHRC and involvement in MEC (the latter delegated to the Danish Embassy). During the course of 2015, the co-location with the Danish Embassy has opened up further dialogue and collaboration given the range of common aid channels and implementers.

The Norwegian coordination and engagement practise is outlined in detail in the education chapter, from ARTF strategic engagement, through donor discussions (where the Nordic+ circle gave further leverage) and working groups involving different ministries, and direct project dialogue. What we have been able to establish was that this was not unique for the education sector. The Embassy also prioritised gender and human rights issues.

The Nordic+ circle was established already in the mid-2000s as a joint coordination point between Nordic donors that has been expanded to other donors, depending on the issues addressed. In 2006 Norad developed the document “Nordic Plus: Practical Guide to Delegated Cooperation”, and the collaboration was formalized at a 2008 meeting of the Nordic Foreign Ministers. A Plan of Action for Nordic Cooperation in Afghanistan was adapted for the donors in order to be “a more concerned partner for the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and the international community.”<sup>8</sup> It stated that

The overall aim of an increased cooperation in the development field is to achieve a stronger impact in sectors of particular importance to the Nordic countries. A more efficient organisation of development work should ease the workload for each country. Furthermore, a strengthened Nordic cooperation would enhance cooperation among donors in general, and strengthen the role of the Afghan government in taking overall responsibility for the development of Afghanistan.

There are few details on the activities of the Nordic+ in the documents made available to the team, but the “Virksomhetsplan 2014” notes that Norway was the lead donor for the first part of 2013, and the Embassy judged the collaboration in the period as “good and constructive”. For 2014 the Embassy noted that Nordic+ developed and extensive collaboration and carried out shared (project/programme) assessments and reviews “to rationalise such types of tasks” It also indicated that “delegated collaboration is considered where possible”. The Embassy further explains that “delegation of tasks between donors, and a rotating responsibility for process follow-up (TMAF) has demonstrated its effectiveness within the Nordic+ circle. Similar sharing of tasks is also taking place in the education sector and on singular contracts.” (pp. 10-11, our translation).

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<sup>8</sup> For more details see the 2009 Norad report “Strengthening Nordic Development Cooperation in and with Afghanistan”, available at <http://www.cmi.no/publications/file/3323-strengthening-nordic-development-cooperation-in-pdf> , visited on 15.02.2016

The interviews confirm the extent of the effort put into Nordic +, and also that it was regarded as very valuable in the dialogue on TMAF with other donors, and particularly by the GoIRA. However, some respondents suggested that the reduction in the number of Norwegian diplomatic staff and the termination of the development advisor position at the Embassy have affected the capacity to attend coordination and thematic meetings, and thereby Norway's influence on processes and decisions. National staff members, despite their knowledge and trusted positions, will find it harder to be heard in such fora. Such staff will also sometimes be required to consult colleagues or the MFA before stating Norway's position or committing to / approving changes or suggestions.

The same development is also noted in a response received from a former Afghan Minister. When asked if he had witnessed any change in Norwegian policy and/or practice in the period from 2011 to 2014, the former Minister responded:

Even before 2011, Norway had very clear ideas about a separation between security and social development activities through the highly specific role of its PRT in Faryab province. The largest change experienced in policy or practice over this period was the reduction of a physical presence in Kabul with the Norwegian Mission shrinking in size and reducing its in-country capacity. The main constraint with this became the reliance of Embassy staff on Oslo for finalising any informed decision.

We would like to mention that the Embassy has, as noted above, had an active role in facilitating information exchange with and between the NGO partners through regular meetings at the Embassy. In Faryab, the Development Advisor organised regular coordination meetings between Norwegian Funded NGOs and the provincial authorities, though the practice was discontinued after the position was eliminated. This lack of national/local coordination and information sharing on development and humanitarian activities with the Embassy is in our opinion a negative development, not least because it reduces the Embassy (and the NGOs) contextual knowledge in a rapidly changing security and political environment.

#### Norway as a donor compared with Sweden and Denmark

There are considerable similarities in the focus and approaches of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, especially after Denmark concluded its direct budget support and presence in the Ministry of Education (discussed later in the report) and channelled their education funding through the ARTF. The three countries have all taken part in and committed to the London and Tokyo processes, and not only signed up to the TMAF but worked actively through the Nordic+ group for the implementation of the framework. There has been a very active and sustained NGO presence in Afghanistan from all three countries, with key individuals in the Karzai and Ghani governments having spent their formative years in one or several of these NGOs.

Denmark's stated priorities are: 1) economic growth and employment with a focus on the agricultural sector; 2) education; and 3) good governance, democracy and human rights. There is also continued support for: 1) capacity building of the Afghan police; 2) returning refugees and internally displaced persons; and 6) providing humanitarian aid. In addition, women's rights and opportunities continue



to be a priority and Denmark maintains a strong focus on fighting and preventing corruption.<sup>9</sup> Denmark budgeted an average annual support of 530 million DKK for the period 2013-2017.

Sweden has two stated strategic results goals: 1) Strengthened democracy and gender equality, greater respect for human rights and freedom from oppression; and 2) better opportunities for people living in poverty to contribute to and benefit from economic growth, and to gain a good education. These goals are designed to respond to the “Five E’s for Afghan Development” announced at the Tokyo conference: 1) Empowerment, 2) Education, 3) Employment, 4) Enterprise, and 5) Economic Integration.<sup>10</sup> Sweden has budgeted a total of 4.87 billion SEK for the period 2014-2019.

In this chapter, however, the aim is to compare structures and practises for managing development assistance. We find more similarities between Norway and Denmark on the way aid delivery is managed, with the MFA as the lead and DANIDA and Norad acting in an advisory and support role. In the case of Norway, the MFA manages at headquarters level the framework agreements with International NGOs and trust funds. In contrast, Sida is more independent from the Swedish MFA, and is mandated to “implement the strategies and manage interventions, (including monitoring and evaluation of results)”.<sup>11</sup> This independence is then reflected in the way the Swedish Embassy is organised and manages its development activities. Sida staff is integrated into the Embassy structure, with the Ambassador as the highest authority. A Swedish Embassy is considered a separate entity from the MFA, which manages the development assistance, although it remains responsible to follow and implement the instructions given by the MFA.

The extent to which development assistance is managed out of the embassy or from the capital also results in differences in the staffing of the respective countries embassies. The Danish Embassy has had a dedicated senior diplomat responsible for overseeing development assistance, though she (and her Afghan colleague) have had limited ability to undertake field monitoring. We were informed that the staff member was leaving her position in the end of 2015 and will probably not be replaced, thus leaving the now joint Danish/Norwegian Embassy without a senior international development counsellor.

The Swedish Embassy has had a very different approach even though their projects are implemented in many of the same locations as those of Denmark and Norway—and facing the same security challenges. When the development advisor position in Mazar-e-Sharif was eliminated, a new position was instead created at the embassy in Kabul. As a result, the number of international advisors at the embassy has increased from four to five. They work together with one male and one female Afghan advisors. They manage together the development assistance portfolio and regularly undertake field monitoring, even in areas considered by others as being too high risk. Their estimation is that this practice works well, with specific security assessments being made for each travel to determine when, how, and with whom they travel.

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<sup>9</sup> The Danish Afghanistan Strategy 2015-17, available at <http://afghanistan.um.dk/en/~media/Afghanistan/FACT%20SHEET%20The%20Danish%20Afghanistan%20Strategy%202015-17.pdf>, visited 21.01.2016.

<sup>10</sup> Results strategy for Sweden’s international development cooperation with Afghanistan 2014 – 2019, available at <http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/c3f71737c5f84cebb8550f61b214ab78/results-strategy-for-swedens-international-development-cooperation-with-afghanistan-20142019> visited 21.01.2016.

<sup>11</sup> Sida: Approaches and Methods, available at <http://www.sida.se/English/how-we-work/approaches-and-methods/> visited 21.01.2016.

The benefits are however not limited to their ability to directly assess their development assistance and to meet with the intended beneficiaries. A further benefit is their capacity to have meetings with Government officials and members of Provincial Council and Community Development Councils, and to gain contextual and province/district specific knowledge that international staff at other embassies might not have. It also allows them to see the implementation of other project activities developed through mechanisms funded by Sweden, such as ARTF, which also provides valuable information for further engagement with these mechanisms. It should also be noted that it is not only the development staff that undertakes these field visits. The current and previous ambassadors also travel frequently and engage with provincial authorities, NGOs and Afghan civil society groups.

One likely reason for this difference is the clearly stated priority of the Swedish Ambassador, and the direction from the MFA, to have Sweden present in the field to the extent possible. This is also a decision that the Ambassador has the authority to make, as the position is mandated to decide on matters relating to travel and security policies in consultation with their security staff.

We therefore observe the largest difference in the management of development assistance between Sweden and Norway. The responsibility for managing development aid primarily lies with the Swedish Embassy in Kabul. Norway has this responsibility divided between (different sections in) MFA and Norad. Sweden also has a larger team (international and national) based at the Embassy, allowing for more hands on and contextually grounded management. This also allows them to conduct their own on the ground monitoring of Swedish development assistance.

We also see differences in how development assistance was utilised as part of the military engagement. Norway decided on a clear separation between the military and civilian engagement, with MFA staff coordinating the 20% of the Norwegian development assistance earmarked for the Faryab province. One interviewee observed that this left Norway in a better position than other countries when they started planning for withdrawal from the PRT and shifting assistance from the military to civilian management.

Denmark, as part of the UK led PRT in Helmand, had a CIMIC (Civil and Military Cooperation) detachment and civilian advisers from the MFA. These, based on an annual “Helmand Plan”,<sup>12</sup> implemented about 400 small projects with the aim of producing quick and visible results “in areas where civilian organisations are unable to work”. The projects were primarily targeted at education, water supply, health and infrastructure.<sup>13</sup> The tentative budget for the Helmand engagement was 85 million DKK in 2011, 90 million DKK in 2012, and 100 million DKK in 2013, as the PRT prepared to leave and hand over responsibility to local authorities.

Sweden allocated approximately 15-20% of its development cooperation towards the north of the country. These funds were administered by the civilian component of the PRT that Sweden led in Mazar-e-Sharif, which was responsible for the stability of four provinces: Balkh, Jowzjan, Samangan and Sar-e Pul. Aid activities were developed in cooperation between the Swedish embassy in Kabul

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<sup>12</sup> The 2011–2012 Helmand plan is available at [http://www.fmn.dk/temaer/afghanistan/baggrundforindsatsen/Documents/Helmandplan2011\\_FINAL\\_web.pdf](http://www.fmn.dk/temaer/afghanistan/baggrundforindsatsen/Documents/Helmandplan2011_FINAL_web.pdf) , visited 13.02.2016.

<sup>13</sup> For details see [http://www.netpublikationer.dk/um/9103/html/printerversion\\_chapter03.htm](http://www.netpublikationer.dk/um/9103/html/printerversion_chapter03.htm) , visited on 13.02.2016.

and Sida development advisers based in Mazar-e Sharif. Decisions on fund allocation were delegated to the embassy in Kabul. The Swedish development advisors at the PRT were part of the Embassy structure and handled development projects by Sida in the northern provinces. When Sweden withdrew from the PRT, the remaining development advisor was relocated to the Embassy in Kabul, to maintain the overall level of staffing in Afghanistan.

## Norwegian development assistance in Afghanistan 2011-14 and the results

In this section, we will provide a schematic presentation of the NGOs and trust funds in light of the main ToR questions, and discuss the extent to which they report on and can document short and long term results and impact.

