

Researching livelihoods and  
services affected by conflict



# Livelihoods, basic services and social protection in Afghanistan

Working Paper 3

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# About us

Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) aims to generate a stronger evidence base on how people make a living, educate their children, deal with illness and access other basic services in conflict-affected situations (CAS). Providing better access to basic services, social protection and support to livelihoods matters for the human welfare of people affected by conflict, the achievement of development targets such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and international efforts at peace- and state-building.

At the centre of SLRC's research are three core themes, developed over the course of an intensive one-year inception phase:

- State legitimacy: experiences, perceptions and expectations of the state and local governance in conflict-affected situations
- State capacity: building effective states that deliver services and social protection in conflict-affected situations
- Livelihood trajectories and economic activity under conflict

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is the lead organisation. SLRC partners include the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) in Sri Lanka, Feinstein International Center (FIC, Tufts University), the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Pakistan, Disaster Studies of Wageningen University (WUR) in the Netherlands, the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

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# Abbreviations

ACKDU	Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADP/N	Alternative Development Program for Northeast Afghanistan
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AREDP	Agriculture and Rural Enterprise Development Program
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
BPHS	Basic Package of Health Services
BSC	Balanced Score Card
CAS	Conflict-affected Situation
CDC	Community Development Council
CEPA	Centre for Poverty Analysis
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EC	European Commission
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IBSS	International Bibliography of Social Sciences
ICG	International Crisis Group
IIHMR	Indian Institute of Health Management Research
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International NGO
IPSA	International Political Science Abstracts
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MISFA	Microfinance Investment Support Facility
MOPH	Ministry of Public Health
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Reconstruction
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NHSPA	National Health Service Performance Assessment
NRG	Nepal Research Group
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
OCHA	UN Office for Humanitarian Assistance
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PRDU	Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RIE	Randomised Impact Evaluation
SDPI	Sustainable Development Policy Institute
SLRC	Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
US	United States
USAID	US Agency for International Development

WFP  
WHO  
WUR

World Food Programme  
World Health Organization  
Wageningen University

# Preface

This paper is one of a series of evidence papers produced by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) as part of its inception phase (January 2011 – March 2012). Seven country evidence papers have been produced (Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Uganda and DRC) and are supported by two global evidence papers focusing on social protection and basic services, and growth and livelihoods respectively. Each paper systematically explores and assesses the available evidence about livelihoods, social protection and basic services in the country. The papers do not attempt to generate new data, nor produce new analyses. Rather they assess what is already known and review the quality of the current evidence base. The papers, along with a series of global and country-based stakeholder consultations, have been used to formulate the future research agenda of the SLRC.

This paper was written by Adam Pain and draws on and has been informed by a decade of work in Afghanistan as well as discussions with colleagues in the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) and agencies in the field. The author is grateful for detailed comments provided on an earlier draft by members of the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) and by Sarah Collinson in particular.

The bulk of the work on this paper took place outside Kabul and in rural Afghanistan, a fact which contributes significantly to the potential to generate perspectives on the outcomes of a decade of reconstruction in the country. This is nevertheless a work in progress on which the jury is still out.

Responsibility for the arguments and views presented in the paper lie with the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of SLRC partner organisations or the UK Department for International Development (DFID) which funds the SLRC

# Executive summary

This paper is a contribution to a broader comparative review by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) of the current state of evidence and understanding on livelihoods, service delivery and social protection in fragile states. It pays particular attention to the nature, robustness and depth of evidence available to support claims made about the effects of policy, programme and project interventions on the livelihoods of poor people in fragile states. It examines the links between interventions in Afghanistan and how poor people seek to make a living and scrutinises the causal models or 'theories of change' that underpin such interventions. The paper examines the country context, explores the role of aid and policy and investigates the nature of the evidence base and its methods. Two detailed case studies of evidence building are presented before discussing the thematic areas of interest to SLRC.

There is a major difficulty in assessing the effects of aid, given the basic problem of determining what aid has been provided. A related issue is that the uneven funding given to different provinces and the districts and villages within them gives rise to different levels and combinations of interventions that make comparison of the effects of interventions impossible. This is compounded by a lack of basic data on aid interventions at the ground level. All this variability and uncertainty makes assessment of intervention effects extremely difficult.

In the judgement of this paper, evidence can be found of improvements in access to basic services funded by aid money, and measurable progress has been made in access to basic health and education, although delivery has been uneven across the country. Meanwhile, although the quality of health provision is improving measurably, albeit from a low level, major concerns over education quality persist and are poorly captured by the metrics of assessment. Programmes such as the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) have brought a level of funding and provision of public goods to villages that they have never experienced before. Benefits may have resulted from this funding in terms of expectations and appreciation, although the durability of such perceptions may be in doubt. The plethora of other projects and programmes funding public good provision in roads and other infrastructure has undoubtedly improved access to public goods.

But the dividends and returns from nearly 10 years of aid to Afghanistan have been meagre for many Afghans. Many of the rural and urban poor are certainly no better off than before, and for many livelihood security is worse. The lack of employment and work in both the urban and rural labour markets is a testimony to this lack of progress.

Attempts to engineer a social transformation and to shift Afghanistan from its existing social order to one more reflective of Western norms have largely failed to take root and if anything have helped consolidate a rule of patronage and personalised relationships. A significant part of this failure can be attributed to conflict between the irreconcilable goals and means involved in fighting terrorism, addressing insurgency, responding to the opium economy and liberal state building, and the effect this has had in terms of generating conflicting objectives and practices leading to perverse outcomes. A goodly part of the mess can also be attributed to conflicting cultures, goals and practices between donors.

# 1 Introduction

This country study of Afghanistan is a contribution to a broader comparative review by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) of the current state of evidence and understanding on livelihoods, service delivery and social protection in fragile states. The review seeks to pay particular attention to the nature, robustness and depth of evidence available to support claims made about the effects of policy, programme and project interventions on the livelihoods of poor people in fragile states. It also examines the links between interventions and their objectives and how poor people seek to make a living, scrutinising the causal models or theories of change that underpin such interventions.

What Afghanistan ‘was’, ‘is’ and ‘will become’ is widely contested. For Lieven (2002), it was ‘medieval on a good day’; Cowper-Coles (2011), the British Ambassador in Kabul in the period 2007–10, regards it as now being ‘a broken state with largely non-existent institutions of government and security’. In terms of the future, some hope that, through market-driven development, democratic process and a light state (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2002), the country will put behind the past and take its place as a modern democratic state with responsibility for its citizens. A North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military officer defined the country’s future (and success) more cynically as the point when Afghanistan ‘becomes like any other normal third-world basket case’ (in Barber, 2011).

The multiple and competing narratives on what Afghanistan is and what is to be done, linked to the goal of reconstructing the country and the means of doing so, are driven by perceptions and subjectivity. In the arena of local governance, for example, Saltmarshe and Medhi (2011) write of distinct and mutually incompatible views on what local governance should be between the international community (and within it), the Afghan government and the Taliban. The evidence on what constitutes ‘progress’ or ‘success’ in building local governance naturally varies according to ‘perceptual frameworks, political agenda and constituencies of support’ (ibid.) – with competing models resulting in confusion in practice (Lister, 2006; Saltmarshe and Medhi, 2011). While changes in local governance might be regarded as being at the ‘softer’ end of the Afghanistan reconstruction exercise, and more technical interventions in health may provide less disputed ground to work on, the question of ‘what constitutes evidence of what?’ – this paper’s central concern – is relevant to both.

The terms of reference for this paper identify a set of core questions to be addressed:

- What are people’s own responses, disaggregated by gender, to conflict and their tactics for making a living and maintaining access to basic services?
- How do state and society interact in the institutional arrangements that mediate livelihoods, social protection and access to services? What are the gender dimensions of these interactions?
- What aid is being provided and what is its effectiveness in supporting access to basic services, livelihoods and social protection? What is known about the gendered impacts of aid?
- What are the linkages between people/aid/governance-determined outcomes in relation to livelihoods and access to social protection and basic services?
- What role does the private sector play: (1) in delivering services and social protection; and (2) stimulating multipliers and growth linkages?

These are important questions, but are not innocent or unproblematic – they carry with them assumptions of the role of the state, the nature of markets and the instrumental role of aid interventions. As will become clear, they are not easy to answer, for a combination of reasons which are central to the arguments of this paper.

One issue is the collision between the strongly state-centric nature of the reconstruction process and the fact that Afghanistan has always had a weak state but a strong society. A second and linked issue is that the complexity and heterogeneity of Afghanistan and the significance of context with respect to the underlying agro-ecology and social order are rarely factored into design, evaluation and evidence



building, let alone understood. Third, and overlying the existing heterogeneity, is the complexity and unevenness of the reconstruction itself. Not only are the broader goals of a war on terror, a counterinsurgency operation, a war on drugs and a state-building enterprise – and the interventions designed to achieve them – often incompatible, but also they have generated perverse incentives and effects.<sup>1</sup> A fourth and again linked problem is that the uneven funding different provinces and the districts and villages within them attract gives rise to different levels and combinations of interventions that make comparison of the effects of interventions impossible. This is compounded by a profound lack of basic data on aid interventions at the ground level. All this variability and the confounding externalities make the assessment of intervention effects extremely difficult.

A fifth issue is that of time – in particular, the dynamics of insecurity in Afghanistan and corresponding shifts in response priorities and focus in donor policy and aid actions over time. Few programmes have shown consistency of focus and effort; the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) and support for health services are two examples that have. More often, the evolving sequence of failure of policy interventions, leading to new models and practices, has left a policy trail and effects that are difficult to untangle. A sixth issue, alluded to by Saltmarshe and Medhi (2011), is an intellectual one around the use of theory and concepts and the deployment of methods to generate evidence, a point that we return to in an exploration of the NSP and evidence building around the opium poppy economy.

Reflecting the state-centricity of the reconstruction effort, the drive to transform Afghanistan through impersonalised competition in both the political (democracy) and economic (market) spheres and their associated institutions has introduced perceptual biases (Pain and Kantor, 2011a). One such bias is an assumption that the new organisational structures can relatively easily bring about institutional change and displace what is there already.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, little attention is given to how new organisational arrangements actually work out in practice. The public text of success – the number of community development councils (CDCs), the number of microcredit groups formed or the declaration of opium poppy-free provinces – rarely pays attention to how CDCs interact with existing customary structures, how microcredit engages with existing widespread informal credit institutions or the means by which opium poppy-free status is achieved. The focus on the formal has ignored the pervasive informal and the logic that underpins it.

Another bias relates to the focus on poor people's agency rather than the structural conditions that create poverty and vulnerability in the first place, although this bias is somewhat schizophrenic. On the one hand, new organisational structures such as the CDCs or market-driven development are viewed as allowing agency to be expressed and people to climb out of poverty, with the existing structures that govern households or individual behaviour ignored. On the other hand, where agency is expressed and markets work – and opium poppy cultivation is the exemplar of this – any understanding that might be drawn from this is neglected. In this sense, the logic of what people do and why – their response to the circumstances in which they find themselves – is rarely the subject of impartial enquiry, either through ignorance or through assumptions that this lacks relevance. A third perceptual issue, and linked to this, is the continuing muddle between symptoms and causes. This is seen in the rather limited debate around opium poppy, in which the crop is firmly seen as a cause of instability and insecurity rather than symptomatic of underlying structural issues; it is also reflected in the increasingly agentic focus on poverty whereby symptoms – lack of assets and so forth – become the causes to be addressed, with underlying structural inequalities ignored.

The difficulties involved in building evidence of outcomes and effects in Afghanistan should not be underestimated; these include lack of basic data (even population data), logistical and security issues and so forth. However, too often, the tyranny of urgency and the imperative to spend have short-circuited effective evidence-building practices; robust evidence building that uses theory and methods critically to explore implicit theories of change and scrutinise policy effects requires time and patience. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that too much of the state-building effort since 2001 has been driven by a combination of incompetence and blind certainty as to what needs to be done; perhaps because of ignorance, there has been a profound lack of interest in using the challenges that

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<sup>1</sup> For example the effects of insecure provinces attracting greater levels of aid than more secure provinces.

<sup>2</sup> The use of the term 'institution' follows North et al. (2009)'s meaning of rules of the game.

Afghanistan generates to rethink basic normative models. There is so much in Afghanistan that we have got wrong.

A number of core themes run through this paper. The first is the fact that there are some areas in which positive change can be linked to interventions and improvement in access to basic services in health and education. The second relates to a discussion of what we don't know or have failed to take account of as a consequence of the emphasis on the central state and the muddle over local governance. This includes a bias towards the formal to the profound neglect of the informal, and a focus on self-vindicating 'proof' with too little attention paid to what is actually happening, such as in the behaviour of regional elites. A third theme is the issue of complexity as a result of both Afghanistan's diversity and multiple donors' competing practices of intervention. These raise two fundamental questions, to which the paper returns at the end: (1) to what extent can evidence be used to inform policy, given the imperatives that have driven policymaking and interventions in Afghanistan; and (2) how can such evidence be built most effectively, given the circumstances?