### Review of NGOs and their activities

Based on the ToR we selected a number of NGOs and requested their reports, monitoring and evaluation, and anti-corruption guidelines. We were able to interview members of the NGOs in Kabul (except the Aga Khan Foundation that did not respond to our requests), while the Norwegian based NGOs were also interviewed in Oslo. Basic information about them is included in Annex III, but the NGOs selected are the following:

- Aga Khan Foundation (AKF)
- Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED)
- Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR)
- Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA)
- Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC)
- Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
- Norwegian Red Cross (NORCROSS)

There are some important differences between these NGOs to be kept in mind. NCA and NORCROSS both work with, and implement projects through Afghan NGOs, the Afghan Red Crescent and civil society groups. The other NGOs listed are primarily implementing their own projects, but collaborate to varying degrees with local communities (including Community Development Councils and similar bodies) and/or national, district and local authorities.

NAC, NCA and NRC (the latter with a break between 1994 and 2002) have had a sustained presence in Pakistan/Afghanistan since the early 1980s, later joined by NORCROSS. Starting in 2002 the Embassy in Kabul provided support for AKF, and later for IWA, as part of support for anti-corruption initiatives. ACTED and DACAAR were partners for the Norwegian development support in Faryab.

All these partners are well recognized NGOs and have substantial additional funding from a range of donors. ACTED, AKF, DACAAR and four of NCA's partner NGOs are facilitating partners for the National Solidarity Programme.

## Aga Khan Foundation (AKF)

Development orientation with strong beneficiary involvement. Projects on 1) human and institutional development, 2) professional development, 3) public health promotion, 4) culture and tourism promotion, 5) alternative energies, 6) maternal and child health, and 7) “Light up Bamyan”.

Context analysis & risk mitigation	Capacity building	National ownership	Monitoring and Evaluation	Anti-corruption	Results/ impact	Gender <sup>14</sup>
Yes  Extensive analysis and risk mitigation, incl. local staff hiring and contact with community leaders.	Yes  Subnational governance structures, incl. local NGOs and community councils.  MOE at province & district, and for TTCs Public Health workers.	Yes  Training and involvement of and with governance structures (province & district), and national NGOs, incl. for advocacy work.  Communities, increased capacity for own development.  Alignment with NPP.	Yes  Evident from reports and including baseline.	Yes  Reference to AKF (UK) Anti-corruption and bribery policy.	Yes  All projects report on actual delivery against plans – and provide explanations when goals not met.  Sustainability and lessons learned discussed for each project area.  Impact cases presented.	Yes  Gender policy, and gender unit, gender advisors and project focal point.

<sup>14</sup> Based on T. Wimpelmann and A. Strand. 2014. *Working with Gender in Rural Afghanistan: Experiences from Norwegian-funded NGO projects*. (Norad Evaluations no. 10/2014). Oslo: Norad.

## Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED)

Rural development and humanitarian assistance orientation. In Faryab they have implemented projects to 1) improve natural, human, social and physical capital, 2) improve the economic potential of excluded groups, and 3) improve governance.

<b>Context analysis &amp; risk mitigation</b>	<b>Capacity building</b>	<b>National ownership</b>	<b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b>	<b>Anti-corruption</b>	<b>Results/ impact</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<p><i>Yes</i></p> <p>Extensive conflict analysis, project level risk mitigation, including delegated authority to field for rapid decision making &amp; staff training.</p>	<p><i>Some</i></p> <p>GIRoA: outreach/ monitoring.</p> <p>Training of youth groups.</p>	<p><i>Mixed</i></p> <p>MoU with ministries but report challenges with govt. participation in projects.</p> <p>Alignment with NPP.</p>	<p><i>Yes</i></p> <p>Internal M&amp;E unit. Financial/ audit control and a mix of local and expat monitoring staff, plus community monitoring and complaints mechanisms .</p>	<p><i>Yes</i></p> <p>AC guidelines and autonomous departments with reporting line to HQ.</p>	<p><i>Yes, partially</i></p> <p>They report achievement against planned outcomes – but i.e. actual increase in income not documented/ assessed.</p> <p>Impact in Faryab: More women taking university qualification tests. Increase in female economic activities. Estimated 9 mill USD savings due to livestock vaccination.</p>	<p><i>Yes</i></p> <p>Gender policy and strategy, gender unit and 7 gender focal points.</p>

### Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR)

Rural development organisation, expertise on Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). Faryab programme includes 1) Rural development activities aimed at: a) reduced household vulnerability and b) reduced female vulnerability for socio-economic risks/stress, and 2) WASH activities aimed at: a) capacity building for technical/management skills; b) groundwater monitoring and c) access to clean water.

Context analysis & risk mitigation	Capacity building	National ownership	Monitoring and Evaluation	Anti-corruption	Results/ impact	Gender
Yes  Covered in strategy doc, incl. scenarios.  Reports more technically oriented, with less on actual risk-mitigation efforts.	Yes  For provincial gov. staff, NGOs and individuals on agricultural and WASH themes.  Training of women and establishment of Women Resource Centers.	Partly  Articulated focus on training, less on involvement and ownership.  Alignment with NPP.	Yes  Including mixed monitoring teams. The M&E system is under development, based on evaluation recommendation.  Detailed baseline study on program priorities conducted at project start.	Yes  Anti-corruption policy with zero tolerance and Code of Conduct on anti-corruption.  AC control in Finance Manual and Procurement Manual	Yes  Detailed on results against plan/baseline.  Water data generated used for other actors – contributed to National Drinking Water Standard.	Yes  Gender policy, and one gender advisor.

### Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA)

National NGO with anti-corruption expertise, projects on 1) public service monitoring; 2) community based aid monitoring; 3) extractive industries monitoring; 4) budget tracking; and 5) community trail monitoring.

Context analysis & risk mitigation	Capacity building	National ownership	Monitoring and Evaluation	Anti-corruption	Results/ impact	Gender
Strong  Including understanding of personal, organizational and communal risks associated with their activities – and ways to mitigate these	Yes  A main IWA objective.  Targeted for government officials, judges, civil society groups and individuals - including rural areas.	Yes  Including building national capacity to control and endure outcome (and impact) of development processes.	Yes  Building national and communal capacity to monitor and evaluate government activities and development, and private projects.	Yes  Addressing it both in theory and practice.	Yes  Some areas have proven more challenging to obtain results in than others.	Yes  For training and in studies on the gender aspects of development and community involvement

### Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC)

Integrated community development and disaster reduction/mitigation. Project include teacher education, midwife education, rural public health, natural resource management, disaster risk reduction and advocacy work.

<b>Context analysis &amp; risk mitigation</b>	<b>Capacity building</b>	<b>National ownership</b>	<b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b>	<b>Anti-corruption</b>	<b>Results/ impact</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<p>Yes</p> <p>Detailed context analysis. Identification and suggestion for risk mitigation on a broad range of potential risks to population, projects and organisation.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>For government and communities.</p> <p>NAC places technical staff in the province/ district office, as expertise to be drawn on by the government.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Consequent in engaging with and including government institutions and officials in the project cycle.</p> <p>Documented alignment with NPP.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Has M&amp;E policy in place, and monitoring unit and strategy in place – and community monitoring.</p> <p>Theories of change developed with stakeholders.</p> <p>Has extensive baseline study.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Has AC policy and concrete project follow-up.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Detailed reports on results against plans. Documented impact of midwife project by reduction in child mortality in a geographical area.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Gender policy and strategy,</p> <p>One gender focal point</p>



## Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)

Donor NGO working through/with Afghan NGOs and civil society organisations. NCA supports a broad range of rural development activities, including solar energy and female empowerment, and provide support for advocacy work. Peacebuilding is an integrated part of their projects.

Context analysis & risk mitigation	Capacity building	National ownership	Monitoring and Evaluation	Anti-corruption	Results/ impact	Gender
<p>Yes</p> <p>Both on their own and in collaboration with their partners.</p> <p>Particular focus on do no harm, and mitigating that aid generate conflict.</p> <p>Working ON conflicts and not only IN them (ref. Norad 2012).</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Main objective towards their partners, GIRoA and local communities, partly implemented by NAC and partly by partners.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Clear objective, aimed at national, province and district authorities, partner NGOs and local communities.</p> <p>Coordination office in Faryab, worked closer with the government.</p> <p>Government representatives invited for project monitoring. Alignment with NPP.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Policy and guidelines in place, including scorecards and reflection, training of partners.</p> <p>Baseline for intervention areas developed jointly with partner NGOs</p> <p>It does own monitoring and hires external evaluators.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Policy and guidelines in place.</p> <p>Follow/up with partners and communities, in dialogue with Afghan NGOs on community monitoring.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Twofold, one on capacity building of partners and the second more quantitative on what results these produce.</p> <p>Indicators of impact, but expected to be substantiated when measured against baseline.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Gender policy and strategy, and gender coordinator in Kabul.</p>

## Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

Humanitarian NGO with refugee/IDP focus, including a) humanitarian assistance; b) education and information activities, and 3) legal advise (ICLA).

<b>Context analysis &amp; risk mitigation</b>	<b>Capacity building</b>	<b>National ownership</b>	<b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b>	<b>Anti-corruption</b>	<b>Results/ impact</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<p><i>Yes</i></p> <p>Context analysis in placed, including on access, and on ways to mitigate risk in fragile areas.</p>	<p><i>Partly</i></p> <p>Limited to own staff on own project and staff of Refugee Ministry.</p>	<p><i>No</i></p> <p>No strategy to increase Afghan ownership and build capacity as expats manage operations. About to change, NRC plan to employ/build Afghan expertise over the coming year.</p> <p>Humanitarian assistance not part of NPP.</p>	<p><i>Yes</i></p> <p>M&amp;E system in place, international staff in charge of an independent unit. Real time monitoring, data gathering and analysis.</p>	<p><i>Yes</i></p> <p>General NRC handbook and policy, person responsible for AC oversight reports directly to Country Director.</p>	<p><i>Yes</i></p> <p>On results according plan. Less impact to report on, programme to be evaluated in 2016. They expect to have more indicators in place by then.</p>	<p><i>Partly</i></p> <p>General code of conduct, no dedicated staff.</p>

## Norwegian Red Cross (NORCROSS)

Humanitarian NGO with partner and network focus, providing support and mentoring for ARCS's organizational, logistic and anti-corruption development; and for their gender department and the RCRC network: organizational development, health programmes as well as support for Kabul ambulance.

Context analysis & risk mitigation	Capacity building	National ownership	Monitoring and Evaluation	Anti-corruption	Results/ impact	Gender
Yes  But largely based on the extensive knowledge and mitigation capacity of the ARCS, IFRC and ICRC.	Yes  Main objective for their support for ARCS.  Includes capacity to respond to emergencies and strengthening their gender department.	Yes  ARCS is the largest volunteer and health network in Afghanistan, working closely with the GIRoA.  Alignment with NPP.	Yes  Main effort to develop the ARCS system and capacity to monitor and evaluate own activities.  Including logistic system for tracing / use of relief commodities.  The NORCROSS representative monitors project activities.	Yes  Assisted ARCS in developing their AC strategy, procedures and routines.  Logistic system form part of AC measures.  NORCROSS has whistle-blowing policy.	Yes  Report on key achievements of supported activities, people reached and success stories.  Reflection on sustainability and lessons learned, less reference to impact.	Yes  Policy and support for as well as capacity building of gender department.

### Assessment of NGO activities

Analyzing the above information, we see a diversity of orientations and approaches among the NGOs, as well as across the type of humanitarian and development assistance they provide and its geographical coverage. Activities are primarily within the three priority areas of Norwegian engagement, particularly for rural development but also for the education sector, capacity building and the advocacy part of good governance. The NGOs hold a distinct capacity for responding to and mitigating the outcomes of natural disasters, responding to internal displacements and providing humanitarian assistance. Gender issues are addressed by most NGOs, with some working specifically on human rights.

As expected, we find a concentration of NGOs in the Faryab province, but also presence in the poorest and least developed provinces (such as Daikondi, Ghor, Uruzgan, Badakshan and Nooristan) and in those areas with large influx of returnees or concentration of IDPs (such as Nangarhar, Herat and Kabul). While there is some variation depending on their type of activity, all NGOs undertake conflict analysis and have developed risk mitigation plans. Most of them prioritize capacity building, though the extent of inclusion of government staff varies, as does their perspective on whether government staff represents an opportunity for collaboration or a major obstacle for the NGO

operations. These differences are then reflected in how each NGO aims to build national ownership. The practice of placing NGO technical staff in government offices and inviting government staff to take part in evaluations is among the clearest examples of a long-term capacity building strategy; merely informing them about ongoing activities is just the short-term option.

It is evident from interviews and documents reviewed that most of the development oriented NGOs have performed baseline surveys since 2011, and some of them have devised their own Theory of Change. This puts them in a better position to not only report outcomes and numbers, but to measure impact (at least over time) in accordance with OECD/DAC guidelines:

The positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. This involves the main impacts and effects resulting from the activity on the local social, economic, environmental and other development indicators.

Some NGOs report on their projects' impact or state the expected impact of the assistance. However, these exercises consist mostly of isolated examples instead of the systematic assessment of impact that are required to comply with the guidelines.

Although with variations, these NGOs are better prepared to meet and adapt to contextual challenges, document results and address corruption challenges than they were in 2011. They have M&E strategies and procedures in place, as well as anti-corruption policies and regulations, and dedicated staff to do the follow up. This is reassuring, when compared to challenges identified in other channels. Still, testing over time is the only way to determine how well functioning are the systems the various NGOs have in place, and what are the results and impact they can subsequently document.

Gender issues were a high priority for Norway over the period studied. We will refer to the main conclusion of a 2014 Norad study of rural Afghanistan that examined the performance of most of the NGOs under study here. One of its findings stands out as particularly relevant for this report (p. v):

The study zoomed in on women's income generation projects in order to examine the **relevance, sustainability, results and promising practices** of gender related activities. The review found interesting differences in how projects were conceived and implemented; to what extent they aimed and succeeded in expanding women's control over the value chain, whether it was possible to mobilize women in small collectives with regular meetings and to what extent women were able to obtain a sustainable income. The findings suggest that organizations should consider whether they could be more strategic, focused and ambitious in their work with women's economic empowerment.

We agree with the assessment that «gender projects» frequently appear as “tick the women box” projects, with limited planning and ambitions for their results and impact. This is a general criticism for projects targeting women in Afghanistan,<sup>15</sup> but one could have expected more from Norwegian NGO partners. That being said, we would like to emphasize that there were several innovative projects identified that deserve credit (not all of them included in the 2014 review that covered the framework agreements with NGOs). These projects helped further women's economic prospects (as

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<sup>15</sup> Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit. 2013. *Women's Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan, 2002-2012: Information Mapping and Situation Analysis*. Kabul, AREU.

solar engineers and midwives), secured their legal rights (as in the case of returning female refugees), and ensured women involvement in peace processes (Midwives for Peace).

## Review of Trust Funds

In this section, we will examine the main three trust funds used for channelling Norwegian development assistance: the WB administered ARTF, UNDP administered LOTFA, and more briefly the British Council administered Tawanmandi.

### Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund

The ARTF was established in 2002 to provide a coordinated financing mechanism for the Government of Afghanistan's budget and priority national investment projects. The fund is administered by the WB and supported by 34 donors. The trust fund is the largest single source of on-budget financing in the country. ARTF grants support to the Government of Afghanistan's operational budget (recurring costs) and to 21 programmes, including education, agriculture, rural development, health, social development, infrastructure and governance. ARTF is the main channel used by Norway to support the priorities set by the Afghan government. In total, Norway has contributed US\$395.656.635 to ARTF.

The ARTF reports on their results in their annual ARTF Scorecards.<sup>16</sup> It reported the following accumulated total results by 2015:

- Direct ARTF beneficiaries: 8,7 million (38% female), in addition to 27 million beneficiaries from NSP (48,5 % female).
- Education: 8,2 million children.
- Electricity: 4,5 million beneficiaries.
- Roads: 13,6 million beneficiaries.
- Water and Sanitation: 10 million beneficiaries.
- Employment: 4000 Enterprise Group members, 2.200 graduates from the National Institute of Management and Administration.
- Short term employment: 59 million labour days.
- Savings and Enterprise support: 69 500 beneficiaries.
- Agricultural and/or irrigation services: 10 million beneficiaries.

A stocktaking of the ARTF carried out in 2012 found that:

The ARTF remains the mechanism of choice for on-budget funding, with low overhead/transaction costs, excellent transparency and high accountability, and provides a well-functioning arena for policy debate and consensus creation.

That being said, the stocktaking also found shortcomings in terms of the reporting of results (discussed below in the section on M&E). Norway played an active role in the Strategy Group and the Steering Group, in guiding the efforts to strengthen the reporting mechanism, including the selection of indicators. During the period, Norway was also a driving force behind ensuring that gender was fully considered under the ARTF.

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<sup>16</sup> ARTF. 2015. "ARTF Scorecard 2015: Integrated Performance and Management Framework", available at [http://www.artf.af/images/uploads/ARTF\\_FINAL\\_2015\\_SCORECARD\\_REPORT.pdf](http://www.artf.af/images/uploads/ARTF_FINAL_2015_SCORECARD_REPORT.pdf) visited 22.02.2016

## Law and Order Trust Fund

LOTFA was established in 2002 with the aim of covering “all reasonable costs associated with the start-up and operational needs of the police force”. The trust fund, which is administered by UNDP, was intended to be a key channel for the international community to support the Afghan National Police (ANP) in order to strengthen the security sector. During the period under review, LOTFA was in its sixth phase. Phase VI (2011-2014) was aimed at achieving five main outputs:

1. Police force and uniformed personnel of Central Prisons Department (CPD) paid efficiently and timely.
2. Required equipment and infrastructure provided to Ministry of Interior (MoI).
3. Capacity of MoI at policy, organizational and individual level improved in identified areas and administrative systems strengthened.
4. Gender capacity and equality in the police force improved.
5. Police-Community Partnerships institutionalised for improved local security, accountability and service delivery.

The main emphasis was put on the payment of salaries. While Norway also contributed to the components aimed at building capacity within ANP/MoI, many of the other donors appeared less inclined to do so. As such, LOTFA was to some extent seen mainly as a mechanism to channel funds to pay for the ANP. Norwegian contributions to Phase VI of LOTFA totaled US\$ 25.521.375.

LOTFA reported the following achievements by December 2015:<sup>17</sup>

- Salaries paid to 150.000 Afghan National Police and prison staff.
- Establishment of 1.350 security check points, and refurbished police hospital.
- Establishment of 100 Family Response Units and 50 Gender Mainstreaming Units.
- Increased number of Police Women Councils to 70 in 30 provinces.
- Trained more than 10.000 police officers on the Code of Conduct.
- Established six 119 Emergency Call Centres and 31 Information Help Desks for the public.
- Connected 33 Provincial Headquarters to the web-based Electronic Payment System.

While there had been growing concerns over possible mismanagement of funds in LOTFA in the preceding years, the problem reached its climax in 2012. Following a report by the MEC, followed by media reports, the donors demanded a response from UNDP on the allegations. Future funding was made contingent on UNDP addressing any shortcomings in LOTFA in a satisfactory manner. Norway was amongst the donors pushing for a tough stance. While seeking to address donor demands, UNDP requested an extension of Phase VI of LOTFA through the end of 2014 (Phase VI should have been completed by early 2013). The extension was meant to give UNDP sufficient time to strengthen management and align activities for Phase VII, with the aim of putting in place a strategy for the eventual handing over of responsibility for the payment of ANP salaries to the Afghan government.

While the reforms undertaken focused primarily on UNDP procedures, rather than on procedures within the MoI, donors were sufficiently satisfied with the safeguards put in place. The strategic importance of LOTFA for the governments counter insurgency activities also meant that cutting of

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<sup>17</sup> LOTFA (2015) Project Summary December 2015, available at [http://www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/operations/projects/crisis\\_prevention\\_and\\_recovery/lotfa.html](http://www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/operations/projects/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/lotfa.html) visited 22.02.2016.

funds would have been a difficult, if not impossible, decision to make. From the decision making process for continuing Norwegian funding to LOTFA, it is clear that MFA/Norad were fully aware of the challenges, and worked closely with other development partners to push for the reform of UNDP's management of LOTFA. Despite the risks, it was felt that sufficient safeguards were being put in place. To this end, Norway also funded the extension of Phase VI (US\$9,6 million out of a total amount of US\$25,5 million). As discussed below in the section on M&E, Norway also used this opportunity for pushing for strengthened M&E and reporting on the party of LOTFA.

### Tawanmandi

Tawanmandi was established in 2011 as an Afghan civil society strengthening fund by a donor consortium including Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The British Council was selected to manage the fund, with a joint Funders' Council and Steering Committee.<sup>18</sup>

Tawanmandi supported Afghan civil society organizations (CSOs) in three main ways: a) by providing CSOs with grant financing; b) by providing CSOs with capacity development support according to their needs; and c) by helping to build effective CSO partnerships, networks, and coalitions.

Tawanmandi aimed to contribute to the development of "...a vibrant and inclusive civil society, with focus on issues of policy and practice in the areas of access to justice, anti-corruption, human rights, media, and peace-building and conflict resolution, with disability, gender and youth as cross-cutting themes". Tawanmandi financed three phases of project grants, where "a total of 78 project grants have been awarded through the programme. Funded projects have directly benefited close to 150,000 Afghan citizens in 29 provinces and 187 districts across the country".<sup>19</sup>

The donors informed about the termination of support to Tawanmandi in September 2014, with the contract expiring on 31 July 2015. They had decided against pursuing the plan of transforming the fund into an independent Afghan entity, while still assuring further support for Afghan CSOs.<sup>20</sup> All the persons interviewed supported the idea and rationale for the establishment of Tawanmandi, but they were also unison in their agreement that the fund did not deliver over time according to program objectives or according to the expectations of either donors or Afghan civil society. The main reason provided for the failure was related to the way the fund, and its relationships with CSOs, was managed. The British Council, as organisation, had not been able to establish a functional management system for the programme. Thus, donors decided to terminate funding following the conclusion of the present funding phase. The Danes placed importance on continued support for Afghan civil society and discussed the possibility of providing funding through a European Union "Programme in Support of Civil Society", though they had comments to the present EU programme note.

Those interviewed for this review had no knowledge about the way in which Norway planned to continue its support for the Afghan civil society, or if any particular funding mechanism was under discussion.

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<sup>18</sup> For details, see <http://www.tawanmandi.org.af> visited on 25.01.2016.