The paper starts by providing a summary introduction to Afghanistan to set the context for the paper (Section 2). It then reviews the evidence on aid flows (Section 3). In Section 4, there is an assessment of the available evidence in relation to the core questions of the paper; this is developed further in Section 5 through two detailed case studies of evidence making in national-level exercises: the NSP and opium poppy cultivation. Sections 6–9 move to address the core research questions of the paper through focused consideration of people's responses, governance, linkages and the role of the private sector. Section 10 provides a set of summary conclusions.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Country context

#### 2.1.1 Country background

Central to Thomas Barfield's outstanding account of Afghanistan's history (Barfield, 2010) is the significance of the country's regional identities and their durability. These identities have been defined by two key dimensions. The first is the location of four major regions, structured around distinct ethnic identities and ancient urban centres: Herat in the west, Kandahar in the south, Balkh (Mazar-i-Sharif) in the north and Kabul in the west, with a fifth region based around Peshawar that was taken by the British and left to Pakistan. These four centres of regional power are central to an understanding of Afghanistan's politics today.

The second is one of a consistent structural contrast that exists within each region: the contrast between the geographically marginal areas of desert and mountain – characterised by subsistence-based economies, low population densities and relatively equitable, less hierarchical social structures with strong group solidarities – and the irrigated plain settlements which have generated the agricultural surplus and been characterised by strong social hierarchies and greater levels of social inequality based on the ownership of land.

While Abdur Rahman brought these regions through force into a nascent Afghan state in the 19th century and used enforced settlement of the Pashtuns in the north to assist in the process, underlying regional identities and social orders did not disappear. They reasserted themselves most strongly with the emergence of resistance to the Communist government and Soviet occupation after 1978 and consolidated themselves in the period of anarchy that emerged after the fall of President Najibullah in 1992. By the end of the Taliban rule (1996–2001), they had re-established themselves as centres characterised more by their outward economic linkages with neighbouring countries than by their nature as subject to any centralising pull of Kabul. This economic orientation has remained since 2001 and has been consolidated by the rise of regional power holders who have remained resistant to the emergence of a strong central government.

The effects of the conflict from 1978 for Afghanistan's population were various. Before this time, the state was characterised by its lack of presence, except for in a certain level of security, whereas afterwards the state became the enemy. The war with the Soviet army led to considerable destruction of the rural economy and a major outflow of refugees to Pakistan and Iran. From the period 1978–92, agricultural production declined, although the evidence does not support a picture of complete collapse:

'[...] the agricultural production systems of Afghanistan can only be described as robust and resilient. For fourteen years, from 1978 to 1992, rural production system in Afghanistan continued to support the remaining rural population under conditions of extreme difficulty. Although malnutrition and hunger were reported, this did not degenerate into [...] catastrophic situations' (UNDP, 1993).

The period after 1992, despite political instability, saw considerable recovery of the agricultural economy, stimulated by a large return of refugees and investment in the rebuilding of the damaged rural infrastructure, reflected in a revival of wheat production. The rise to power of the Taliban brought a level of security from 1996 that had been missing since 1992. From 1997, for nearly five years, a national-level drought gripped the country; this caused considerable hardship, albeit not a collapse into famine – wheat markets continued to function. Under the new political conditions following the fall of the Taliban in 2001, households thus found themselves in serious need of an economic recovery, and there was hope that the new political dispensation and the reconstruction effort would provide security and deliver the basic services they had long been deprived of.

#### 2.1.2 Basic features

Post-2001 Afghanistan presented a grim set of basic indicators on poverty levels and provision of basic services. Even current indicators (see Table 1,) show a large gap between the country and other South

Asian and low-income countries. As Section 4 discusses, while significant progress has been made in the provision of basic health services and access to education, much remains to be done.

**Table 1: Current Afghanistan key statistics**

	Afghanistan	South Asia	Low-income
Population (million)	29.8		
Urban population (% of total population)	24	30	29
Poverty (% of population below national poverty line)	42		
Life expectancy at birth	44	64	57
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	134	55	76
Child malnutrition (% of children under five)	33	41	28
Access to improved water source (% of population)	48	87	64
Literacy (% of population aged 15+)		61	66
Gross primary enrolment (% of school-aged population)	106	108	104
	Male 127	110	107
	Female 84	105	100

Source: World Bank (2011a)

With respect to the economy, and starting from a very low base level in 2002/03, real gross domestic product (GDP) growth has been significant but volatile (Table 2), both with respect to inter-annual comparisons and, as discussed later, between urban and rural areas (IMF, 2010). For the seven years between 2002/03 and 2009/10, the economy grew by an estimated total of 114 percent, with 80 percent of this overall growth coming from growth from cereals (22.5 percent), transport and storage (20.5 percent), construction (16.7 percent), government services (15.7 percent), goods, beverages and tobacco (11.6 percent) and wholesale and retail trade (9.0 percent). Although the contribution of cereals has been significant overall, in the dry years of 2004/05 and 2008/9, it contracted by 2.84 percent and 6.13 percent, respectively.

As with much of the data from Afghanistan, considerable caution has to be exercised with respect to reliability. Most of Afghanistan's economy is informal (at least twice the size of that of the formal) and therefore its value is captured poorly and can only be estimated. Further to the level of the informal but legal economy has to be added the value of the opium economy, which the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2009) estimates to have a net export value of \$2.3 billion, equivalent to nearly 40 percent of the estimated \$6 billion in aid that Afghanistan received in that year (IMF, 2010). A key driver of growth has been the inflow of aid and sub-contracts linked to military activities. Aid, starting from an estimated level of \$57 per person in 2002, had risen to \$154 per person by 2008 (real 2006 US\$), dwarfing other parts of the economy – in 2008/09 it was about 10 times the size of official exports.

**Table 2: Real GDP growth (%)**

Year	Real GDP growth
2002/03	28.6
2003/04	15.1
2004/05	9.4
2005/06	16.1
2006/07	8.2
2007/08	14.2
2008/09	3.4
2009/10	22.5 (estimated)
2010/11	8.9 (projected)

Source: IMF (2010)

The likely effects on the economy of the military withdrawal from Afghanistan should not be underestimated (Zoellick, 2011). Military spending in 2010–11 has been estimated at more than \$100 billion (in comparison with that of aid of \$15.4 and GDP of about \$16.3 billion) and military contracts have fuelled much of the growth of the urban economies.

The third key feature that should be noted here is the general rise in insecurity over the past four to five years, spreading to both eastern Afghanistan (ICG, 2011) and northern Afghanistan (Guistozzi and Reuter, 2011). This has increasingly affected the delivery of aid programmes and government activities and brought for many rural Afghans a sense of uncertainty and despair over the failure to achieve a rule of law since 2001. The sense of order the Taliban brought between 1996 and 2001 is increasingly and favourably compared with the present and prevailing insecurity and predatory behaviour of many government workers and power holders.

# 3 Building the state: the role of aid and policy

## 3.1 Introduction

Aid organisations have deployed two primary and closely interlinked instruments of intervention in seeking to (re)construct the Afghan state and make progress towards achieving poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The first has been money and the second has been policymaking in defining the use and ends towards which money should be used. Both have been supported by efforts to build capacity in government ministries. Key agents involved in these activities have been aid donor technical staff and consultants. Given this central role of both money and policy, it is necessary here to build an understanding of aid levels, sector allocations, modalities of delivery and donor policy practice, so as to be able to assess the impact of interventions.

This section aims to review and summarise what is known about aid effectiveness and policy practice in Afghanistan. As will become evident, even assessing what aid has been provided is not easy, in part because a significant part of it has been delivered outside government systems and not necessarily reported on. Meanwhile, military- and security-linked funding dwarfs the level of aid, and has also come to include areas which have conventionally fallen under the heading of development activities, for example the construction of schools and roads – and there is no systematic reporting of these interventions, let alone their effects. This increases the problems of linking interventions to impact and attribution. This is compounded by indicative evidence of highly uneven patterns of expenditure across provinces, driven in part by security considerations. The fact that, in development and state-building interventions, different donors work to different theories of change and employ different instruments of intervention further magnifies the problems involved in attempting to understand what links what intervention to what outcome. In short, what is evidence is there of what?

## 3.2 Aid flows to Afghanistan

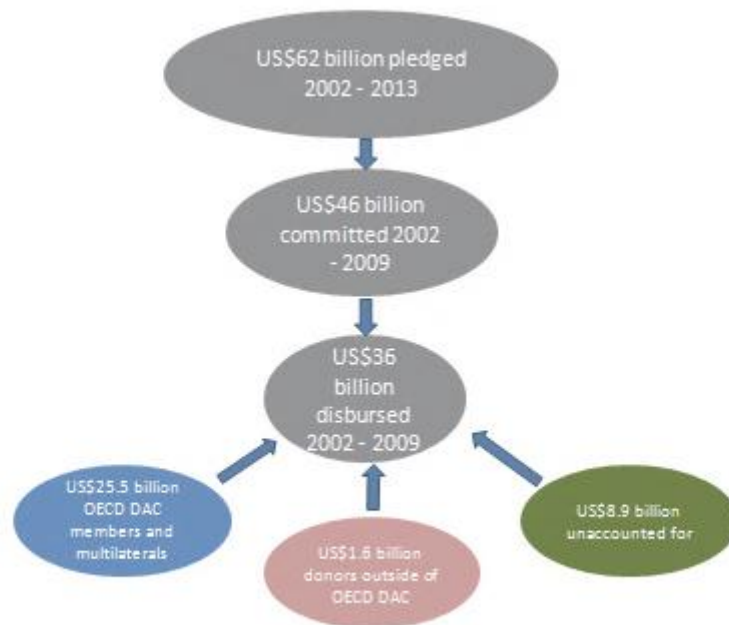
This subsection draws on two primary sources: an analysis by Global Humanitarian Assistance (Poole, 2011a) of aid resource flows in Afghanistan and a more specific analysis commissioned by SLRC to support this paper (Poole, 2011b). These are supplemented by additional secondary literature including a recent Afghanistan case study (Ministry of Finance and Baawar Consulting Group, 2010) of donor performance in relation to the Paris Declaration.

First, note has to be taken of the considerable uncertainty that exists over the figures on aid reported to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) database on which this analysis is based, given an overall lack of transparency among donors in terms of what is being spent on what. Of the top 10 bilateral donors which from 2002 to 2009 provided nearly 75 percent of aid, eight also have a military presence through the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and deliver aid linked to military objectives that does not meet the criteria of official development assistance (ODA) and is not systematically or reliably reported.<sup>3</sup> Pledges do not necessarily lead to commitments, there are gaps between commitments and disbursements, donors outside the OECD do not necessarily report their aid and at least 22.8 percent of funds disbursed cannot be accounted for with respect to what they have been spent on. Figure 1 captures the best estimates of resource flows that can be made.

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<sup>3</sup> This includes funding provided to many of the provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), and for this reason this report does not assess the effects of PRT activities are not assessed.

**Figure 1: Aid pledges, commitments, disbursements and major funding flows**



Source: Poole (2011b)

Between 2000 and 2009, an estimated total of \$274.7 billion in aid and military funding was spent in Afghanistan. An estimated 9.6 percent of this was ODA, 88.6 percent (\$243.3 billion) was spent on foreign military operations and a further 5.6 percent (\$16.1 billion) on security-related aid that is not ODA eligible (Poole, 2011b). This level of funding made Afghanistan the world's leading recipient of aid in 2008 and 2009. Yet even at peak aid flows, Afghanistan has received only \$172 per person compared with an estimated \$369 and \$315 per person for Iraq and Bosnia, respectively.

The overall volume of aid tells one aspect of the story, but a comparison of Afghanistan with other top aid recipients for the period 2002–09 also reveals some distinctive features about Afghanistan with respect to the weight of funding that comes from ODA and other international resource flows (Table 3). What stands out is not only the weight of resource flows from foreign military operations in relation to total resource flows, with which only Iraq bears comparison, but also the uniqueness of Afghanistan in having almost no counterweight to ODA in terms of domestic government revenue or foreign direct investment. The effect has been to recreate an even more extreme version of the rentier state (Suhrke, 2011) that existed in the Cold War period (Rubin, 1995).



**Table 3: Major domestic and international resource flows to the six leading ODA recipients, 2000–9  
(Percent of total in \$ billion)**

Country	Iraq	Afghanistan	Vietnam	Ethiopia	Tanzania	Pakistan
Foreign military ( percent)	48.5	88.6	0	0	0.42	0
Multilateral peacekeeping (%)	0.19	0	0	3.8	0	0.03
Total ODA (%)	7.0	9.6	9.4	47.9	47.4	6.7
Foreign direct investment (%)	1.15	0.6	13.9	7.3	13.8	9.5
General government revenue (%)	42.9	1.2	59.0	37.0	37.9	65.1
Remittances (%)	0.3	0*	17.7	4.0	0.4	18.6
Total \$ billion	442.6	274.7	219	41.1	35.1	242.4

Note: \* This does not capture the significance of remittance flows, most of which are informal and not registered.