<sup>19</sup> British Council webpage, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/partner/track-record/tawanmandi> visited on 25.01.2016.

<sup>20</sup> The letter is available here <http://tawanmandi.org.af/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Letter-from-Tawanmandi-Donors-28-9-2014.pdf> visited on 25.01.2016.

## M&E and Anti-Corruption Procedures

Two areas of particular concern raised by the previous review were: i) the ability to document results and impact of the Norwegian development assistance, and ii) the capacity to address and prevent corruption. Recommendations included strengthening procedures and mechanisms in both areas.

### Monitoring & Evaluation

The evaluation of Norwegian development cooperation in Afghanistan during the period 2001–2011 noted that M&E had been a weak point largely because Norway, due to the security situation, had to rely largely on the reporting of others. The absence of baseline data also meant that impact was difficult to measure. While this was acknowledged by MFA/Norad, it was also noted that the security situation in Afghanistan continued to deteriorate through 2011–2014—the period of this review. Similar challenges remained, with limited possibilities for staff to carry out monitoring in the field (no visits were made to Faryab since 2013) and a reliance on implementing partners M&E frameworks and reports. With the reduction of staffing at the Embassy and the transfer of responsibility for NGO contracts to Oslo, people interviewed noticed that this issue has become even more of a challenge during the period under review.

This is not a concern unique to Norway, either for the previous period or for the period currently under review. Other donors face similar challenges, although some (e.g. Sweden) have maintained or even increased staffing at their embassies and made efforts to get staff out into the field. This practice shows that it is actually possible to conduct field visits, although the security assessment carried out by the Embassy in Kabul does not allow for doing it. As a result, working to strengthen the M&E and reporting procedures of implementing partners was the main channel to address the findings of the previous review.

As noted earlier in this report, multilateral organizations (primarily ARTF and LOTFA, the main multi-donor trust funds) continued to receive the majority (55%) of the Norwegian development funds to Afghanistan. While this means that strengthening the M&E and reporting of these organizations is critical for tracking the impact of Norwegian funds, it is also the area where Norway has the least capacity to effect change on its own.

However, during the period reported, an external review of ARTF was carried out, finding that more attention needed to be placed on strengthening M&E and reporting, as well as on providing gender disaggregated data. This has allowed Norway, as part of the ARTF Strategy Group, to have input into the process. These efforts have resulted in improved reporting on results, as well as in the development of an ARTF results matrix (launched in 2015), which provides at least some baselines against which progress can be measured, and some gender disaggregated indicators.

During the period under review, emerging concerns about mismanagement in LOTFA (which came to a head in 2012) also presented an opportunity for Norway—as one of the main contributors to the trust fund—to exercise pressure for the strengthening of M&E and reporting mechanisms. While baselines remained weak, Norway, together with other donors were heard in terms of more emphasis being placed by UNDP on strengthening M&E procedures and providing more adequate reporting.

The strengthening of M&E frameworks and reporting has also been a major emphasis in the dialogue with NGO implementing partners, with continued discussions between MFA/Norad and the NGOs in



relation to their framework agreements at the annual meetings. While it was mentioned that baseline data is desired for all new project agreements, it was also recognized that given the security situation baseline data may not be available in all cases, and that it would be possibly absent for emergency/humanitarian assistance. As such, the absence of baseline data does not have to mean that a project is automatically disqualified.

This emphasis on results reporting appears to have had results during the period under review, with all NGO implementing partners working towards establishing more robust M&E frameworks (with innovative ways of monitoring being adopted, such as documenting impact with digital camera or community reporting), improved reporting procedures, and the establishment of baselines against which to measure results. While these efforts are still ongoing, a majority of NGO implementing partners now have these mechanisms in place, and have frequently established a baseline for their projects. In some cases, partners are also moving towards developing theories of change (see Annex V for NAC's theory of change) to guide their activities. These efforts go some way towards addressing the concern that there is too much reliance on reporting from implementing partners due to the inability to verify independently the impacts claimed.

Overall, interviews with NGO implementing partners indicate that signalling from Norway during the period under review, together with an overall trend towards a greater emphasis on M&E and impact reporting, has provided a push for them to invest more in this area. Similarly, it seems that Norway has been able to seize the opportunities presented to push for change also within the major multi-donor trust funds. While there is still scope for improvement, it does seem that MFA/Norad and the Embassy in Kabul have made a considerable effort to improve M&E frameworks and reporting on results, taking into account a very challenging context.

### Anti-corruption procedures

Corruption remains a major concern in Afghanistan, threatening long-term development and stability. The Afghan government and the international community have repeatedly affirmed that addressing corruption is a key priority. Through interviews and the review of the relevant documentation, we are satisfied that the risk/threat that corruption poses to Norwegian development cooperation is recognized by staff within MFA/Norad and at the Embassy in Kabul.

Overall, under a very difficult context, the MFA/Norad and the Embassy in Kabul have by and large taken the measures that could be taken to safeguard against the misuse of Norwegian funds. Despite a potentially higher risk of corruption than in other partner countries, the Embassy actually had less means at their disposal to adopt safeguards than would have been the case in a more regular development context (e.g. field visits and on sight monitoring).

The overall framework for mitigating corruption risks in Norwegian development cooperation, along with a zero-tolerance of corruption policy, also apply in Afghanistan. This framework provides clear guidelines for how to address corruption allegations, including channels for reporting to the relevant units at HQ level. However, with the difficulties for carrying out monitoring in the field and a decrease in staffing at the Embassy in Kabul, the review of documentation from implementing partners increasingly became the main means of identifying cases of corruption during the period under review. The value of a zero-tolerance to corruption policy in a high-corruption context was also a concern raised. The risk is that partners may not report suspected cases of corruption in order to

avoid having their funding discontinued—a situation that NAC experienced during the period. This concern was confirmed by several interviewees.

While corruption, when uncovered, should never be tolerated, cutting funding may not always be the most appropriate response if it ends up jeopardizing the implementation of critical development activities. Instead, applying the principle of proportionality would be desirable and allow for, to the extent possible, continued development efforts while working to prevent further cases of corruption.

Proportionality, in this case, entails adopting an approach that is appropriate given the scale of corruption encountered. For example, if an implementing partner staff member is found to have embezzled funds, cutting funding completely would be a disproportionate response. Requesting the organization to sanction the staff member and putting in place better safeguards, while continuing to implement development activities, would protect development funds in the future without having a negative impact on implementation. That said, this would also require close follow-up with the implementing partner to ensure that actions are taken. It is possible that this again would require sufficient staffing at the Embassy to be able to do this in a timely manner.

At the same time, the number of projects/implementing partners was decreased during the period, in an effort to minimize the risk of corruption/increase oversight. This meant that Norwegian aid was channelled through fewer organizations, with stringent due diligence carried out prior to entering into a funding agreement. All contracts included an anti-corruption clause and implementing partners (including NGOs) are expected to have in place adequate safeguards against corruption, including complaints mechanisms.

The review of the NGOs that Norway is working with (see section on “Review of NGOs and their activities” above) shows that all of them have either put in place or are in the process of putting in place specific policies and mechanisms for mitigating corruption. The effectiveness of these policies and mechanisms is however difficult to determine without carrying out a more in-depth assessment of the actual systems put in place and of the capacity of the staff responsible for putting them into effect. We do however share the view of key informants that over the period reviewed it appears that adequate controls have been put in place by the NGOs to safeguard Norwegian/donor funds. We do note however that more could be done in terms of providing support for NGOs in order to strengthen internal systems and building capacity of their staff to further increase confidence in the safeguards that they have put in place.

With the major multi-donor trust funds (e.g. ARTF and LOTFA), Norway has relied on adequate safeguards having been put in place by the administrative agent (WB for the ARTF and UNDP for LOTFA). In cases where this assumption has not held (e.g. in the case of LOTFA), Norway acted together with other development partners to seek to strengthen control mechanisms.

There is greater uncertainty as to the controls in place to prevent corruption once funds enter Afghan government systems or reach out into the field. This of course is beyond the capacity of Norway to address, but the Embassy worked with other development partners during the period to keep the issue high on the agenda, and supported projects/interventions aimed at strengthening Afghan government systems. This however remained a difficult undertaking given the perception of a lack of commitment to genuinely tackle corruption on the part of the Afghan government.

## Case studies

We will present three brief case studies in this section to reflect the Norwegian priority areas of education, rural development and good governance. In these case studies, we have put the emphasis on reviewing the support for anti-corruption efforts.

### Education

The GoIRA decided early on to prioritise education, and to resume the responsibility for the sector, and not outsource the implementation to NGOs (as with the NSP). The new Afghan Constitution, approved in 2004, states that “education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan”. NGOs and private companies were allowed to build schools and provide teacher training and vocational/specialized training. In the field of higher education, private universities and institutes were allowed to be established, in parallel to the strengthening of the public universities. Finance Minister Ghani demanded direct budget support for the Ministry of Education (MoE), but most donors were reluctant and preferred to channel the funds through the ARTF. Denmark was an exception in this matter, as we will discuss below.

This led to the establishment of the Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP) in 2004, under the ARTF, with an EQUIP Coordination Unit tasked to coordinate the ARTF/WB support within the MoE and to liaise between the MoE and the WB. Key donors have been Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and USA.

The budget for EQUIP I at the start-up, in 2004, was US\$79 million, targeting 26 provinces. EQUIP II started in 2008, with initial funding for US\$188 million, and with a subsequent cost extension of US\$250 million. Planning for phase III is underway. Support was temporarily suspended in 2011 due to a critical Mid Term Evaluation, but continued later, according to the Norad 2012 evaluation (p. 5), after WB and MoE interventions that addressed most of the concerns.

Between 2003 and 2015, Denmark provided direct support to the MoE through their Education Support Program to Afghanistan (ESPA). It aimed to secure larger sustainability and ownership by the Afghan government, and included secondment of staff to the Ministry. The initial expectation from the Danish side was that other donors would join them in the initiative. As that did not happen, they were left with a heavy administrative burden, “especially as the MoE was rather fragmented in their structure, had limited capacity, and faced challenges related to corruption during the implementation.”<sup>21</sup> Denmark therefore decided to channel their education support through the ARTF from 2015.

At the same time, in 2011 Afghanistan joined the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) (supported and funded by Norway), and the MoE received a three-year grant of US\$55,7 million, starting in 2013. The GPE aim was to address some of the inequalities in the education system through targeting provinces that were “insecure, underserved, difficult to access, and have the lowest education and economic factors”. The project, that has established its own GPE Coordination Unit in the MFA, places large emphasis on ownership and social mobilisation through community and parent involvement, and on local teacher recruitment. While the EQUIP programme has been evaluated, so

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<sup>21</sup> For more details see Strand, A. (2015) *Financing Education in Afghanistan: Opportunities for Action*. Country Case Study for the Oslo Summit on Education in Development, available at <http://www.osloeducationsummit.no/pop.cfm?FuseAction=Doc&pAction=View&pDocumentId=63328>, visited on 25.01.2016

far there is no independent assessment of the GPE assistance, beyond a noticeable concern among donors due to a slow start, a lack of coordination, and the risk that of it ending up as a separate programme rather than an integrated part of the Afghan education system.

The Norwegian education support between 2001 and 2012 was primarily provided through EQUIP, but also through support for the WB's Vocational Education and Training, UNICEF for basic education and literacy, UNESCO for educational planning, and later the NAC, NRC and FOKUS for basic, vocational and health sector training. With the termination of the priority given to education through the ARTF, there is only NGO support registered for the 2011–2014 period. Norad aid statistics shows that the NRC receives most of the support, a total of NOK 93 million, for their basic education project.