Source: Poole (2011b)

Two other international comparisons should also be noted. First, Afghanistan received over 80 percent of its ODA as bilateral aid, a proportion exceeded only by Iraq. Second, over 16 percent of this ODA for the period 2000–9 was allocated through pooled funding mechanisms, in contrast with 6 percent in Iraq. While the first comparison indicates the potential challenges to a national government from the operations of multiple bilateral agencies, the second identifies the potential counterbalance to this in an attempt to reduce transaction costs to the government. Within these pooled mechanisms, the proportion of funding that has been earmarked or ‘preferenced’ to funding of specific sectors by the donor has risen significantly – from 7.5 percent in 2002–3 to 47 percent in 2008–9 – thereby blunting the pooled funding objectives and reducing the government’s influence over where funds should be spent. Over 77 percent of aid given to Afghanistan by bilateral agencies between 2002 and 2009 was not funnelled through government but rather was spent directly by the bilateral agency.

Based on data reported to OECD DAC (see Table 4), spending on sector allocable aid has increased in importance over the past decade, with the largest share allocated towards support to build government capacity and civil society. There was a decline in the relative significance of humanitarian aid for a number of years from the early 2000s, from \$890 million in 2002 to \$330 in 2005. Since 2008, there has been an increased response to food shortages caused by poor agricultural performance and rising global food prices; in 2010, levels of humanitarian aid exceeded those of 2001. It is significant that the UN Office for Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), which was closed in 2004 (Donini, 2010), was re-established in Afghanistan in 2009.



**Table 4: Aid allocation by sector in Afghanistan**

	<b>2002-5</b>	<b>2006-9</b>
<b>All aid (\$ million)</b>	8,113	17,146
<b>Sector allocable aid (%)</b>	65.3	82.1
<b>Debt relief (%)</b>	0.9	0.5
<b>Humanitarian aid (%)</b>	23.2	12.8
<b>Commodity aid (%)</b>	2.6	1.7
<b>General budget support (%)</b>	2.4	2.0
<b>Other</b>	5.7	0.9
<b>Sector allocable aid</b>		
<b>Economic infrastructure and services (\$ million)</b>	5,293	14,074
<b>Multi-sector/cross-cutting (%)</b>	26.7	25.9
<b>Production services (%)</b>	8.1	6.8
<b>Social infrastructure and services (%)</b>	6.6	7.7
<b>Social infrastructure and services</b>		
<b>Education (\$ million)</b>	3,105	8,379
<b>Health (%)</b>	11.9	9.1
<b>Population programme and reproductive health (%)</b>	9.2	9.7
<b>Water and sanitation (%)</b>	2.0	2.9
<b>Government and civil society (%)</b>	4.2	2.8
<b>Other social infrastructure and services (%)</b>	54.7	62.0

Source: Poole (2011a)

The distribution of aid between sectors is one matter. But attention also needs to be given to the number of donors working in each sector and the potential consequence of this for differing interests and agendas within a sector. Byrd (2007) makes the general point:

‘Difficulties in aid management and coordination have been exacerbated by the following factors. First, an enormous number of donors are active in Afghanistan – according to the Government as many as 62 including non-governmental donors. Second a number of these donors – of the order of a half-dozen or more – are major players in terms of the amount of assistance that they provide and/or as actors on the world stage. There is unlike in many other post-conflict countries, no natural dominant or “lead” donor in the development sphere.’

A comparison between various sectors of the number of donors active in it and the distribution of their relative weight is instructive. Drawing on OECD DAC data, Poole (2011b) determines the number of donors per sector, the number of donors contributing 90 percent of the funding and the contribution of each of the three most significant donors. Both the number of donor relationships in itself and the variation between sectors is striking. Taking just the statistic of the major players (those contributing 90 percent of the funding), with nearly eight in each sector (with the exception of health), this in itself must

provide a major challenge to government in terms of dealing with so many parties. Further, there is evidence of divisions of interests and perspectives between donors, as is discussed below.

**Table 5: Donor fragmentation by selected sectors**

	Social services and infrastructure	Education	Health	Agriculture	Governance and civil society
No. of donor relationships	28	23	17	13	26
No. of donors providing 90% of funding	8	8	4	7	8
No. of donors providing 10% of funding	20	15	13	6	18
Share of leading donor (%)	45.2	19.7	53.4	31.6	45.5
Share of second-largest donor (%)	13.1	17.3	17.8	23.3	13.6
Share of third-largest donor (%)	7.6	15.0	14.6	11.9	9.0
All other donors	34.1	48.0	14.1	33.1	31.9

Source: Poole (2011b)

The contrast between the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (MRRD) is instructive in this respect. Between 2005 and 2008, MRRD attracted total aid funding of \$937.8 million (Pain and Shah, 2009), of which 60.8% was core budget support (and 39.2 percent was off budget and spent by donors bilaterally). In contrast, over the same period, MAIL received only \$320 million, of which only 17.5 percent was core (with 82.5 percent off budget). There is a question as to whether ministry leadership might have led to higher funding and a greater core budget or the reverse, but the subsequent history of change in ministry leadership and the implications this has had for funding indicates a donor practice of being selective in terms of which ministries they will work with.

There is also indicative evidence of selectivity in terms of how funding is allocated geographically between provinces, which is further confounded by differential levels of ‘development’ spending by military actors. Waldman (2008) draws attention to disparities in PRT spending, with more insecure provinces (Uruzgan and Kandahar) receiving \$150 per person and less insecure ones receiving substantially less (\$30 per person in Faryab, Daykundi and Takhar). On the basis of an analysis of Ministry of Finance data, he also suggests there are higher levels of spending by government and donors in more insecure provinces – with Helmand receiving more than \$400 per capita and substantially less going to what have been seen as secure provinces – about \$50 in Sari-Pul, Ghor and Wardak. The data available in the Afghanistan Donor Assistance Database managed by the Ministry of Finance (the only publicly assessable source for provincially disaggregated aid data) show very different concentrations to those reported by Waldman,<sup>4</sup> which may well reflect selective reporting.

There is certainly a perception by people in the north that there is a greater level of donor funding to the south, where there is greater insecurity and more opium, and this has been given as one reason for the return to opium poppy cultivation in the north on the grounds that aid follows insecurity and opium poppy cultivation (Pain, 2011). Sar-i-Pul, for example, has long been considered an orphan province with

<sup>4</sup> Lydia Poole, personal communication.

respect to donor and government funding. There is also more recent evidence from an analysis of health funding that there are considerable provincial disparities in funding levels. Belay (2010) suggests that there is no clear targeting of provinces with poor health indicators and that there are large disparities (Table 6) in per capita amounts of total aid received between provinces (\$8.97–46.25). How much of this variability owes to different donor practices, how much to government practices and how much to insecurity is unclear.

**Table 6: Total health assistance received per capita by province, 2003/04–08/09 (\$)**

Province	Spending
Badghis, Herat, Helmand, Baghlan, Faryab, Daykundi, Kandahar, Balkh, Nangarhar, Wardak, Khost	10-19
Paktia, Panjshir, Takhar, Kapisa, Parwan Ghor, Farah, Sari Pul, Badakhshan, Jawzjan, Paktika, Uruzgan	19-25
Ghazni, Kunar, Kunduz, Zabul, Logar, Laghman	25-35
Nimroz, Bamyán, Samangan, Nuristan	More than 35

Source: Belay (2010)

Different levels of funding to different provinces are likely to have effects in terms of intervention levels and coverage; these in turn are likely to have consequences for a comparison programme effects between provinces, let alone within provinces.

There is a final point. As Beale and Schutte (2006) note, many of the core national programmes, such as the NSP, have a rural focus and, while the data do not provide the basis for an analysis of this, the tendency to focus on the rural dimensions of poverty, compounded by the predominantly rural nature of insurrection and instability, raises a question about whether or not there has been a rural bias in funding in certain sectors.

### 3.3 Donors, policy and practice

A multiplicity of donors in any one sector and differential levels of funding to different provinces do not necessarily lead to problems of different programme design between donors, provided all donors are working to the same broad theory of change. But the evidence is very clear that they are not. Wilder (2007) points to very different cultural models of the role of the police between German- and US-funded programmes, with implications for how they are trained and with what values. Pain and Shah (2009) argue that there are some very distinct narratives driving making policymaking and programme design in agricultural and rural development: the US is supporting an almost exclusively private sector market-driven model with trickle-down effects on poverty; other donors have more of a ‘developmentalist’ perspective. This leads to different programme designs and different assessments of outcomes, making it impossible to analyse the overall effects within sectors. Even in the health sector, which by most accounts has been one of the more successful in terms of outcomes, the difference in models of private–public partnerships (Table 7) between the lead donors – the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank and the European Commission (EC) – raises administrative challenges for the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), since the models address monitoring and evaluation in different ways. Such differences also make it difficult to assess impacts.

**Table 7: MOPH contracting schemes with USAID, the World Bank and the EC**

Donor	No. of provinces covered	Flow of funds	Contract management	Performance-based elements	Monitoring and evaluation
<b>USAID</b>	13	From USAID to MOPH	Health Economics & Finance Department	No bonus but extension of contract conditional on performance	Small-scale household surveys
<b>World Bank</b>	11	From Ministry of Finance to MOPH	Health Economics & Finance Department	Monetary bonus up to 10% of contract value; performance-based assessment based on balanced score card (BSC) outcomes	Annual facility survey and household survey conducted by third party covering entire country
<b>EC</b>	10	From EC to non-governmental organisations (NGOs)	EC	None	Third party evaluation in EC provinces; annual report to EC

Source: Waldman et al. (2006)

In summary, the overwhelming weight of non-ODA resource flows into Afghanistan, the significant flows of funding outside government control and the presence of multiple donors within sectors often working to different theories or change and models of programme practice raise intrinsic difficulties in determining the nature of interventions and assessing aid effects.

## 4 The evidence base

This section of the paper provides an overall assessment of the scope, quality and depth of evidence on which the subsequent sections of the paper draw. It provides a brief overview of the methods used in the search for relevant literature and summarises the literature that was found by thematic area and source. It then goes on to outline some of the key practical challenges in carrying out research and evidence building before briefly addressing some methodological issues. The section concludes with a longer discussion exploring the different approaches that have been used to generate evidence, using key examples of relevant evidence-building exercises for each method. This leads into the following section, which discusses two contrasting national-level programmes.

### 4.1 Methods

The availability of evidence and relevant documentary sources was assessed in a multi-stage process. One strand of this was done through a systematic search<sup>5</sup> of relevant published sources that could be accessed through institutional website searches (the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank – ADB) and through academic journals/databases including JSTOR, the Web of Knowledge, Peace Research Abstracts, International Political Science Abstracts (IPSA), the International Bibliography of Social Sciences (IBSS) and Francis. This was supplemented by additional reference sources identified by the global evidence review being undertaken by SLRC.

A second strand was to undertake an online search of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) library database ([www.areu.org.af](http://www.areu.org.af)) and that of the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University (ACKDU) ([www.ackdu.edu.af](http://www.ackdu.edu.af)). AREU has about 10,000 holdings and ACKDU more than 22,000. Both databases have a similar design structure and were searched using relevant key words. As an independent research organisation, AREU also has its own publications, many of which are relevant to this review; these were incorporated into the compilation of sources.

The third strand was to draw on several bibliographies, notably that of the Afghanistan Analysts Network and the bibliography compiled by Christian Bleuer (sixth edition, July 2011) (<http://afghanistan-analyst.org/bibliography.aspx>).

The fourth strand involved both a more general search using Google employing similar key words as search categories, and finally drawing on the extensive collection of documentation compiled by the author of this paper over the past 10 years.

The papers' sources were then catalogued into the key subject areas and categorised according to the nature of their publication, as a rough guide to the peer review process and quality assessment:

- Academic publication in a journal/book with assumptions of blind peer review and critical scrutiny of theory, methods and interpretation;
- Peer reviewed report but non-academic publication with assumptions of a process of peer review process;
- Reports where a peer review process was not clearly evidenced;
- Evaluations (which could include a peer review process) of programmes and projects;
- Other publications which, while relevant, did not fit in any of the other categories.

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<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Mathieu Tromme who conducted this search for the paper; see Annex 2 for a summary of the search strings used and databases consulted. As noted in reviewers' comments of the first draft of this paper, agriculture, livestock and humanitarian assistance were not used as search criteria: the scope of the paper had to be limited and focused around the core questions; further, as will become clear, assumptions about intervention effects on changes in crop and livestock production or productivity translate poorly into livelihood effects and are rarely assessed. Equally, robust assessment of the effects of humanitarian assistance is limited.

Making these distinctions should not necessarily be taken as a judgement on quality or relevance. The requirements of writing for an academic journal and its specific audience does not necessarily speak to the needs of this paper, and in many cases the less formal literature (peer reviewed internal reports and un-reviewed reports) can provide valuable insights. Equally, well-conducted evaluations can be valuable sources.

## 4.2 What was found

Table 8 provides a breakdown of publications by main thematic area and nature. Publications by AREU are listed separately, not least because they offer the widest sources of independent evidence building undertaken in Afghanistan since 2001 and are mainly not directly linked to specific interventions.<sup>6</sup> The thematic breakdown is based on the main content area so it is indicative rather than absolute, and there are bound to be overlaps in category. Over half of the literature assessed (274) shows no evidence of peer review, and only about 20 percent has been subject to full peer review. Over 40 percent of the peer review papers are in health and governance

One area in which it has not been possible, relatively speaking (in terms of the level of funded projects), to find much publically available documentary material is that of project evaluations. An evaluation of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) country programme (Bennett et al., 2009) notes that, up until 2006, many of the small projects in the DFID portfolio were not evaluated. A review of the overall German-funded programme, possibly one of the better-managed programmes, speaks more generally about the availability of project-related information:

'We use data drawn from a survey (2006) conducted by the BMZ, which lists a total of 259 projects conducted by German development cooperation actors – state and non-state – in Afghanistan since 2003. While this surely represents the most comprehensive list of German development projects in Afghanistan, it is nevertheless not without flaws that render the interpretation of the data included in the survey prone to fuzziness. One of the problems of the survey is that apparently questionnaires were sent out to the various organisations without pre-structured answers to the questions. This has led to a situation where for example an analysis of the target groups of the projects is virtually impossible without refining and re-assigning the target groups with the subsequent loss of some information in the process. Furthermore, not all information is complete in all the projects listed – this goes especially for information concerning the financial aspects of the projects. Out of 259 projects, only 215 included financial information of any kind in the database. Further noteworthy is the fact that only two projects have been evaluated by external consultants (both of these projects were implemented by the Welthungerhilfe (German Agro Action). 67 projects have been reviewed internally, although a good number of them stated that this was only in the annual reports. 55 reports have not been reviewed, and for the rest there was no information contained in the database' (Zurcher et al., 2007).

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<sup>6</sup> It is acknowledged that, to the extent that this paper draws on AREU publications, and given the contribution of the author of this paper to AREU's publications, particularly in research on livelihoods, this could be seen to give a biased account of the evidence – even though all papers have been through a peer review process and every effort has been made to report the findings in as objective a manner as possible. However, the use of these papers also points to the somewhat limited body of accessible research outputs on which this evidence review can draw.

**Table 8: Breakdown of publications by thematic area and source**

Thematic area	Academic	Peer review		Report		Evaluation	Other	N
		AREU		AREU				
Aid	5	1	1	20	0	0	6	33
Basic services	1	1	0	4	0	1	0	7
Civil society	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Conflict	2	0	0	14	0	0	2	18
Education	7	0	2	4	5	0	0	18
Evaluation	5	0	0	4	0	25	5	39
Gender	3	2	3	6	8	1	2	25
General	9	4	0	8	0	0	0	21
Governance	12	2	10	17	2	0	5	48
Health	18	2	2	14	0	0	1	37
Land	0	0	5	2	3	0	0	10
Livelihoods – rural	4	2	19	14	17	0	4	60
Livelihoods – urban	0	0	2	0	14	0	0	16
Private sector	4	0	3	17	7	0	2	33
Opium	1	0	8	2	6	0	0	17
Poverty	0	2	0	12	0	0	0	14
Social protection	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	4
Water	2	1	0	5	0	0	0	8
N	74	17	55	148	72	27	27	420

While this body of literature provides the basis for the rest of the paper, the paper cannot provide a comprehensive review of all the literature. Rather, given the confines of space and time, it selectively uses case literature that reflects the range of evidence to enable focused scrutiny and discussion of particular issues and challenges related to evidence building.

### 4.3 Problems of practice and issues in evidence building

Four issues which relate to the challenges of building evidence in Afghanistan are noted here. The first relates to the logistical difficulties involved in carrying out research, and the associated methodological challenges. The challenges are well summarised by one source:

‘There are also limitations stemming not from choices, but from the many constraints, which a highly complex research endeavour inevitably faces in the challenging environments of conflict zones. As it was to be expected Afghanistan is a particular difficult case. Difficult terrain and road conditions make it often hard to travel. Security concerns dramatically increase the problems of running surveys in rural areas. A near complete lack of basic demographic data requires that all data have to be collected by the researchers themselves. Also sampling procedures and the establishment of representative sample sizes becomes difficult when there is no reliable census data. It was extremely difficult to obtain reliable data from the myriad of aid organisations, which are active in the region. The conservative nature of Afghan rural society presented a challenge for conducting a large number of interviews with women and youth. At the same time, the conservative nature of rural society may exacerbate the risks that respondents tend to give the answers, which they think the “authorities” expect them to give’ (Böhnke et al., 2010).



Similar issues arise in relation to demonstrating and assessing impact: as the evaluation of the DFID programme noted, ‘the lack of good national and provincial data and security constrains access to beneficiaries (for both DFID staff and partners) impedes the measurement of progress or decision making’ (Bennett et al., 2009).

Second, there are often inherent problems in project design and assumptions that can make impact assessment a problematic exercise. As Bennett et al. (2009) note, ‘impact assessment has been difficult partly due to the weaknesses in project-levels results frameworks but also due to the inherent difficulties in measuring impact in an insecure environment’. This raises fundamental questions about intervention logic, including on assumed cause-and-effect relationships, the expected effects and impacts and underlying assumptions that are often simplistic and unrealistic; from experience, this would seem to be a widespread problem. Evaluations of some of the major USAID-funded programmes (USAID Afghanistan, 2009) appear to be undertaken mainly as end-of-project self-evaluations by the project contractor and are largely self-serving rather than independent and critical assessments.

Third, if assessments of intervention effects are not problematic enough – in part related to design – issues of variability and context specificity and the dangers of generalisation are rarely acknowledged, let alone addressed systematically. Barfield (2010) points to the long history of distinctive regional identities. National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) data (Ministry of Economy and World Bank, 2011) point to significant variation between regions based on topography and altitude with respect to poverty incidence and depth, which are greater in higher altitude locations. The dynamics of opium cultivation point to distinctive social order patterns, with social inequality overlying variability in agro-ecological conditions, with implications not only for the distribution of benefits from its cultivation (Pain, 2007) but also the links between drugs, economic rent and regional social orders (Goodhand and Mansfield, 2010). Further field evidence points to enormous variation in the ways villages ‘behave’ and the functioning of their customary structures (Pain and Kantor, 2010), mirroring the difficulties of generalising about gender: ‘in a country with a long history of migration, one often finds villages with different ethnicities, languages and religious beliefs several kilometres apart [...] it is necessary to be extremely cautious when making universal statements about what rural women do’ (Grace and Pain, 2011). It follows that, given such heterogeneity, intervention effects are at best likely to be uneven, with intended effects subject to being confounded by variables outside their control. This also raises issues for randomised approaches to evaluation.

The fourth issue is one of aid modalities linked to funding levels; spatial coverage; the multiplicity of implementation partners with different intervention portfolios and methods (linked to funding source); project modalities and intervention locations. As cited above, Waldeman (2008) draws attention to the enormous disparity between provinces with respect to aid funding, with more insecure provinces attracting higher levels of funding; Pinney and Ronchini (2007) note the effect of agencies working in the NSP in more accessible ‘easier’ areas first, confounding the assessment of its impacts; Zurcher et al. (2007) draw attention to the widespread occurrence of uneven coverage even in programme target areas:

‘The reality in our target region is that almost all communities have received at least some development aid, but rarely the same mix. In other words, all communities have received some treatment, but the treatment widely varies across communities.<sup>7</sup> In order to cope with this problem, we will cluster communities that have received similar treatment.’

While these are the remarks of a reflective evaluation, other evaluations rarely pick up on the consequences of uneven implementation practices or the confounding effects of other agency interventions, let alone unequal starting positions of different communities prior to interventions.

#### **4.4 Questions of theory and method**

This is not the place, nor is there the space, for any extensive discussion of key concepts and ideas that drive much of the policymaking and programming in Afghanistan. Any review of the theoretical debate

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<sup>7</sup> A treatment was defined as ‘a specific mix of development projects that might differ with regard to the number of projects, overall financial volumes, targeted sectors, and applied tools’ (Zurcher et al., 2007).



around core conceptual motifs and mobilising metaphors (Mosse, 2004) that frame interventions in Afghanistan – good governance, civil society, vulnerability, poverty, community-driven development, social capital, market-driven development and so forth – would note the uncertainties and complexities involved in defining them, the politics of choice of definition and the dilemmas inherent in designing programmes to achieve progress in any of these areas. Few, if any, programmes address these concerns: core concepts and effects come to be defined by what can be measured, and therefore rarely address or question the implicit theories of change that underlie the intervention.

The example of microcredit illustrates the point. A major microcredit programme in Afghanistan – assuming lack of access to credit, deep rural debt and problems in informal credit – has been designed to improve incomes and savings, raise productivity and promote growth in the rural economy. But the language in which informal credit is discussed (see Klijn and Pain, 2007) interprets informal credit practices entirely through the lens and the construction, language and meanings of formal credit. This is a major problem because access to, use of and contractual arrangements involved in informal credit are not the same thing as in credit without the formal label. It follows that the role of informal credit plays in cementing social relationships and providing consumption smoothing (money has values other than those for exchange) cannot be fulfilled by formal credit. And the metrics of success in microcredit lending – numbers of loans dispersed, repayment rates and so forth – do not capture the role that informal credit plays, let alone the substantial interface that has emerged between formal credit and informal credit, with the former parasitic on the latter (Kantor, 2008).

If core concepts need to be subject to more critical scrutiny, so do methods. Two major studies have been carried out on looking at the ‘hearts and minds’ effect of interventions, whether development aid contributes positively to changed attitudes and how government is perceived. They are not strictly comparable in that the first (Böhnke et al., 2010) was conducted in a relatively secure environment in northern Afghanistan, looking at ‘normal’ development aid, whereas the second (the Tufts studies, see Fishstein and Wilder, 2010; Gompelman, 2011; Gordon, 2011) focused more on military interventions in development. The former is the more methodologically robust study (careful scrutiny of data, mixed methods and carried out over several years); the latter work, based on contrasting case studies, is more qualitative, interview based and selective and, in consequence, less robust in its methods. While the conclusions from the latter study are striking and interesting, and clearly informed by perceptive insights, judgement might be reserved on how strong its methodological basis is. Although there is much of value in case studies, particularly if they are chosen carefully as contrasts and these contrasts are explored robustly, they can offer little for generalisation.

This leads to questions of qualitative and quantitative methods. From a livelihood perspective and drawing on chronic poverty research, da Corta (2010) strongly advocates the case for a plural approach combining both quantitative and deeper and multiple levels of qualitative research (from livelihood strategies to the dynamics of social relations and meso-level changes). For understandable and pragmatic reasons, no research or evidence building in Afghanistan around livelihoods meets this gold standard, but there is also very little that comes close to it. Much of the qualitative work in case studies speaks to a specific context and not much beyond it, and often analyses context weakly and seeks to generalise without a basis to do so. Equally, the fewer quantitative-based studies provide generalised explanations but little understanding of the specific mechanisms by which claimed effects have been achieved.

## **4.5 Breakdown of methods**

Based on a review of the evidence, six methods or approaches to data generation or evidence making have been identified. It is difficult to provide a robust assessment of the frequency distribution of methods against thematic area, but the most frequently used methods appear to be qualitative case study approaches and the least frequent are randomised evaluations and longitudinal studies. No studies mixed methods were found. The data and evidence sets produced by these differing approaches are reviewed here briefly.

### **4.5.1 Time series data**

Three major and national-level efforts in building time series understanding of livelihood-relevant measures are discussed here, although there are also other time series datasets in, for example,

educational enrolment (Ministry of Education, 2010). There is a surprising absence of baseline studies for programme areas carried out by international NGOs (INGOs), although one INGO is known to have been wrestling for several years to establish an effective and utilisable baseline. The first study is the NRVA of poverty; the second is a systematic monitoring of the performance of the provision of the Basic Package of Health Services in Afghanistan (BPHS). These both have a direct bearing on the assessment of poverty outcomes and basic health services provision. The third study, the annual assessment of the area under opium poppy, is perhaps more controversial, but, given its centrality as the one market opportunity of choice for rural households and the challenges this has been seen to raise to the state-building exercise, an understanding of evidence building on opium poppy area, its spatial distribution and its associated economy is highly relevant to this discussion.

The NRVA has been carried out over three rounds since 2003 and has progressively expanded its scope, methods and coverage (Table 9). Evolved out of a national food security assessment developed by the World Food Programme (WFP) (Pinney and Ronchini, 2007), it has developed into a national-level set of representative household data of poverty assessment, in itself a remarkable achievement. The third NRVA provides an understanding of some of the key seasonally smoothed dimensions of poverty. But as the report makes clear (Ministry of Economy and World Bank, 2010), the evolution of methods in the survey means that, for many of the outcomes assessed, this is not a time series dataset and the assessment of poverty rates in 2007/08 cannot be compared readily with earlier assessments. However, for certain socioeconomic indicators that have been defined consistently over the survey rounds (e.g. some of the education and health indicators), time-based comparisons are legitimate.