However, a case study is too narrow for reviewing the NGO support for the period 2011-2014, since Norway has given substantial support to the education sector over time and has been engaged with several coordination efforts. We will therefore provide a more general assessment of the Norwegian support to education, and its outcomes and impacts, drawing primarily on the research for a MFA funded study (2015).

The results are impressive, from less than 1 million children in school in 2001 (with a low proportion of girls), the MoE estimated that in 2015 the number of students had reached 8,35 million students (39% of them girls) in primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary government schools--including Islamic schooling. The school-aged population is 10,33 million. However, 3,3 million children, the majority of which are girls, are still out of school. There is a common concern over the reliability of the data and numbers provided by the MoE. Numbers are not independently verified, and some students remain in the system for several years even after they have dropped out. However, the number of 8,35 million students used here is regarded by the statistics department of the MoE, the WB and EQUIP as fairly reliable, and is far below numbers quoted on several occasions by the previous Minister of Education.

There is a major lack of equity in the Afghan education system, measured by gender, geographic location, and language. Afghanistan has the highest level of gender disparity in primary education in the world, with only 71 girls in primary school for every 100 boys.<sup>22</sup> Only 21% of girls complete primary school, with important cultural barriers (such as early marriages) and a lack of female teachers as two of the main obstacles (GoIRA 2015).

There is also a major difference in enrolment in primary education between rural and urban areas. The Education Inequality profile for Afghanistan<sup>23</sup> shows that 58% of boys and 52% of girls in urban areas attend school, while in rural areas only 41% of the boys and 28% of the girls. To further highlight the gender and geographical disparities, 80% of the richest boys in urban areas completed primary school in 2011, while the same was true only for 4% of the poorest girls living in rural areas.

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<sup>22</sup> Government of Afghanistan. 2015. *Afghanistan National Education For All. 2015 Review Report*. Kabul, MoE.

<sup>23</sup> Available at <http://www.epdc.org/education-data-research/afghanistan-education-inequality-profile> , visited on 03.06.15.

There are numerous bottlenecks identified—including insecurity, limited human resources, infrastructure, qualified teachers, teacher training and teaching materials—, while demand side issues include economic factors, cultural barriers, and governance and capacity.

The limited capacity of and within the MoE to handle and report on progress is itself a barrier, especially in provinces that have not had the same attention, support and allocation of advisors as the ministry in Kabul.

As expected, given the major overhaul the education sector has been through (including the development of curriculums, the printing and distribution of textbooks, teaching of teachers and the task of building schools), it has taken time to increase the quality of education and to measure the quality of education and learning. The GoIRA points out that “...by most standards, the education quality in Afghanistan is very low. Learning outcomes are generally poor. A few sample studies suggest that about less than half of the children are able to meet the minimum required learning outcome at their level of study.” Furthermore, the GoIRA found that for technical training “most of the education is theoretical and of very little practical value” (GoIRA 2015).

However, the lack of evidence on results is not as bleak as was painted by the 2012 Norad evaluation. The first learning assessment for the Class 6 level released in 2015<sup>24</sup> stated “...while there are small numbers of Class 6 students operating at the higher level of proficiency in each of the domains of reading, writing and mathematical literacy, there are substantial proportion of the population who are not able to perform simple reading, writing and mathematical tasks”. A comparison with three peer countries in the region indicates that their Class 4 students are performing at a similar or a higher level than Class 6 students in Afghanistan.

The assessment suggests that “what is needed is a focus on the quality of teaching, both through policy and planning in the wider level, and through the professional practice of individual teachers in classrooms.”

Interviews for the education report, including a number of donors, MFA officials, EQUIP and ARTF staff, established that the MoE and donors agree to continue to channel funding for education through the ARTF, as “this has proved a trusted mechanism that ensures a fair degree of influence and prioritization from the Afghan government” (p. 13).

The report noted that

While there have been major achievements in Afghanistan since 2001, there is still concern over the quality of education. There is a broad recognition that more funding alone, if available, would not ensure quality education for all. Rather, quality education depends on a number of factors that must be addressed in parallel, and should be included in the new education strategy for 2015–2020, in the planning for EQUIP III, and any extension of the GPE.

The recommendations were to: a) start with the teachers and build their skills, and allow for NGOs to play a larger role; then b) strengthen the MoE, and in particular the data collection/verification and

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<sup>24</sup> T. Lumley, J. Mendelovits, R. Turner, R. Stanyon and M. Walker. 2015. *Class 6 Proficiency in Afghanistan 2013. Outcomes of Learning Assessment of Mathematical, Reading and Writing Literacy*. Victoria, Australian Council for Educational Research.

coordination efforts, for a better planning and management of the education assistance; and c) build in addition a domestic resource and support base, including community and parent involvement, and request for support from the private sector.

Norway, albeit not the largest donor, has played a major role in developing the Afghan education sector. Its involvement has gone beyond funding, both donors and MoE refer to a very active engagement of staff at the Norwegian Embassy in the various coordination bodies and in EQUIP and ARTF fora, pushing for a priority for education and in particular girls' education. The NGO activities have from 2011–2014 complemented the GoIRA activities putting emphasis on improved teacher training to increase quality of education, vocational training to ease access to the job market, and literacy, numeracy and life skills training for those many that have not gained any basic education skills.

A question that emerges is whether quantity—and especially girls in school—trumped quality, and whether Norway and other donors could have done more to ensure the quality of education. There are two observations to be made in this regards, both indicating that there was an awareness at the Embassy of the prevailing challenges in the education sector, and due attention paid to this concern even if earmarking for education through ARTF has ended. One point is the diversity in funding for the education sector, including support for teacher training, vocational training and school building through the NGOs. More important, and emphasized by the Ministry of Education in an interview, is the scale of the Norwegian strategic and policy engagement during the period 2010–2013. This engagement included participation from the Embassy in Kabul in the following bodies and fora:

- ARTF's strategy-group and council.
- The Human Resource Development Board (HRDB), a collaborating body between donors and four Afghan ministries.
- The Education Coordination Committee (ECC), and advisory body for primary education.
- A donor working group on primary education.
- A working group for donors to the EQUIP project.

Further,

- Norway was the funding team leader that coordinated and reported on Afghanistan's first joint education sector review in 2012.
- The Embassy was the donor focal point for development of the National Priority Programme (NPP) for higher education.
- Norway was the only donor with an observer in the EQUIP Implementation Support Mission during autumn 2013.<sup>25</sup>

This engagement was then complemented by the Norwegian international support to the GPE, including the prominent position of Rohana Ghani, wife of the Afghan president at the 2015 Education for Development Summit. This involvement represents a major contribution to the development of the Afghan education sector. Still, it requires close follow-up and monitoring of ARTF

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<sup>25</sup> Norwegian Embassy. 2013. "Norsk utdanningsbistand til Afghanistan", memo, 12.12.2013.

and EQUIP funding to counter concerns about corruption, inflated student numbers and a continued attention to quality.

### Rural Development

Afghanistan remains a primarily rural country, where the majority of the population secure their livelihoods and income from agricultural activities, services and trade—including those of illegal substances. Wars between 1979 and 2001 destroyed much of the traditional irrigation systems, roads and production facilities. This led to general neglect of the field, due to conflict and migration, and a lack of research and trials reduced the quality and quantity of agricultural products. Lack of income opportunities led many young men to join armed groups, or to seek job opportunities in neighbouring or Gulf countries.

Rural development was therefore high on the agenda back in 2002, and there was an overwhelming donor support for the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) when introduced in 2003. It was modelled on WB experiences in Indonesia paired with UNHABITAT experienced from Afghanistan, and placed under the responsibility of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD). According to its webpage,

*The National Solidarity Programme (NSP) was created by the Government of Afghanistan to develop the ability of Afghan communities to identify, plan, manage and monitor their own development projects. Through the promotion of good local governance, NSP works to empower rural communities to make decisions affecting their own lives and livelihoods.*

*The programme is the primary vehicle used to promote rural development in Afghanistan. Empowered rural communities collectively contribute to increased human security. NSP lays the foundation for a sustainable form of inclusive local governance, rural reconstruction, and poverty alleviation.*

NSP had, at that time, an important governance component/function. It introduced ballot elections for the establishment of the village based Community Development Councils (CDC), in advance of parliamentary and presidential elections. The CDCs were introduced as the lowest level of the Afghan governance system.<sup>26</sup>

One reason for the quick establishment and rapid results of the NSP was that experienced NGOs (Afghan and International) were assigned as facilitating partners for the different provinces. These partners a) facilitated the CDC election; b) assisted the villages in the selection of their community development project (within a given economic frame); and c) assisted with the implementation and reporting on the project. Later on, female CDCs were introduced, then District Development Councils (CDCs), and finally the concept of Cluster CDCs for managing projects covering larger areas.

It is important to note that the MRRD also introduced a number of other rural programmes, including the Norwegian funded National Area-Based Development Programme (NABDP) and the National Rural Water Supply, Sanitation Irrigation Programme (Ru-WatSIP). Norway, moreover, supported the private enterprise NORPLAN to develop documentation of Afghan hydrogeology (including that of

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<sup>26</sup> The CDC's governance role was later disputed by the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) and remain an issue for discussion, ref NPP debates.

Faryab), which has been useful for several Ministries.<sup>27</sup> The MRRD drew extensively on the NGOs when recruiting their staff, not least on NAC and NCA and their partner NGOs.

NSP provides results for the three phases of the programme. Phase III is extended into 2016. The overview presented in Figure 8 presents the most updated information. The total NSP budget from 2003 to September 2015 (excluding community contributions) was US\$2,5 billion.<sup>28</sup>

**Figure 8: NSP Progress 2003-2015, as of 21 June 2015** (Source: NSP)

Key Indicators	
# of communities with CDCs elected	3.439
# of communities financed (at least partially)	33.809
# of communities with full 1st block grant utilization	27.583
# of sub-projects proportional finances (at least partially)	87.133
# of sub-projects completed	66.133
BG Committed (US\$) Million	1.595
BG Disbursed (US\$) Million	1.563
# of male CDC members	294.142
# of female CDC members	151.891

It should be mentioned moreover that, during the period under review, Norway continued to provide support for rural development through NGOs (and NCA partners) with an integrated approach to their development projects, and frequently collaborating with/implementing projects through the CDCs.<sup>29</sup>

We can notice that the NGOs have reported a range of outputs so far, while we can expect further documentation of impact as they start to measure up against their established baselines. An important reflection to be made from the reports reviewed is that the investment in development of community organisations, and their involvement in development activities, has enabled a better and far more rapid local disaster-risk response, especially when these organisations have pre-stocked emergency equipment or cash have been easily available.

Since 2011, Norway has provided support for the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) project “Promoting Integrated Pest Management in Afghanistan”. The project has, according to FAO,

<sup>27</sup> For a presentation of NORPLANS activities, see <http://www.norplan.af> visited 15.01.2016

<sup>28</sup> Available at <http://www.nspafghanistan.org/Default.aspx?sel=109>, visited on 26.01.2016.

<sup>29</sup> There is a larger discussion about the advantages of CDCs compared to more traditional village structures, and about the extent to which elites influence their decisions and priorities. AKF had an interesting experiences on the way in which regular re-elections of CDCs ensure a fairer representation (private communication, Kabul).



led to a major crop increase and production, with significant and sustained increase in farmer income.<sup>30</sup>

NSP is one of the most frequently evaluated projects in Afghanistan, due to high donor interest and level of funding, and efforts have been made to put the programme in line with the recommendations provided. The 2012 Norad evaluation mentions early results from an impact assessment, which provided impact indicators for some objectives, though it provided less for other ones (p. 56). The final report was released in 2013 and has the most substantive evaluation of the development impact we have identified through this review. The report concluded that:

NSP-funded utilities projects deliver substantial increases in access to drinking water and electricity, but infrastructure projects are less effective. As a consequence, NSP has limited impacts on long-term economic outcomes such as consumption or asset ownership.

Project implementation and the accompanying infusion of block grant resources do, though, deliver a short-term economic boost. This stimulus also improves villagers' perceptions of central and sub-national government, as well as of allied actors such as NGOs and ISAF soldiers. However, the impact of NSP on perceptions of government weakens considerably following project completion, which suggests that government legitimacy is dependent on the regular provision of public goods and/or interaction with service providers.<sup>31</sup>

They also conclude, however, that the "creation of CDCs by NSP has few durable impacts on the identity or affiliation of de facto village leaders". But as a more important change, it appears that "the mandating of female participation by NSP—and the consequent female participation in project implementation—results in increased male acceptance of female participation in public life and broad-based improvements in women's lives, encompassing increases in participation in local governance, access to counselling, and mobility." And, "these and other economic, institutional, and social impacts of NSP further drive increases in girls' school attendance and in women's access to medical services, as well as improved economic perceptions and optimism among women in NSP villages." This is in itself a remarkable result, and one of the few solidly documented impacts of the development assistance.

It is therefore of interest for further Norwegian rural development engagement that President Ghani in November 2015 announced that NSP will be replaced by a "National Citizen Charter Program". In his words, in a speech to CDC leaders, the objective is "to execute overall government programs at village level through a single mechanism that is called NSP/National Citizen Charter Program. Our objective is to provide overall Afghan rural communities with equal essential services in upcoming four years."<sup>32</sup>

Donors and NGOs that had been involved in the discussion of a concept note for the charter programme were uncertain where this initiative would lead, whether it would influence the CDCs role in the governance structure and whether it would continue to attract public and donor support.

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<sup>30</sup> For details on the project and results, see FAO. 2016. "Afghanistan and FAO Partnering for food security through gender equality", <http://www.fao.org/3/a-az491e.pdf>, visited on 25.01.2016

<sup>31</sup> Available at <http://www.nsp-ie.org/reports/finalreport.pdf>, visited 26.01.2016.

<sup>32</sup> Speech by President Ashraf Ghani at the 5<sup>th</sup> CDC conference November 2015, available at <http://www.nspafghanistan.org/default.aspx?sel=156>, visited on 26.01.2016.

Still, it might address the recognized lack of cooperation and coordination between ministries – if they accept to be led by anyone else than themselves.

Considering the entire 2001–2014 period, there is no doubt that the international and Norwegian support for rural development, and NSP in particular, has yielded extensive results, and some documented impacts. Results that are likely to hold major influence on the further development of Afghanistan, not least when it comes to women’s roles and development opportunities. The degree of community mobilization and engagement that has taken place is in itself a major step forward, and a major strengthening of Afghan civil society at the village and community level.

There has been a noticeable concern about possible corruption in such a large programme, as well as suggestions for more active ARTF and external monitoring and verification of numbers of beneficiaries and projects. Still, there are indications that properly community managed projects are better insulated against corruption than large infrastructure projects, which might have ensured a high utilization of funds in this sector.

The real challenge now is figuring out how investments made can be secured, and how the on-going need for community development (to increase food production, strengthen the rural economy and generate much needed jobs) can be continued under the new NSP/National Citizen Charter Program—with a government struggling to get their act together and where ministries are reluctant to collaborate.

### Good Governance

The fight against corruption has consistently been at the forefront of the good governance agenda in Afghanistan. While progress on tackling corruption has arguably been limited, there have been a few successful initiatives, including the establishment of Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA), an Afghan civil society organization committed to increasing transparency, accountability, and integrity in Afghanistan. IWA was established as an independent civil society organization in 2006, and shortly afterwards the Embassy in Kabul decided to provide the newly established organization with core funding—the first donor to do so. The funding decision was in large part a response to the dialogue between the development advisor at the Norwegian Embassy and the founders of the organization, and of the recognition of IWA’s potential impact. During the period 2009–2011, Norwegian core funding totalled US\$ 971.795.

From humble beginnings, IWA has grown to an organization with approximately 90 staff members and 700 volunteers, with head offices in Kabul. IWA has provincial programmatic outreach in Badakhshan, Balkh, Bamyan, Herat, Kabul, Kapisa, Logar, Nangarhar, Parwan, Panjshir, Samangan and Wardak. IWA focuses its activities in three main areas: 1) community monitoring; 2) research; and 3) advocacy. In the area of community monitoring, IWA works through four program pillars: 1) community based monitoring; 2) public service monitoring; 3) extractive industries monitoring; and 4) community trial monitoring. IWA’s work during the period of review has been significant in providing an evidence base for advocacy efforts, and in piloting successful community monitoring tools which are currently being scaled up. Many of the approaches adopted by IWA are not only innovative in the Afghan context, but also globally.

Norway’s decision to provide IWA with core funding allowed the organization to find its own focus and establish itself as a credible voice in the fight against corruption, instead of being driven by

donor funding to carry out specific projects. It also provided IWA with the financial stability to bridge the period between its establishment and the development of capacity to attract funding from other donors.

However, with the establishment of the Tawanmandi trust fund, Norway ended its core funding to IWA in 2012. Instead, Norwegian funding to IWA was to be channelled through Tawanmandi. The trust fund did not however prove to be sufficiently flexible or quick in responding to funding requests, as described above. Funding delays, along with insufficient fiduciary controls within IWA, led to a difficult budget situation in 2013, which could potentially have jeopardized the future of the organization. Quick internal action within IWA and additional funding being provided by donors (in particular Sida) allowed IWA to balance its budget in 2014 and ensure its continued survival.

IWA is a good example of a case where MFA/Norad staff based in Kabul were able to identify an opportunity and, with the flexibility provided through Norwegian development assistance, take a calculated risk in supporting a newly established CSO. Without this support, it is unlikely that IWA would have flourished and developed into the organization that it is today. This will remain a lasting legacy of Norway's support to the anti-corruption efforts in Afghanistan. Conversely, channelling funding to civil society through a trust fund such as Tawanmandi does not provide a similar degree of flexibility, and risks undermining the ability of Norwegian aid to have similar catalytic impact in the future.

## Lessons learned and recommendations

The ToR ask for the review to provide recommendations for further development cooperation in Afghanistan, while a clarification from the Secretariat modified the request to develop a more general reflection about future learning, including new development engagements. We will therefore start with some of the suggestions made by the interviewees/Afghan stakeholders, and then reflect on the more general lessons learned from our findings.

The development partners request a continuation of predictable and flexible funding for the coming years, which they see as a prerequisite to provide quality humanitarian and development assistance in an increasingly challenging work environment. The NGOs and the ARTF argue for a continuation for the thematic areas they cover, but without suggesting cuts in other parts of the Norwegian engagement. Senior Norwegian bureaucrats have a similar position, but they also recommend more attention to M&E of the Norwegian funded assistance, and several of them emphasize the need to address grand corruption challenges (and the individuals influencing them) in order to ensure that the Norwegian assistance meets the required needs and the jointly agreed development goals.

One important observation is that the situation in Afghanistan changed substantially in 2011. With the US announcement of military withdrawal from 2014, a more definite timeline was set that led to the expectation among Afghans of a reduction of all types of international assistance. The new context established a new urgency and planning horizon for all actors involved, including those that aimed to benefit from the corruption and embezzlement opportunities the assistance provided. The Kabul Bank case, and the involvement of relatives of senior government officials in the fraud, is one example.

Challenges to security, economic development and the establishment of a functional Afghan government increased in the 2011–2014 period and placed an even stronger urgency on working towards Norway’s strategic aims. These were to 1) strengthen Afghan institutions (to be in a position to handle international assistance as well as to increase and manage their own revenue); 2) contribute to a political settlement (to ensure a more peaceful future); and 3) contribute to sustainable and just development, humanitarian efforts, and promotion of governance, human rights and gender equality. It can be argued that these goals have been pursued consistently since 2001, including in the 2011-2014 period. The difference is that in this period these goals have been pursued through fewer development partners and projects, and with gradually less process involvement from the Kabul Embassy due to the reduction of Norwegian staff.

This is where we identify the main challenge for development assistant, and where the Afghan case can offer insights for similar and future peace/state building efforts. The Norwegian support to Afghanistan has had multiple objectives since 2001. It included building a state structure and the development and strengthening of administrative capacities; building a judiciary, in competition with a traditional justice system; establishing a western democratic system and running regular elections; getting a free market economy in place; and running a military operation (while building a new army and police force). Also relevant to this review, in collaboration with multiple donors and stakeholders, Norway sought to contribute to the achievement of major development tasks (and to building Afghan capacity to take them on over time), while ensuring the rights and opportunities of the most vulnerable, not least of Afghan girls and women. The Afghan government was held responsible—expected to be in the “driver’s seat”—for leading these efforts.

At the same time, it was acknowledged that most Afghan ministries and the newly elected parliament lacked the required management capacity to fulfil this role. The donor response was to establish trust funds to manage development activities, and to make use of NGOs and private companies to implement development programmes and projects, though in collaboration with and under control of Afghan ministries and donor coordination mechanism. Such a fragile framework, however, requires a continuity of process knowledge, and of awareness about how and why commitments were made. It has been challenging to maintain continuity in this area as Embassy officials (and UN, WB and International NGO staff) rarely stay on for more than 2 years in Afghanistan, and as key ministry staff is often changed when a new minister takes up.

The larger trust funds, as we have seen, had in place internal management procedures to safeguard donor funds. This was not necessarily the case when these funds were transferred to the implementing ministry for implementation and/or salary payment. Even when severe misuse was documented, as in the case of LOTFA, the response options for donor were limited, as the consequence of cutting funding could threaten their overall engagement in Afghanistan. In the LOTFA case, donors were able to put pressure on UNDP, but had very little leverage to effect changes in the MoI. The case of Tawanmandi was different, as support to civil society organisations was not seen as equally important to the achievement of the overall objectives for the Afghanistan engagement (particularly in the security side), and was therefore more easily terminated.

However, fund disbursement is only one aspect of programme management. An equally important aspect is the Norwegian involvement in setting and ensuring strategic objectives in dialogue with the GoIRA and other donors. Also crucial is ensuring compliance with plans and priorities; coherence with Norwegian (or Nordic) priorities (as in ARTF, LOTFA and Tawanmandi); and follow up on implementation, M&E processes and anti-corruption safeguards.