**Table 9: Evolution of the Afghanistan NRVA**

Year		Features
2003	First NRVA	All districts of the country with the exception of 12 in Uruzgan and Zabul owing to insecurity; female-accompanied male surveyors enumerated all areas except the southern region. Food security became consumption based; conducted at community, socioeconomic group and household level; 11,700 households.
2005	Second NRVA	All districts of the country with the exception of 12 in Uruzgan and Zabul owing to insecurity; statistically valid at provincial level; 10 urban areas and Kuchi nomadic population; consumptions and dietary diversity based on household level; 31,412 households. Collected over summer only.
2007/08	Third NRVA	Comprehensive multi-topic household survey covering all aspects of food consumption, demography, household infrastructure, assets and credit, agriculture and livestock, migration, child and maternal health; collected from all 34 provinces, 20,576 households in 2,572 communities; collected over entire year.

Since 2004, MOPH has used a BSC as a performance measurement and management tool for the BPHS, evaluating the quality of service performance at primary care facilities in six areas, including patients and community, staff, capacity for service provision, service provision and financial systems (Johns Hopkins and IIHMR, 2009). The methods of the survey allow for comparison of the 2008 BSC assessment with earlier ones (in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007). Accordingly, assessment of progress in service provision is possible, although changes have been made in methods of assessment on several of the indicators, and these are carefully documented. Provincial breakdown of service delivery is also available. The results from the 2008 assessment point to 'remarkable progress [...] since 2004 [on] the benchmarks set as the upper quintile of provincial performance in 2004 [...] and many have been achieved during a period of rapid expansion and improvement on the BPHS' (ibid.). The one area of poor performance highlighted relates to physical infrastructure. Taken in conjunction with the NRVA data, the survey methods support an emerging picture of a substantial improvement in the provision of health services and certain health outcomes over the past decade in Afghanistan, as discussed further below.

The third set of data that has been collected on an annual basis, which has been the longest running of all surveys (dating back to 1992), relates to the collection by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) of statistics on opium poppy area and opium production. The level of national coverage and

methods used in survey assessments (of area and production) have evolved considerably over time, and since 2004 the annual assessments have come to be seen as key indicators of progress in the state-building exercise. As will be discussed in more detail, however, the evolution of methods over time questions the extent to which these are robust time series data, not least given the discrepancies that have emerged between two different procedures of assessment. Further, the interpretation of area statistics and its use to support certain lines of argument has been controversial. The discussion on evidence building with respect to opium poppy and the use of this evidence lies at the heart of the discussion of the state-building exercise and its practices.

#### **4.5.2 Longitudinal data**

A second form of time series data relates to the study of cohorts (or panel sets) of individuals and households over time so that one is able to track events, trajectories and outcomes at a very local level over time. The study of cohorts and panel sets is a widely used methodological approach in medical studies (e.g. in HIV/AIDS studies<sup>8</sup>) and has also been used to study long-term effects on US military serving in Afghanistan (Smith et al., 2007). Its use to explore household trajectories and therefore to trace events, impact and household responses over time has been very limited and, as far as this evidence review has been able to ascertain, it has been the basis of only one study (Kantor and Pain, 2011) which revisited in 2008–9 a subset of 64 households in 8 districts in 3 provinces of an initial study in 2002–3 of 390 households in 7 districts in 7 contrasting provinces to explore how and why livelihoods had changed. The study, based entirely on household interviews, was supported by detailed contextual analysis (Pain and Kantor, 2010) but did not include a quantitative cross-sectional survey of all the original surveyed households. In part, this owed to security, logistics and finance issues.

#### **4.5.3 Cross-sectional surveys**

Strictly speaking, given the shifts in methods and scope, the NRVA assessments discussed above are cross-sectional surveys, given the changes in sampling procedures and representativeness. Other repeat cross-sectional surveys with an increasingly explicit sampling frame can be found in the assessment series by The Asia Foundation in its opinion polls on security and development (e.g. The Asia Foundation, 2010). More commonly, many broader surveys concerned with the assessment of opinions and attitudinal change are less robust in their methods and careful in their questioning. The Senlis Council (2007), which has been advocating for a change in drug policy, for example, claims to have carried out a rapid assessment survey polling 17,000 men in 9 days with 50 interviewers in 2007, asking such questions as ‘do you ever worry about feeding your family?’ and ‘do you know how to fire a weapon?’ with a choice of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers or no answer. This may be an extreme example, but there are many broader surveys that do not stand up well to scrutiny with respect to methods and thereby produce debatable interpretations and conclusions.

#### **4.5.4 Case studies**

There is a very wide body of published material based on qualitative case studies. These include (1) studies based on purposively selected case contrasts where contrasts are explored systematically (e.g. the series of studies on provincial contrasts in the dynamics of opium poppy cultivation by Mansfield and Pain, 2005–8); (2) those where cases are purposively selected from contrasting provincial or village settings (as in Saltmarshe and Medhi, 2011), cultural settings (as in Smith’s 2009 study on marriage practices) or military operations (as in the Tufts ‘hearts and minds’ series) to capture the range of variability, but the contrasting contexts are not a specific point of the analysis; and (3) case studies on a particular commodity or market, village or individual which at best are used to explore specific issues (e.g. Zardozi, 2007) and at worst are used to illustrate but not argue or evidence a claim. Claims of success stories are a particularly problematic form of evidence building and run the severe danger of uncritically and selectively cherry picking ‘facts’ or ‘evidence’ to suit the claim with no critical conceptual or methodological underpinning. They are used simply to bolster assumptions about the theory of change (the link between an intervention and its effects) without critically questioning it.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the General Population Cohort study started in 1989 in 15 rural villages in Uganda tracking the dynamics of HIV infection, with repeat surveys tracking change undertaken at regular intervals (Ekoru et al., 2010).

#### **4.5.5 Evaluations**

In theory, programme and project evaluations could provide a rich body of evidence and argument in relation to interventions and their impacts. In practice, they often do not, and there are several reasons for this. First, there is the enormous difficulty in finding evaluation reports, reflecting in part a lack of public access to such reports and in part the fact that many projects remain unevaluated (see Zurcher et al., 2007 in relation to their search for evaluations of German-funded projects) or, at best, evaluations being limited to the delivery of activities and results (Bennett et al., 2009).

But, and this is the second issue, Bennett et al. (2009) also found problems in project-level results frameworks within the state-building portfolio. They note that both the NSP and the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA) ‘had a fairly strong focus on the role of women [... but neither ...] project memoranda had indicators for how to report impact on women’. The problem of weak and inconsistent programme- and project-level results frameworks is not unusual. From the author’s own personal experience in evaluating an EC-funded rural development project and support to monitoring for a large INGO programme, problems of logic and absence of robust indicators are widespread. The use of opium poppy area as an indicator of both counter-narcotic programme outputs and goals is a particular example of a conceptual muddle (Mansfield and Pain, 2008).

A third issue related to evaluations and indications of programme impact, again concerned with indicators, is the choice of sound indicators. Indicators can be selected to support the public text of success without necessarily questioning or exploring what might underlie this. A case in point is the early reporting on MISFA, which focused on reporting the number of microfinance loans dispersed, the number of groups established and levels of repayment, without critically assessing how those loans were repaid and the economic benefits that might have accrued from the loans (Kantor, 2008). The fact that, in rural areas, microfinance could be parasitic (formal credit being repaid through informal borrowing) on informal credit or used largely for consumption smoothing despite the rules was not something that was assessed, leading to questions about the substance of ‘impact’. It also exemplifies a broader issue, to which we return later, about the general lack of interest and understanding of how new formal rules, organisational structures or programmes engage with existing social structures and informal institutions.

But, while acknowledging the very real difficulties of undertaking robust evaluations, they are possible: the assessment of the impact of German funding in northeast Afghanistan (Böhnke et al., 2009) – which went through careful methodological preparation, baseline establishment and impact assessment – shows that they can be done. This specific example and its methodological robustness provides an interesting contrast to the three ‘hearts and minds’ case studies examining the links between aid and building security.

#### **4.5.6 Randomised impact evaluations**

The final approach to evidence building comes from randomised impact evaluations (RIEs), which attempt to bring methodological robustness to accurately assess and attribute impact effects to interventions, although strictly they assess correlations more than causalities (Valdes and Foster, 2010). The approach is not without its critics (Deaton, 2009), and it is one that has been applied to the NSP, discussed in greater depth later. It has also been applied to an assessment of the effect of proximity on school enrolment (Burde and Linden, 2009).

## 5 Reviewing the evidence: case studies of evidence building – the NSP and the opium poppy economy

This section provides a more detailed exploration than will be possible for other programme and projects of the building of evidence in two policy or programme areas that have been national in scale, have a direct relevance to the livelihoods of poor people, are seen to be central to the state-building exercise (but for different reasons) and for which claims of success have been made. The first, the NSP, is taken as an example of an intervention designed not only to deliver public goods at the village level but also as an instrument in state building and contributing to the building of a social contract between the state and its citizens. In the second case, the opium poppy economy has been seen as a core challenge to the state-building exercise, but has played a significant poverty-alleviating role in the rural economy. Both cases illustrate some of the debates around what constitutes evidence, approaches to building it and what it tells you given the different conceptual frameworks, political agendas and constituencies of support that drive programming in Afghanistan.

### 5.1 The National Solidarity Programme

The World Development Report 2011 (World Bank, 2011b) cites the Afghanistan NSP as an example of a programme design that supports bottom-up state–society relations in insecure areas. It features the NSP as an example of a community-level programme design that has been adapted to country context and presents a case study of the NSP, summarising both the programme and the evidence for the claims that community-driven development has strengthened state–society relations in Afghanistan (see Box 1). The case study is supported by a graph and text from a RIE (Beath et al., 2010) that states that, in response to the question ‘do officials work for the benefits of all the villagers?’, villages that had participated in the NSP showed ‘more trust in national and local government’ (based on statistically significant more ‘yes’ than ‘no’ responses to the question) than non-participating villages.

#### Box 1: Assessment of the NSP

The largest development programme in Afghanistan, the NSP, has registered some important successes. Since its inauguration in 2003, it has established more than 22,500 CDCs across 361 districts in all 34 provinces and financed more than 50,000 development projects. Through the democratically elected, gender-balanced councils, the programme builds representative institutions for village governance. Typical projects construct or improve critical infrastructure, such as communal drinking water facilities, irrigation canals, local roads and bridges and electrical generators, and offer vocational training or literacy courses to villagers. Economic evaluations show consistently high rates of return across all sectors (above 12 percent). A mid-term evaluation by the University of York in the UK in 2005–06 found significant evidence of greater public faith in the national government, along with better community relations. The independently conducted RIE of Phase II of the NSP in 2010 reinforced this finding through a large-sample quantitative assessment using randomised controlled trials to compare outcomes in 250 villages covered by the NSP with 250 villages not yet participating in the programme. As part of this, a survey conducted between October 2007 and May 2008 showed that the simple process of electing councils and planning local investments increased villagers’ trust in all levels of government. Across the board, those in villages participating in the NSP had more trust in government officials, showing that it is possible to markedly change perceptions of state institutions through effective local interventions.

Source: Adapted from World Bank (2011b).

There is no question of the scale and coverage of the NSP as the largest development programme in Afghanistan. Phases I and II cost \$1.2 billion and Phase III, at a cost of \$1.4 billion, will extend coverage to the 40 percent of the country not covered so far. Of the \$1.5 billion provided by donors, mostly spent



through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), an estimated 72 percent has been spent on block grants for community development projects, with 19 percent supporting the facilitating partners (NGOs), which have been responsible for supporting the establishment of CDCs and their activities. It has been highly visible as a project, providing block grants of up to \$60,000 per community (calculated at a rate of \$200 per households) and a level of funding that has never been experienced by many villages before. It has delivered public infrastructure that has been widely appreciated. There are reports from many sources of the positive assessment of the NSP in comparison with other reconstruction projects. The observations of Gordon (2011) in relation to the NSP in Helmand, a province of acute conflict, speak for many:

‘On the positive side, as was the case in the other case study provinces, beneficiary responses [to the NSP] were more positive. While there were still significant criticisms overall respondents appreciated the extent to which they were consulted and involved in identifying, prioritizing, implementing, and monitoring the projects, and that a relationship was built between communities and the NSP implementing partners.’

But how well does the claim ‘community-driven development strengthens state–society relations in Afghanistan’ (World Bank, 2011b) made in relation to NSP’s role in building bottom-up support for the state stand up? And is the assertion that ‘democratically elected gender balanced councils [have built] representative institutions’ (ibid.) have led to an institutional transformation in introducing competitive impersonal elections and improving gendered equity supported by the evidence? Note should be made that the evidence presented in the World Development Report is an assessment of perceptions rather than outcomes, with which RIEs are normally associated. These questions are important because the NSP CDCs have been seen as a launching pad for other community-based activities in Afghanistan. In its support for the MRRD’s Agriculture and Rural Enterprise Development Program (AREDP), the World Bank has argued (in essence a ‘best practice’ justification) that ‘South Asian experience has shown that community-based approaches play a critical role in stimulating the local economy and catalysing market development in rural area’ (World Bank, 2010). The AREDP sees itself as building on the success of NSP and ‘utilizing strong bonds of community solidarity to facilitate access to finance’ (Pain and Kantor, 2011b).

A number of issues arise in a critical consideration of what the NSP has and has not achieved and how good the evidence is for this. The following discussion draws on some key sources and approaches to the assessment of the NSP (summarised in Table 10). Important concepts that have to be unpacked included those of community, collective action and gendered interests. There is a need to separate out the ‘flow of fund’ effects, which undoubtedly the NSP has provided (and which could induce favourable perceptions of the state, but not necessarily ‘bankable’ ones) from the process of ‘social engineering’ or ‘governance’ effect. The latter has been an attempt to bring about transformation in the social order of the village from one based on distinctly gendered separate spheres and relationally based patriarchal order to one that is impersonal and competitive. The evidence, although incomplete, would question the extent to which changes in the village social order have been brought about. As to how durable the favourable perceptions of the problematic Afghan state are, this remains to be seen once the funding runs out or is reduced and where chronic insecurity persists.

**Table 10: Assessments of aspects of the NSP**

Source	Methods	Sample	Research objective/questions
<b>Beath et al. (2010)</b>	RIE	'Treatment' group of 250 villages in the NSP and a 'control group' of 250 villages not in the NSP until after the conclusion of the study; from 10 villages in 6 provinces.	Estimate the impact of the NSP through a comparison of changes in outcomes of interest between a treatment group of villages in which CDC elections are held and NSP-funded projects are implemented and a control group of villages which are governed by customary structures and which do not receive NSP-funded projects.
<b>PRDU (2006)</b>	Midterm evaluation	Qualitative interviews from national-level interviews with core stakeholders; community power and household survey (participating and non-participating villages 24 districts in 11 provinces).	Evaluating of (inter alia) resources used to deliver the NSP; progress of the NSP in delivering outputs; potential impact of the NSP on improved local governance and poverty reduction; involvement of women CDC processes and as beneficiaries.
<b>Azarbaijani-Moghaddam (2010)</b>	Qualitative	483 men and women; 71 interviews CDCs in 43 villages in 11 districts in 7 contrasting provinces (ethnicity and security).	What are the main determinants of gender equity in CDCs? How can women's participation in CDC processes be increased? How much do CDCs reflect and further women's development proprieties? Do CDCs improve women's access to funds, influence and voice and can this be improved?
<b>Brick (2008)</b>	Qualitative and quantitative	Analysis of 2005 NRVA and The Asia Foundation's 2007 Survey of Afghan People; qualitative case studies from semi-structured interviews in 32 villages across 6 provinces.	Do communities with customary organisations have higher levels of public good provision than those that do not? Does the presence of other forms of local organisations including NSP CDCs lead to higher levels of public good provision in villages that do not have customary organisations?
<b>Pain and Kantor (2010)</b>	Qualitative	11 villages in 4 contrasting provinces (ethnicity, agro-ecology, economy, resource flows).	How do villages differ in 'behaviour' and why?
<b>Saltmarshe and Medhi (2011)</b>	Qualitative	800 respondents; 6 contrasting but secure provinces (ethnicity, economy, resource flows).	To gain understanding of progress in local government and examine the nature of formal administrative structures and their interactions with informal local governance structure.
<b>Boesen (2004)</b>	Qualitative	65 individual and CDC discussions; 4 facilitating partners in 6 districts in 3 provinces.	An examination of community perceptions of the NSP and the election process to the CDCs with a particular focus on its gendered dimensions.

'Village' and 'community' are not unproblematic concepts, although they are often used interchangeably, with a village treated as a community and a community as a village. But the term community is not neutral, as the assumptions behind the concept of community that drive development make very clear (Pain and Kantor, 2010). Further, the NSP definition of 'community' is often not consistent with that of 'village'. The operation guidelines of the NSP limit a community to 300 households, thus in some cases dividing larger villages into two or more communities or in other cases combining more than one village. The notion of 'household' in Afghanistan is also very inexact in

practice,<sup>9</sup> and fluid over time. As Saltmarshe and Medhi (2011) found, the NSP practice of community creation might encourage not only the creative expansion of household numbers in the village but also conflict as a village is split. Nor, as they argue, is the village necessarily the primordial unit of solidarity, with 'higher levels' of social solidarity (*mantequa*, *quam*, etc.) potentially being more significant.

While this might be seen to be a conceptual detail, what is more problematic is the assumption that the new institutional arrangements being introduced will durably displace what exists at present. The literature makes very clear that there is very strong qualitative evidence to support the existence of customary structures at the village level that can provide a key role in providing basic public goods – security, dispute resolution and sometimes more (see, in particular, Brick, 2010; Pain and Kantor, 2010); Beath et al.'s (2010) analysis of the data from their RIE scarcely draws on this or other field-level understanding. At best, villages can exhibit a strong moral economy where the elites work for the public good; at worst, the elite operates the village entirely for its own benefit and can capture any external resources. Much depends on the incentives the elite has to support open access to resources; where there are high degrees of inequality in land and a strong landed elite, these incentives are often weak (Pain and Kantor, 2010). In this sense, villages mirror the limited access orders described by North et al. (2009).

For Beath et al. (2010), these village preconditions will cause variability in the impact of the NSP, which is true. But what the RIE cannot reveal is the way that newly introduced organisational structures engage with what is there and the effects that this may have. What the qualitative evidence shows (and this is consistent with the evidence of the interaction between formal microcredit and informal credit, see Kantor, 2008, and attempts to introduce merit-based appointments for provincial governors, see van Bijlert, 2009) is processes of institutional bricolage, whereby interventions simply add a new layer of rules without overriding or displacing the others. The new rules become subject to what is there already.

This applies not only to issues of village governance but also to other social factors such as gender that structure behaviour at the village level and beyond. Thus, while it is possible to point to indicators of the number of women engaged in CDCs or the number of women's projects, the more critical evidence points to the limitations of these in terms of shifting the strong social norms that structure existing gender relations (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2009).

In summary, while there is no question that the NSP has contributed to the increased availability of public goods at the village level and a level of village resourcing that has been unprecedented in the experience of most rural households, the claims for the transformatory aspects of the NSP for village institutional life seem at best premature and less easily secured.

## **5.2 The opium poppy economy**

The growth of the opium economy since 2001 has been one of the defining motifs of Afghanistan over this past decade and one of its most controversial aspects. A core feature of it, and relevant to the interests of this paper, is the example that it provides of a market driven by Western demand and price that has brought technical change to Afghanistan's rural economy, created employment and transformed the rural economy through its multiplier effects. From a dispassionate point of view, it offers lessons about the potential for market development to contribute to poverty reduction and growth, although these have not been the lessons that have been drawn from it. Rather, for reasons relating to the international position on the illegality of opium and the potential linkages between opium and insurgency and between opium, corruption and criminality, it has been seen as a central problem to be addressed.

The extensive literature on opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan can be broadly divided into two camps. Underlying the divisions between these two broad schools of enquiry are questions of the balance between cause and symptom. The first is more inclined to see the opium economy as causal in undermining the state-building programme, whereas the second would see it more as indicative and

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<sup>9</sup> See Boesen (2004) for a discussion around this.



therefore symptomatic of underlying state failure, power structures and inequalities. The policy response in the case of the first school is to stress more the question of choice that actors in the opium economy have and therefore takes a more 'agentic' position, structuring incentives through raising risks and rewards to move households out of cultivation and individuals away from trading. The second school gives more attention to the underlying power structures that condition the room individuals have to make choices. Accordingly, it gives more weight to the institutions that are embedded in markets, for example, and the ways these regulate access and returns. It thus uses the opium poppy economy as a lens to view the political economy of the political and commodity market place, the structures of power within which these are embedded and the distributional outcomes of such markets.

This second body of literature has engaged with Afghanistan's opium economy more as a phenomenon to be understood rather than as one necessarily to be judged, and to be used as a lens for understanding rural economies, the politics of the country and the actual practices of state building. One part of this research has traced the ebb and flow of opium poppy cultivation at a more micro level, looking at farm-level decision making, household benefits from cultivation and the geographically differentiated nature of cultivation (Mansfield and Pain, 2007). A second part exemplified by a recent paper (Goodhand and Mansfield, 2010) has emphasised more the links between the opium economy and political processes and the potential transformatory role that drugs might play in state-building processes.

Two dimensions of the evidence building around the opium poppy economy are discussed here: assessments of opium poppy area and the links between counter-narcotic interventions and effects. The assessment of opium area and production, their change over time and the provincial shifts in cultivation, with suggestions as to the reasons for this shift, is an area of evidence building in which UNODC has played a central role (see UNODC and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2005–10). This is linked with the body of literature on the opium economy and its actors focusing on the grey and criminal economies, insecurity and insurgency linkages and effects on the state-building programme in Afghanistan (Maass, 2011). Estimates of crop area have been a key indicator driving claims of success or failure of policy and assessments of the effects of the opium poppy economy, and have largely been framed within a view of opium poppy as a problem to be addressed. The opium economy is seen to challenge state building and therefore to be responded to through counter-narcotic policy, eradication, interdiction and incentives to move households and Afghanistan out of it.

The construction of the area figures is not without its problems. Since 1992, UNODC has been carrying out surveys on the amount of opium being cultivated in Afghanistan and producing annual reports which provide summaries by province and nationally of estimates of area and production. These have been the key source material of 'basic facts' on opium production. However, 'basic' is not an unarguable observation. It is understood that separate assessments of opium area by the US<sup>10</sup> that are not publicly available have provided different estimates of production and area and directions of change.

An examination of method and assumptions indicates some of these problematic dimensions to what are facts and how they are constructed. Taking the annual UNODC surveys alone, a careful reading of the text would make the attentive reader aware that methods, where the surveys have been carried out (provincial coverage, for example) and estimates for production have all changed – as UNODC (2004) puts it, 'In a changing and challenging environment, UNODC constantly strives to adapt and improve the survey methodology'.

How these facts are used and presented is also important. One example illustrates the point. Compare and contrast the maps presented in UNODC for opium poppy cultivation (2003) and those in UNODC (2004). In the former, reporting up to and including 2001 included a category of provinces (the majority) that are labelled as having no data which are therefore left blank. In the latter document, these same provinces are considered for 2000 and 2001 as 'poppy free'. The executive summary for UNODC (2004) goes on to make the following statement: 'Opium poppy cultivation is now found in all 32

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<sup>10</sup> David Mansfield, personal communication.

provinces of the country, up from 18 provinces in 1999, 23 in 2000, 24 in 2002 and 28 provinces in 2003’.

There is, of course, a major difference between having ‘no data’ and being ‘poppy free’, although the case could be made that surveys were not carried out prior to 2002 in areas known to be poppy free. How one might know this is a matter for debate, but at the very least there is a slippage in the categorisation of ‘facts’ between one UNODC document and another. Methods of area assessment have undoubtedly been refined since then, not least using remote sensing techniques. But the concept of ‘poppy free’<sup>11</sup> has come to have wider political implications as a statement of progress and success in the counter-narcotics campaign and through the institution of rewards in terms of ‘good governance’ payments to governors in provinces where opium poppy cultivation has been seen to be eliminated.

The evidence building around counter-narcotic interventions and their effects is also problematic. A dramatic decline in opium area in Balkh between 2006–07 was heralded as an example to be followed and claims were made as to how it was achieved:

‘[...] other Afghan provinces should be encouraged to follow the model of this northern region where leadership, incentives and security have led farmers to turn their backs on opium’ (UNODC and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2007).

‘The poor farmers in Afghanistan’s mountainous North and East who grew poppy two to three years ago have now mostly stopped, as security, governance and development opportunities have improved in these areas ...and as the recent successes in Balkh, Badakhshan and Nangarhar demonstrate’ (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2008).

The evidence to support these claims is not compelling. In Balkh, little evidence could be found of development opportunities being provided or of good governance, although the existence of security was not in doubt (Pain, 2008). In Badakhshan also, where USAID funded a five-year ‘alternative livelihoods programme’, it was argued that alternative development had led farmers out of opium poppy cultivation:

‘Over the four-year life of the ADP/N program [Alternative Development Program for Northeast Afghanistan], the production of vegetables, cereal grains and orchard products increased dramatically in Badakhshan, while the cultivation of opium poppy, according to the UN Office of Drugs and Crime, declined more than 99-percent from 15607 hectares in 2004 to less than 200 hectares by the time ADP/N ended in February 2009’ (USAID, 2009).

For the ADP/N, it was argued that ‘Badakhshan farmers planted fewer poppies because they made a rational economic determination that they could make more money growing other crops [...] they voluntarily switched from cultivating poppy [...] because ADP/N’s broad-based, sustainable development program stimulated economic growth and business activity’ (ibid.).

But there is evidence that a fall in opium price combined with a significant rise in the price of wheat straw was a significant element in the shift out of opium poppy cultivation, and only in certain well-irrigated and market-connected areas did vegetable crops provide sufficient returns (Mansfield, 2007) to alleviate the loss of income from opium poppy.