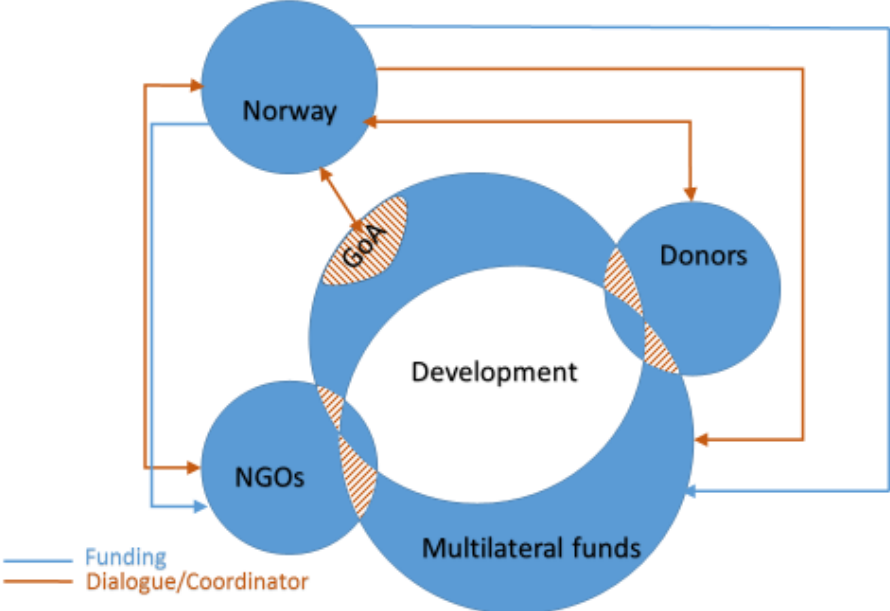
Actually, there are stricter controls applied to NGO support than to support for the trust funds, both in terms of the selection of implementing partners, and of assessing their overall conflict analysis, risk mitigation, M&E and anti-corruption systems and routines before they are accepted as partners. Their project proposals are assessed as for development objectives and budget alignment. Budgets are cut or withheld if reports or accounts are not delivered, or if there are accusations of corruption. Such accusations result in a close dialogue with the NGO to ensure that they address the concerns identified, or an external investigation either confirms or acquits them of the allegations.

We are drawing up this picture to identify a weakness of the aid management system in a fragile/weak state such as Afghanistan, where there are major concerns over weak management capacity and corruption on the government side. Successful implementation depends, in our view, equally on 1) donor administrative systems, approval and control of the aid funding – which is in place, but now located in Norway and administratively divided between the MFA and Norad. And 2) donors' ability to engage in a "development dialogue" with the government of Afghanistan and a range of other stakeholders throughout the programme planning and implementation period. This dialogue is critical, as outcomes will only be achieved if there is willingness and ability on the part of the national government to ensure that shared goals are established and met through the selected and implemented programmes and projects (and some of them through other partners, as in the case of the NSP).

The first part of the aid management system is well in place for Afghanistan, and made easier with a reduced number of partners and projects. There is also a larger continuity and institutional memory as there is a more permanency in staff in the MFA and Norad than was deemed possible at the Embassy in Kabul, given the security situation. The NGOs are very satisfied with the handling of their contracts, recognizing that Norway has been able to combine a long term funding commitment with flexibility when required.

As for the second—crucial—part, the aid management system’s capacity for dialogue with the Afghan government has gradually been reduced over the last years with the reduction in Embassy staffing. In Figure 8, we have illustrated the different funding and potential dialogue channels in Afghanistan, taking into account that ultimately it is the GoIRA that is responsible for, or implements, the majority of the development programmes Norway funds.

**Figure 8: Funding and dialogue channels for Norwegian Development Assistance**



Source: developed by Strand, Taxell and Mjeldheim.

The reduction in Norwegian capacity for development dialogue in Afghanistan takes place at a time when the need for sustained dialogue and trust building, according to our observations, has increased. This engagement is necessary for two main reasons. On the one hand, strategic and high level diplomatic efforts with the GoIRA and other donors and donor mechanisms is required to maintain the strategic direction and priorities of the trust funds. And, on the other hand, there is a need for more practical programme/project follow-up and coordination with GoIRA and other donors in order to ensure coherence with Norwegian priorities.

There is, as argued above, a need to initiate independent M&E (preferably with other donors) of both NGO and trust fund projects, as well as of their management. This requires continued dialogue, engagement and development diplomacy effected in Kabul to ensure that the necessary changes are implemented, assistance calibrated to the implementing capacity of ministries and NGOs, and sufficient resources allocated to ensure the building of the necessary capacity. The presence at the

Embassy in Kabul of one dedicated and skilled international development counsellor, working closely with skilled national staff empowered to make decisions within defined responsibility areas, can make a major difference for the Norwegian development engagement, even within the present security regulations.

The present security regulations can be less universally applied, bringing in Afghan/external monitors (and “remote monitoring”) and possibly requesting assistance (e.g., from Sweden) for programme monitoring, in order to improve the oversight and results of Norwegian funded assistance.

Ensuring a continuation of support for Afghan civil society organisations and engaging in the new NSP/National Citizen Charter Program are two of many tasks that cannot wait if Norway aims to influence future developments in Afghanistan.

## Annex I: Interview list

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Date</b>
Petter Bauck	Norad	Senior Advisor	12.11.15
Liv Kjølseth	NAC	Secretary General	12.11.15
Marit Strand	Norad	Senior Advisor	13.11.15
Arne Disch	SCANTEAM		13.11.15
Anders Wirak	MFA		13.11.15
Mette Bastholm Jensen	Danish Embassy, Kabul	Head of Development	16.11.15
Sabir Nasiry	Norwegian Embassy, Kabul		16.11.15
Zabiullah Shenwari	Norwegian Embassy, Kabul		16.11.15
Azada Hussaini	World Bank, Country Management Unit	Operations Officer	19.11.15
Muhammad Wali			
Ahmadzai	World Bank	Financial Management Analyst	19.11.15
Cherise Chadwick	Norwegian Red Cross	Country Manager	19.11.15
Connie Maria Shealy	NCA	Assistant Country Director	19.11.15
Ahmad Hassan	NCA	Program Manager	19.11.15
Javlon Hamdamov	ACTED	Country Director	21.11.15
Kaithlyn Scott	ACTED	AME Officer	21.11.15
Terje Watterdal	NAC	Country Director	21.11.15
Kenneth Marimira	NAC	M&E Specialist	21.11.15
John Morse	DACAAR	Director	21.11.15
Sayed Ikram Afzali	IWA	Director	21.11.15
Qurat-ul-Ain Sadozai	NRC	Country Representative	4.12.15
Nils Haugstveit	MFA	Ambassador 2012-14	11.12.15



Anders Tunord	NCA	Program Coordinator	11.12.15
Liv Steimoeggen	NCA	Country Representative	
Margrethe Volden	NCA	Area Team Leader, Middle East and Asia	
Adam Combs	NRC	Head of Section, Asia	11.12.15
Anna Hamre	Norcross	Programme Coordinator	16.12.15
		Afghanistan and Pakistan	
Odd Pedersen	Norcross	Logistics Coordinator	
Semund Haukland	Norad	Senior Advisor	05.01.2016
Ulrika Josefsson	Embassy of Sweden	Counsellor/Head of Development Cooperation	15.01.2016

## Annex II: Terms of Reference

### ***Review of Norwegian development assistance to Afghanistan 2011 -2014*** **Terms of Reference**

#### **Introduction and rationale**

On 21 November 2014, the Norwegian Government appointed a Commission to evaluate the Norwegian civilian and military effort in Afghanistan in the period 2001-2014. The Commission will submit its report to the Norwegian Government by June 1st 2016. For the mandate of the Commission see: [https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/utvalg\\_afghanistan/id2340951/](https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/utvalg_afghanistan/id2340951/) (English language excerpt attached).

Among the many questions raised in the Commission's mandate concerning the civilian effort, two stand out as particularly relevant as overall guidelines for the Commission's investigative work: what are the results on the ground, for Afghans, of Norwegian development assistance to Afghanistan from 2001 - 14? And: to what extent has this assistance been supportive of the overall Norwegian political priorities and goals in its engagement in Afghanistan?

A partial answer to these two questions may be found in the evaluation report published by The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) in 2012, covering the period 2001 -2011. The central question of this evaluation was: what contribution has Norwegian support made to sustainable peace, improved governance and reduced poverty in Afghanistan? Taking the point of departure of analysing the development portfolio in terms of relevance, effectiveness, effect, impact and sustainability, the evaluation concludes that the portfolio is relevant and in line with international and national priorities, and that certain direct results have been achieved. However, the evaluation recommends that the Norwegian MFA rethinks its development and aid strategy in order to be based on a more sound theory of change.

In the absence of a more recent evaluation, the Commission has decided to outsource a small-scale study of Norwegian development assistance in the period 2011-2014. The study will focus on the management of Norwegian development funds, and the results of Norway's main cooperation-partners: international institutions (the World Bank and UNDP) and international and Norwegian NGOs (including ACTED, DACAAR, Norwegian Church Aid, Norwegian Refugee Council, Aga Khan Foundation, Norwegian Afghanistan Committee and the Norwegian Red Cross), in addition to the national NGO Integrity Watch and the national fund Tawanmandi.

In view of the rapidly deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, this will in essence be a combination of a desk study, consultations in Oslo with relevant aid officials and diplomats, as well as interviews with key stakeholders residing in Afghanistan and elsewhere. These interviews may be conducted through skype or phone, or the consultant may engage Kabul-based consultant(s).

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is three-fold

- 1) An assessment of the follow-up of the recommendations from the Norad-report, including MFA strategies and internal guidelines.

- 2) Establish an overview of the Norwegian development assistance in Afghanistan 2011-14 and, where possible, the short and (expected) long-term results of these.
- 3) Provide recommendations for further development cooperation in Afghanistan.

### **Evaluation questions**

In order to ensure coherence between the Norad 2012 report and the proposed outputs, the criteria will remain the same but should be further guided by following groups of questions:

#### Management of Norwegian Development Funds:

What trends can be seen in the period 2011 – 2014 in terms of prioritization and selection of thematic focus and implementing partners, and to what degree do they meet the overall Norwegian development goals in Afghanistan?

If adjustments in prioritization of themes, partners and funding were done, on what criteria were these based?

To what extent and how have the recommendations from the 2011 evaluation (and the internal strategy) been followed up?

Particular focus should be given to:

1. development of a theory of change of the overall Norwegian contribution;
2. improved contextual analysis, conflict sensitivity and risk mitigation;
3. anti-corruption procedures
4. monitoring and evaluation systems
5. internal human resource allocation and administrative capacity

How and to what extent have Norwegian authorities engaged with, supported and evaluated the activities of implementing partners?

How responsive was Norway in adapting to changing circumstances directly affecting development assistance?

How well did Norway coordinate with other donors?

Has Norway stood out in any way, positive or negative, in its development assistance policy compared to other “likeminded countries” (e.g. Sweden and/or Denmark)?

#### Contribution of implementing partners:

What concrete results, short and (expected) long term, can Norway’s implementing partners refer to in the 2011-2014 period?

1. This entails synthesising reported results from the partners, international institutions and NGOs at country level, including reported results in Faryab province
2. For assessments of results, a case study should be selected to illustrate each of the sectors: good governance, education and rural development. These should, if possible, identify key factors leading to success or failure.

### 3. A synthesised overview of M&E mechanisms utilized

To what extent and how have Norway's partners and the key channels through which Norwegian assistance has been allocated, contributed to strengthening Afghan ownership at institutional and community level?

How do key implementing partners perceive the support and engagement from the Norwegian government?

#### Recommendations:

What recommendations for future development cooperation in conflict areas can be drawn from the findings?

#### **Methodology**

The evaluation team will focus its work on going through key implementing partners' results reports, evaluations relevant to Norwegian contributions and other relevant written sources. The evaluation team should also conduct extensive interviews with development assistant workers, policy makers and other stakeholders, chosen in consultation with the secretariat.

#### **Organisation of the evaluation**

The evaluation will be funded and supervised by the secretariat of the Commission. The consultant(s) should consult extensively with stakeholders pertinent to the assignment, and stakeholders should be asked to comment on the draft final report. Access to relevant archives will be facilitated by the secretariat to the extent possible. The final report will be the property of the Commission who will decide on its further dissemination.

#### **The consultant(s)**

The consultant(s) should have following qualifications:

1. Demonstrated professional knowledge and understanding of development assistance practices, and evaluations of these;
2. Solid knowledge and/or experience of Norwegian development assistance to Afghanistan, in particular from 2011 onwards;
3. Solid knowledge of development efforts in Afghanistan and demonstrated access to Afghan networks that may provide Afghan perspectives;
4. Proficiency in a Scandinavian language in order to be able to read documents in Norwegian.

The Commission encourages the consultant(s) to establish a team to cover the different requirements.

#### **Budget and deliverables**

The budget of the evaluation shall not exceed NOK 490 000.

Deliverables will be:

1. An inception report/ final work-plan including an overview of expected final deliverables, to be discussed with the secretariat two weeks after signing of contract
2. Update on progress – midterm (est. early January 2016)
3. A final report not exceeding 40 pages, based on agreed deliverables
4. One day of meetings with members of the Commission and the secretariat to present the findings, in Oslo.

<b>Phases and deadlines</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
Invitation to tender		Commission/ secretariat	26 September 2015
Tender submission		Consultant (s)	15 October 2015
Signing of contract		Consultant and secretariat	End of October 2015
Inception report/ work-plan		Consultant (s)	15 November 2015
Interviews		Consultant (s)	Mid November- end December
Draft report		Consultant (s)	18 January 2016
Final report		Consultant (s)	15 February 2016
One day dissemination seminar		Consultant (s)	End February 2016

## Annex III: NGO profiles

**Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED)** is an international relief agency with headquarters in Paris, France. ACTED was established in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1993 to provide humanitarian and rehabilitation assistance to Kabul during the civil war, but has later broadly expanded their activities.

ACTED is among the largest NGOs operating in Afghanistan, employing 961 national and 9 international staff. ACTED has a broad range of projects throughout Afghanistan and is a facilitating partner for the NSP, including in Faryab.

The Norwegian Embassy established a strategic partnership with ACTED in 2008, and the organization has since been a major implementer of Norwegian assistance for the Faryab province, including the Ghormak district. ACTED had six of their national staff-members killed in Faryab in November 2013. The financial framework has amounted to NOK 120 million for their project “Sustained Rural Development in Faryab Province”.

**Aga Khan Foundation (AKF)** is a Swiss-registered foundation that forms part of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). AKF was established as an international organization in 1967 under the leadership of His Highness Aga Khan, the Spiritual Leader of the Shia Ismaeli Muslim community.

AKF established itself in Afghanistan in 2002 and quickly became one of the largest NGOs in the country, with 1700 staff-members. It is a facilitating partner for the NSP in Badakshan, Baghlan, Bamyán and Takhar.

The Norwegian Embassy established a partnership with AKF in 2007, supporting a multisector support programme in the Badakshan, Baghlan and Bamyán provinces, including Bamyán Electrification Project, with a financial framework of NOK 64 mill.

**Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR)** is a Danish NGO formed back in 1984 as a collaboration between three Danish NGOs. DACAAR supported Afghan refugees in Pakistan during the 1990s and then pioneered support for Afghan women through an embroidery project and a structure for selling their products.

Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces, since 1989, DACAAR started to shift their activities inside Afghanistan, going into rural development and vocational training, while continuing targeted support for women and water and sanitation projects. What set DACAAR aside from many other NGOs was their employment of Danish (and international) academics with extensive knowledge of Afghanistan, which informed their priorities and approaches.

DACAAR employs 850 national and 10 international staff members, and is a facilitating partner for the NSP, in which they worked in Faryab, Herat, Laghman and Parwan provinces in 2012.

The Norwegian Embassy has since 2010 supported DACAAR for their programme “Rural Development in Northern Afghanistan” in the Faryab, Sar-e-Pul and Badakshan provinces. The two main activities, rural development and water supply and sanitation had a financial framework of NOK 77 million.

**Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA)** is an Afghan civil society organisation established in 2006, committed to increasing transparency, accountability, and integrity in Afghanistan. It has received Norwegian support since 2009.

The mission of Integrity Watch is to put corruption under the spotlight through community monitoring, research, and advocacy. They mobilize and train communities to monitor infrastructure projects, public services, courts, and extractives industries. They develop community monitoring tools, provide policy-oriented research, facilitate policy dialogue, and advocate for integrity, transparency, and accountability in Afghanistan.

IWA has approximately 90 staff members and 700 volunteers. The head office of Integrity Watch is in Kabul, with provincial programmatic outreach in Badakhshan, Balkh, Bamyan, Herat, Kabul, Kapisa, Logar, Nangarhar, Parwan, Panjshir, Samangan, and Wardak.

**Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC)** is a Norwegian NGO established in 1980 as a solidarity movement, working solely with Afghanistan. They provided emergency assistance and operated medical teams inside Afghanistan during the 1980s. From 1989 onwards their work shifted towards rehabilitation and development assistance, and field offices were opened in Ghazni and Badakhshan provinces.

NCA is working on health, education and natural resource management through an integrated approach, and has a staff of 200 national and 1 international member based in Kabul, Jaghori (Ghazni) and Badakhshan.

The rural development project, with projects in Ghazni and Badakhshan provinces, has a financial framework of NOK 45 million.

**Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)** is a Norwegian NGO that works in partnership with/through Afghan NGOs and civil society organisations. NCA have supported Afghans since 1979, first with assistance to refugees and since the early 1990s with rehabilitation, development and humanitarian assistance inside Afghanistan. It established a Kabul office in 1993.

NCA applies an integrated approach for their support for climate justice and the right to peace and security, advanced through long-term development, emergency assistance, and advocacy work. Given their role as donor NGO, NCA has a rather small staff based in Kabul and Maimane, Faryab.

The contract on integrated rural development included 12 partner NGOs, operating in Faryab, Daikundi and Uruzgan provinces, with a budget of NOK 105 million. The more targeted programme "Promoting Women's Engagement and Participation in Faryab" was implemented through four partners. These activities had a financial framework of NOK 6,9 million.

**Norwegian Red Cross (NORCROSS)** is a Norwegian NGO that works in partnership with the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARSC), The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Federations, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

NORCROSS works primarily to support, strengthen and supplement the humanitarian activities of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movements in Afghanistan, with major efforts going into strengthen the organizational and management capacity of the ARSC and their activities.

NORCROSS has Kabul based Country Representatives that monitor and coordinate Norwegian funded activities.

**Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** is a Norwegian NGO that operated a joint office in Pakistan with NCA until 1994, when they disengaged from Afghanistan, but then they re-established their presence in Kabul in 2002.

NRC supports and advocates for the rights of returning refugees from neighbouring countries and of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) through legal assistance, education, shelter, WASH and emergency assistance.

NRC has 450 national and 22 international staff-members working from their Kabul office and from six field offices. The project included in this review, “Youth education and Gender based Violence Program in Faryab and Nangarhar provinces” has a financial framework of NOK 38 million.



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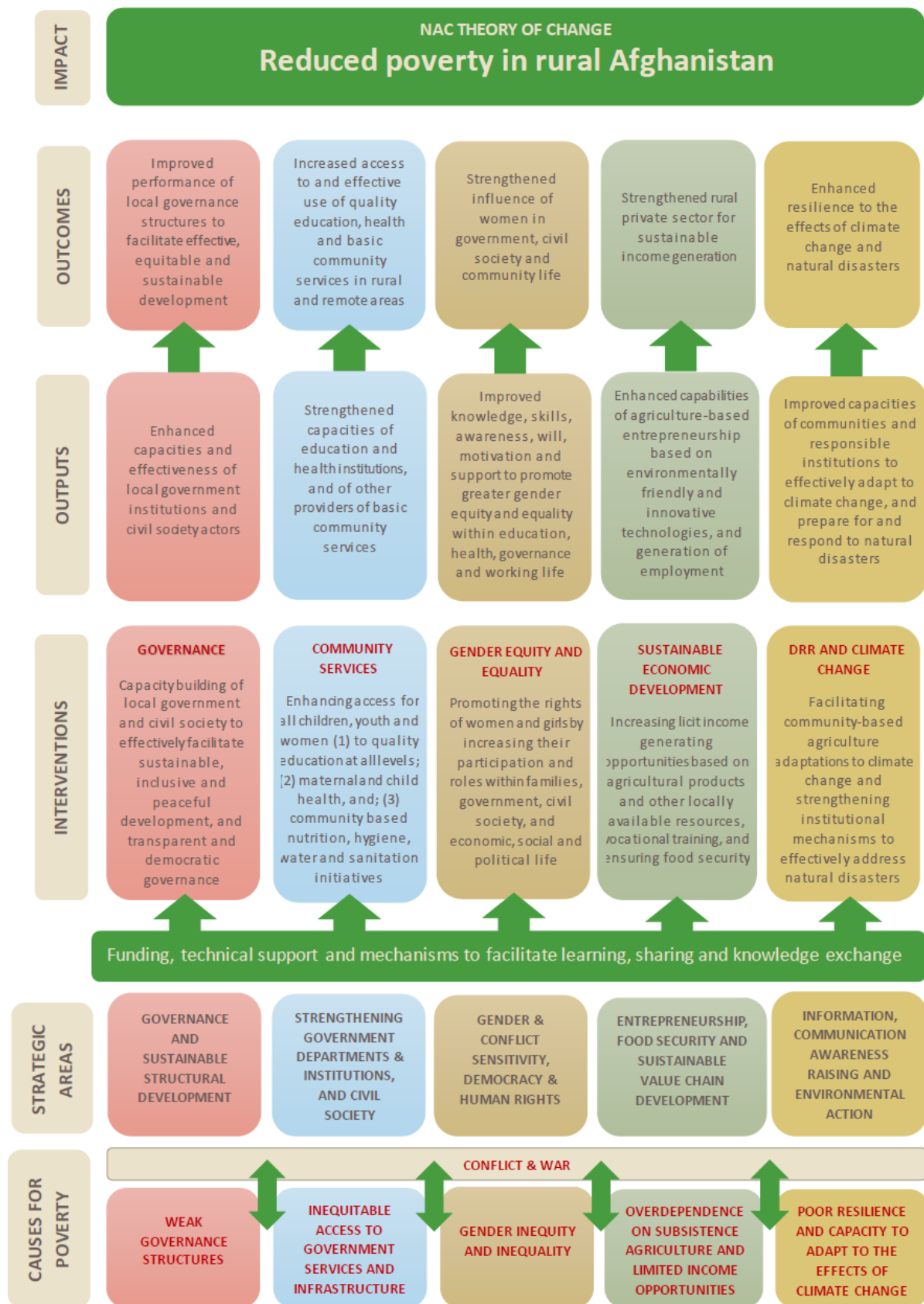
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## Annex V: Example of Theory of Change



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**Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI)** is an independent, non-profit research institution and a major international centre in policy-oriented and applied development research. Focus is on development and human rights issues and on international conditions that affect such issues. The geographical focus is Sub-Saharan Africa, Southern and Central Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

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