In Balkh, though, the stronger evidence on the reasons for the cessation of production relate more to the ability of Governor Atta – in a manner reminiscent of the Taliban ban – to make it known that further cultivation would not be allowed and his being in a position to enforce this. His reasons and motivations for taking this position remain far from clear, but may not be unrelated to his repositioning himself as a political figure who could do business with donors and the fact that alternative sources of income were readily available to him. The fall in price of opium and the fact that the bulk of production was in better-irrigated areas where crop alternatives might have been available probably contributed to the effectiveness of the ban.

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<sup>11</sup> Defined as under 100.

In the case of Badakhshan, the reasons are more complex and variable according to location. Price was certainly a relevant factor, as were the pressures from counter-narcotic activities. However, in both provinces, evidence on 'good governance' as a contributory cause remains sparse, and governance in the market place works to a logic different from the one that assumes a free impersonal competition, a point returned to later.

While debate around the evidence on opium dynamics is highly political, it is also clear that political position has an effect on how evidence is constructed and used and what evidence carries weight and what is ignored. It is striking, for example, that the UNODC reports have singularly failed to acknowledge, let alone engage with, a body of evidence that is critical of some of its fundamental assumptions and positions. Indeed Barnett Rubin (2008), in a very public debate, took UNODC to task over its claims made in the 2007 Afghanistan Opium Survey about opium being associated with greed and linked to the insurgency, an engagement that forced a retraction by UNODC.

In summary, both case studies explored here illustrate well both the challenges in generating evidence and the engagement of evidence with policy.

## 6 Thematic areas

The paper now turns to examine more explicitly the core themes of interest in relation to what we know about livelihoods and conflict in Afghanistan and the links between aid and livelihood effects. The discussion focuses more on an assessment of what the evidence reveals and less on the methodological issues around generating evidence as discussed so far, although these considerations inform the discussion. It first looks at the evidence on how people have made their living before going on to explore the inter-linkages between state and society and the efforts of aid to build a social contract

### 6.1 People and their responses

What do we know about how households and individuals have constructed their lives and with what outcomes in Afghanistan over this past decade? For many, the prior two decades (1978–2001) were marked by experiences of war, destruction and migration but not a complete collapse of the rural economy, as noted in the 1993 UN Development Programme (UNDP) report in terms of its resilience. During the first half of the 1990s – within a context of deep insecurity until the Taliban imposed a regime of security from 1996 – there was considerable economic recovery until a major drought hit in 1997/98. This lasted until 2002/03 and had severe consequences, depleting the reserves of many households and driving further migration and diversification. It did not, however, lead to chronic food insecurity and grain markets did not fail. From 2002 onwards, years of good rains and the expansion of the opium economy brought a rural transformation, with an emerging economy driven by reconstruction resource flows that has supported the growth of cities. Since 2006, with the decline of opium, reoccurring droughts, high grain prices (in 2008) and rising insecurity spreading from the south, economic conditions for the poor in both rural and urban areas have declined.

Within this broader landscape of change, how have households fared, what outcomes have they achieved and through what means? The evidence that exists is diverse, ranging from a very limited body of longitudinal studies, more numerous context- (and un-contextualised) and time-specific case studies, to broader cross-sectional data (notably from the NRVA) which usefully complements the more case-specific material. This review starts with an examination of a body of evidence drawn from a longitudinal study to identify some key themes and issues, which are then used to drive an exploration of the wider evidence around these.

#### 6.1.1 Two livelihood trajectory studies

This section draws on two qualitative longitudinal studies of households – one urban and one rural – to discuss the empirical evidence from case study material. The first study (Beale and Schutte, 2006), conducted in 2006, was on urban livelihoods and tracked the lives of 40 households over a 12-month period in 3 contrasting cities: Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad. This was supplemented by shorter city case studies in Mazar-i-Sharif and Pul-i-Khumri. The rural livelihoods trajectory study (Kantor and Pain, 2011) differed in that it drew on an earlier dataset of rural households established in 2002/03 and revisited a subset (64) of these in 2009/10. Both studies employed male and female interview teams, meaning men and women of the study households could be interviewed separately. The urban study used regular monthly interviews mapping detailed changes, whereas the rural trajectory study focused on broad longer-term changes. In the case of the urban study households, the focus was on poor households, sampled to capture diversity in household types with respect to ethnicity, gender of head of household, long-term residents, returned refugees and internally displaced persons. For the rural study, the sampling framework was different, seeking to capture contrasts in wealth status and household fortunes, looking at both the elite and the poor – those who had prospered, remained as they were or suffered declines in the household economy over the seven- to eight-year period.

## Urban livelihoods

The cities of Afghanistan have grown significantly since 2001, with a high rate of urbanisation driven by returning refugees, conflict and a move out of rural areas because of declining economic opportunities. The urban population is now estimated to constitute 23–30 percent of the country's population. The rate of urbanisation, driven as much by push as well as pull factors, has challenged the limited capacities of municipalities to provide basic services to growing urban populations. In addition, and driven in part by a reconstruction boom and the recycling of opium profits from major drug traders, profiting cities have been characterised by significant land grabs by powerful people and escalating land prices (Esser, 2009; Pain, 2011).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, much of the economic growth of Afghanistan's cities seen since 2001 evidences more the political obstacles to growth (rent-seeking behaviour, appropriation of public resources – see Pain, 2011 and the later discussion of these issues for Mazar-i-Sharif) and the limited benefits that have accrued to the poor from this growth.

The effect of this, the 2006 study found, was that a majority of the sample households lived on the margins of cities in its informal and non-legal spaces. An estimated 60 percent of Kabul residents live in informal settlements compared with 30 percent in Mazar-i-Sharif and 25 percent in Herat (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2004), although these are likely to be minimum values. These households had limited access to basic services and social support, with adverse consequences for their ability to earn a sufficient income and achieve livelihood security. While access to education was also difficult – in part because of the need for children to work to contribute to the household income – health issues were more severe. This was the result of a combination of lack of availability of and access to health services and living in environmentally unsafe conditions – with polluted water and a lack of sanitation – imposing a direct cost on households in terms of health problems and time and money devoted to trying to secure clean water.

For most, the major source of income came from working in the informal sector in irregular and insecure conditions with a lack of protected rights and marked seasonal dimensions: people needed to create their own marginal economic opportunities in the informal economy, although the greater economic activity found in Herat, given its location in relation to trade with Iran, provided more opportunity for work. Only 5–6 percent of workers had regular employment, 20–60 percent were self-employed<sup>13</sup> (the greater value was from Jalalabad) and 32–38 percent worked as casual labourers,<sup>14</sup> with 20–36 percent in Kabul and Herat, respectively, working at home (but less than 1 percent in Jalalabad).<sup>15</sup> About 70 percent of workers were employed for less than 200 days per year, but those with access to regular employment had a substantially higher number of workdays. Table 11 shows the effect of the nature of employment and location on median individual annual incomes. Regular employment in Herat generated significantly higher income compared with the other two cities, whereas home-based and self-employed status was associated with correspondingly low income. Casual and self-employed workers in Herat – which included a high percentage of women (43 percent) – worked more labour days per year, reflecting the lower average wage rate.

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<sup>12</sup> The example of Sherpur in central Kabul is widely cited (Schutte and Bauer, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Petty trade, manual cart pulling, trading recyclable materials, selling phone top-up cards, rickshaw driving, etc.

<sup>14</sup> Unskilled labour, goods loading, brick making, car washing, etc.

<sup>15</sup> Washing clothes, weaving carpets, tailoring, embroidery work, spinning wool, cleaning houses, etc.

**Table 11: Estimated median annual earnings of urban labour from sample households**

	Kabul		Herat		Jalalabad	
Nature of employment	Afs	\$	Afs	\$	Afs	\$
Home-based	8,902	182	2,547	52	3,755	77
Self-employed	18,740	382	14,305	292	25,475	520
Casual	18,113	370	24,011	490	26,075	532
Regular	31,578	644	77,810	1,588	34,098	696

Source: Beale and Schutte (2006)

The annual earnings shown are those of individuals and not households. Few individual workers earned a living wage to support a household (on average seven members) and, as a result, women and children also had to seek an income. Access to male labour was the crucial determinant of per capita income levels of households rather than whether the head of household was female or male. Many were self-employed, with home-based work by women particularly significant in Herat and Kabul, but not in Jalalabad. Erratic income hindered savings and the ability to plan, and most had to borrow through informal sources in order to smooth consumption, with income often not meeting basic food consumption needs. The majority of households were constantly in debt.

Most households had strong social networks from which they borrowed, effectively providing their only source of social protection. But these horizontal networks based on reciprocity have their limits in a context of shared poverty (see also Kantor and Pain, 2010a on the limits of reciprocal relations in the rural economy) as to the extent they can provide an effective safety net. Further, in some contexts where there was a majority of one ethnic group (e.g. of Ismailis in Puli-Khumri or Uzbek in Mazar-i-Sharif) with small pockets of other ethnic groups (e.g. Hazara), the minority ethnic groups may be excluded from the social networks of the major ethnic group. Variability in the economic fortunes of different households could be largely accounted for by differences in household structure and composition and in particular the availability of male labour. In sum, what characterised the lives of poor urban households was the multitude of livelihood-related risks to which they were exposed. These were associated with insecurity of land and housing tenure, lack of service provision, erratic and saturated urban labour markets and the seasonality of employment, making households particularly vulnerable to lack of income during the winter period.

Key conclusions from the 2006 study pointed to the absence of pro-poor land policies, the failure to create jobs and quality employment, the lack of effective social protection and the failure to ensure availability of affordable health and education services. The NSP is entirely rural focused, which, the study argues, reflects an overall rural bias in development assistance and a relative neglect of urban poverty, although the data on aid flows do not allow for analysis to substantiate this. The study also notes major limitations in the capacity of city administrations. However, it does not address – nor was it designed to do so – any analysis of the growth of the city economies, how and why they might differ and the implications of this for the urban poor.

### Rural livelihood trajectories

In 2002–4, AREU, in conjunction with seven INGOs, implemented a short-term longitudinal study of 390 rural households in 21 villages in 7 districts in 7 contrasting provinces over an 18-month period. Its aim was primarily to build an evidence-based understanding of how rural livelihoods were constructed. The findings pointed to the significance of livelihood diversification, the critical role of nonfarm labour for the poor, the centrality of labour migration, the presence of widespread debt and high levels of household expenditure on health (Grace and Pain, 2004). Further, it pointed to a significant and undervalued but variable role of women in agriculture (see also Grace, 2004).

In 2009, a selection of field sites (four provinces – Badakhshan, Sar-i-Pul, Faryab and Kandahar) and a sub-sample of households (64) were revisited to build an understanding of the changes in the lives of



the case study households and the factors that had driven these.<sup>16</sup> The study drew attention to both the contrasting provincial and village contexts and the relevance of these to understanding the constraints and opportunities that these households had faced. While Badakhshan has remained relatively secure, both Sar-i-Pul and Faryab had become increasingly insecure during the period of study as the insurgency spread to northern Afghanistan (Guistozzi and Reuter, 2011). In Kandahar, insecurity is a daily feature of life.

First, the evidence showed that many households had gained improved access to basic services since 2002 but this was highly variable between provinces and between villages within provinces (Kantor and Pain, 2011). In Kandahar – characterised by both high levels of insecurity and strongly hierarchical and unequal social relations and social norms that restrict access of women to the public sphere and girls to education – access to schooling was limited to sons of wealthier households and women did not go to school. In Kandahar city, health facilities were available and households had access to safe drinking water through communal or private bore wells. By contrast, in Badakhshan – with more equitable social structures and a longer history of education – one of the three villages had a long history of schooling and all boys and girls went to school; in a second village, there was poorer access to school for girls because of geographical distance (see also Burde and Linden, 2009); in a third village, access to education was relatively recent. Health facilities were more available but variable in distance from the villages. The Sar-i-Pul patterns of access to basic services reflected those of Badakhshan, but overall access had improved.

While access to basic services had improved in most villages (but not in the remoter villages in Sari-i-Pul and Badakhshan), the key conclusion was that, for a majority of the households, economic security had declined significantly, particularly those in Sari-i-Pul and Badakhshan. For most, there had been a relative period of prosperity associated with the opium economy, but its enforced closure in Badakhshan and Sar-i-Pul and a series of dry years had led to a decline in the rural economy. Of the 64 households, 13 had experienced some improvements in livelihood security, 10 of these being in the Kandahar villages. Forty-five of the households (70 percent) were worse off than in 2002, with just six maintaining their economic status.

What can be learnt from the case of those households that have prospered? First, in only one case had rising prosperity come through agriculture (a Badakhshani household), and the basis for this was the rise of the opium economy combined with available household labour. Two other Badakhshani households had also prospered, having managed to leverage education into formal employment with an NGO. In Kandahar, an area well-endowed for agriculture, improvement in household economic circumstances had come through the urban and not the rural economy. For the minority of land-rich households, inherited wealth and strong informal social connections had been the route into a triple diversification – employment with key power holders, access to construction contracts and overseas trade. For those without land, the vibrant but turbulent Kandahar urban economy provided opportunities on the margins for them, and this was helped if the household was labour rich.

For the static and declining households, household-specific events (e.g. health events) and resource constraints in relation to land or labour (or both) in a context of a declining rural economy and off-farm employment opportunities had led to a number of responses, including able-bodied labour migration to Pakistan and Iran (both seasonally and longer term), enrolment in the Afghan National Police or Army and/or diversification into low-return and unreliable off- or nonfarm activities. Where ill health or lack of labour precluded such a response, informal credit, debt and reduced food consumption were the result.

In summary, where agricultural conditions were best, the greatest opportunities for the poor had come through the urban and not the rural economy. In more agriculturally marginal areas that lacked a growing urban economy and had a weak or declining rural economy, being tied to the land has been a cause of impoverishment rather than a possibility for improvement. The one market opportunity there has been in agriculture – opium poppy cultivation – to which many responded has been closed off – the lessons that can be drawn from this are returned to later. The rural nonfarm economy into which many

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<sup>16</sup> A fifth study province, Herat, had been planned but insecurity in the study villages meant that the research could not be implemented; in Faryab, as insecurity developed, household-level studies could not be undertaken. Both indicate the effect of insecurity on doing research.

have been forced to diversity has, for most, provided at best a means of survival – no more. The lessons from this study point not only to the significance of location in relation to access to basic services but also to the role of urban economies, migration and employment as key dimensions of understanding how households have responded to changing circumstances over this past decade.

But it is the means by which households have or not have prospered and the crucial role that informal social relationships have played in this that present one of the critical insights that come from this study. Social relationships vary in their terms, qualities and outcomes for those who are party to them, and their form and availability is strongly determined by context. Table 12, drawing on Kantor and Pain (2010a), summarises their key properties. Reciprocal social relationships between equals where the economy is strong, with an opium-driven rural economy, can provide a robust means of mutual support, as in urban Kandahar in the past (see Klijn and Pain, 2007; Pain, 2010b). But the availability of and access to this support are strongly dependent on the health of the economy. More commonly, social relationships have some hierarchical dimension to them, either as a form of charity or as adverse incorporation, whereby autonomy of the dependent party is subject to survival in the present (Wood, 2004). The poorest are the destitute who are excluded from all sorts of social relationship. Charity and adverse incorporation are characteristics of the poorer households (and cases of these were found). But a broader range of households exist in some form of patronage relationship, whether it is between poorer and richer households within a village or between the village elite and the district or provincial elite. Village elites with connections of kinship or identity can draw on powerful external connections to prosper (privileged inclusion), and those who are associated with them can also benefit (secondary inclusion).

**Table 12: Social relationships and their characteristics**

<b>Social relationships</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Reciprocal</b>	Networks among peers providing access to informal credit, for example
<b>Hierarchical</b>	
<i>Charitable</i>	<i>Islamic norm and entitlement but unreliable</i>
<i>Patronage</i>	<i>Essential for access to wider resources and invested in by clients</i>
<i>Adverse incorporation</i>	<i>Households living in landlords' housing, working as servants or entirely dependent on informal credit from landlord</i>
<b>Elite inclusion</b>	
<i>Privileged</i>	<i>Elite with strong external connections and income sources</i>
<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Allies of the elite</i>
<b>Exclusion</b>	Potentially those in hierarchical relations, particularly adverse incorporation

The evidence from the study points to how context can influence the availability of these different forms of social relationship (Pain and Kantor, 2010). Where villages are resource poor and land inequalities are low, then it is more likely (but not necessarily so) that social relationships of a more equal basis will be established, even if the level of support that can be provided is low given the overall health of the village economy. This may be sufficient to ensure a degree of food security even if it is not a route to prosperity. Conversely, in areas of resource richness and large social inequalities, more hierarchical social relationships might be expected (but not necessarily so). But it is possible, as in the Kandahar villages where there is a more robust regional economy, that some households can evade being trapped in negative hierarchical relationships and can draw on the strength of reciprocal ones to maintain their independence and even prosper. This evidence on the strength and critical role of informal social relationships is central to understanding the way villages work – this is returned to later.



### 6.1.2 Migration

Much of the literature on Afghan migration since 2001 has tended to emphasise transnational migration as an outcome of being a refugee and, at both the regional and international level, there has been a tendency to focus on the issue of repatriation and treating migrant populations as a problem to be dealt with (Monsutti, 2006; Turton and Marsden, 2002). Rather less literature is available on the dynamics and experience of migration, both internally and internationally. The core body of research addressing transnational networks comes from a three country study by AREU (Monsutti, 2006) and a study on the experiences of returning home (Saito, 2009). Scattered throughout the livelihood literature is a persistent comment and identification of the critical role that migration and remittances plays in rural livelihoods but estimates of its economic importance and its scale (see Table 3) do not exist. We summarise here some of the key features of migration within the context of rural and urban livelihoods.

Migration has been central to the tactics of living in Afghanistan, with both national and international dimensions. Seasonal migration has deep roots within certain provinces, such as grain-deficit Badakhshan, where there has been a long history of seasonal migration to the grain-surplus provinces of Takhar and Kunduz. Other more mountainous areas, such as in eastern Afghanistan and the central Hindu Kush (Bamiyan), have long experienced out-migration for work. The constraints of resource-poor areas are compounded by rising rural populations and shrinking farm sizes (Stitger and Monsutti, 2005), leading to population levels per unit of cultivable land that have been cited for parts of Hazarajat as in 'excess of Bangladeshi rural population densities'. Since the 1960s, outward transnational migration to the region (Pakistan and Iran) has become a central part of many households' livelihood practices, particularly those from the remoter more mountainous provinces. Limited employment opportunities in both rural and urban Afghanistan have led to the establishment of significant Afghan populations in the cities of Afghanistan's neighbouring countries. The opium poppy economy has been the one opportunity in the rural economy that has provided any significant reversal of the long-term decline in rural employment possibilities and reduced pressure for outward migration (Mansfield and Pain, 2008). The urban reconstruction economy, fuelled in particular by military expenditure and drug profits, has, since 2001, been a significant contributor to urban employment possibilities (see Pain, 2010b on Kandahar) and one that has drawn rural migrants (Opel, 2005). However, it is one which is likely to be affected significantly by the military withdrawal after 2014.

Overlying these long-term drivers of migration have been the effects of war, conflict and drought. The conflict during the Soviet period created a large refugee population, estimated at minimum of about 2.5 million in Iran and Pakistan (Turton and Marsden, 2002), adding to an already significant expatriate population of Afghans. An estimated 2.25 million had returned from Pakistan by 2005 (Stitger and Monsutti, 2005, quoting UN figures) and a further 0.75 million from Iran. Drought during the late 1990s led to large-scale internal displacement as well as migration out of the country; continuing conflict within Afghanistan since 2001 has contributed to this. As Monsutti (2006) emphasises, transnational migration has become a way of life for many Afghans as much as a response to the specific effects of conflict and drought, and has become embedded in the normal life experience.

The contribution of remittance incomes to the economy of many households in rural Afghanistan can be significant but is subject to enormous variation, depending on migrant circumstances, geography, ethnic identity, social class and household-specific factors (Monsutti, 2006). For some, it can contribute to the rising prosperity of the household and provide the means for marriage and a widening of social networks. For many, it is more of a coping strategy which provides at best a means of survival for the household left behind. What the literature makes clear (Kantor and Pain, 2011; Monsutti, 2006) is that, for many, migration is a risky process carried out almost exclusively by younger men and mostly as a covert action because of the difficulties and costs of doing it officially. Informal migration can be costly and debt creating because of predatory action by smugglers and the need to pay bribes to host country border officials, and at times it can prove dangerous and life threatening, with the 'least worst' outcome being forced repatriation. Even if the migrant makes it to their destination, the risks of working in the host country's informal labour economy are considerable even if resident Afghan communities can provide a means of support.

From a policy perspective, several issues are relevant to this paper. First, as widely documented (e.g. Monsutti, 2006; Saito, 2009; Shaw, 2010), the effects of the migration and refugee experience often change people's expectations and aspirations with respect to the provision of public goods, such as

access to education. Second, informal networks play a key role in both supporting the migration process itself and lubricating the transfer of remittances through the hawala system. This is a crucial and informal conduit of money in Afghanistan's rural economy that has inevitably been seen more for its role in transferring the proceeds of the drug economy than for the lifeline it has provided to many parts of rural Afghanistan in supporting the inflow of remittance income. The third relates to migration policy and the tendency to see the widespread movement of Afghans primarily as a problem of conflict refugees and/or – particularly in Western migrant-receiving countries – in simplistic terms as 'economic migration'. The available but limited evidence points to multiple and complex causes of migration and the central role of migration networks in the livelihood systems of many Afghan households. The continuing scale of Afghan migration and the level of distress migration that is taking place (Kantor and Pain, 2011) are symptomatic of the limited progress that has been made since 2001 in building livelihood security in rural Afghanistan.

## **6.2 Evidence on the provision of and access to basic services**

Both of the urban and rural longitudinal studies of livelihoods discussed above – although different in terms of time span, sample and method – point to a set of critical issues with respect to changing access to basic services. Complementing this, the NRVA provides a national-level understanding of changing provision of these services; these are now discussed.

### **6.2.1 Health provision**

Afghanistan in 2001 was widely described as having some of the worst health indicators in the world. In 2001, the infant mortality rate was estimated at 165 per 1,000 live births, the under-five mortality rate at 257 per 1,000 live births and the maternal mortality ratio as high as 6,507 per 100,000 births in some parts of the country (Belay et al., 2010). A public health service scarcely functioned and an estimated 80 percent of health services were provided through NGOs (ibid.). The position, as seen from a health management perspective, was that:

'[...] there was little coordination of activities, there was no standard package of services, and the government had very little influence over the activities of NGOs. Health facilities were situated primarily in accessible urban or more secure rural areas, leaving parts of the population unserved. In addition NGO activities focused on individual facilities rather than clearly defined populations or geographic areas resulting in an irrational distribution of services, with a patchwork of NGO clinics with obvious duplication and inefficiencies. There was a lack of services in remote rural areas and no accountability of NGOs for tangible results' (Belay et al., 2010).

With support from donors, MOPH has concentrated on an essential package of hospital services and the BPHS to be delivered through a core service in primary care facilities, designed to support a redistribution of services to ensure equitable access across the country. The BPHS, which is what we focused on here, has prioritised the health of women and children, who were seen to be the most vulnerable groups and the principle health problems of the population. The model of service delivery was a public-private partnership, largely through partnering with NGOs for the delivery. By 2008/09, NGOs were delivering the BPHS in 31 (of 34) provinces, with USAID funding 13 provinces, the World Bank 11 and the EC 10. Three of the World Bank provinces have followed a slightly different model, with direct but supported MOPH delivery. The modalities of funding of these three core donors are different, a point noted in the discussion on aid modalities.

Three issues fundamental to the long-term development of basic health service provision are noted here. The first is financial, given the dependence on external funding and its dynamics and major problems of fund disbursement by MOPH. The second is the lack of qualified health workers, linked to major geographical imbalances, with rural areas chronically underserved by qualified workers and lacking female staff and staff with public health, reproductive health and child health skills (Belay et al., 2010). The third is that of health delivery in insecure areas. In Helmand between 2006 and 2008, 12 of the 440 health workers were killed, and the number of functioning facilities fell from 42 in 2004 to 26 in 2006, with obvious effects on health service utilisation (ibid.). Sar-i-Pul and Helmand started at the same level of utilisation of health facilities and have had the same NGO delivering the service in both. Improvements have been much more rapid in the former (more secure) province than in the latter. Insecurity makes it particularly difficult to retain female health workers, who are critical to maternal health services in insecure areas. Belay et al. (2010) note that different modalities of health delivery

are being trialled in such locations and include conditional cash transfer schemes that pay patients for well-child visits and birth delivery in a health facility.

Three basic sorts of data or analysis exist with respect to the evidence on health care provision and its effects. First are data generated from the health planning and delivery assessment exemplified by the use of a health sector BSC (Johns Hopkins and IIMHR, 2010), linked to MOPH's own monitoring and evaluation activities. This links with a baseline survey carried out in 2004 (Peters et al., 2007) as part of the 2004 National Health Services Performance Assessment (NHSPA). It was carried out at a time when there was no usable household sampling frame and was implemented nationally in all (then) 33 provinces, with 25 BPHS health facilities selected randomly for inclusion: one village was randomly selected within 1.5 hours' walking distance of each BPHS facility and a survey instrument on health seeking and health expenditures (a closed-ended questionnaire) was administered to 20 randomly selected households. A subsequent analysis of health seeking behaviour using data from this survey (Steinhardt et al., 2009) noted, among other things, the survey's lack of statistical representation of the Afghan population and the bias of sampling to households within 1.5 hours' walk of the BPHS. It was suggested that use of health services would be low for remoter populations and that their out-of-pocket costs would be greater. A later survey by MOPH (2006) that investigated health indicators and household health expenditures confined the survey to rural areas. The exclusion of urban areas is likely to have resulted in an overall underestimation of the availability and use of private sector health services and of people's out-of-pocket health expenditure.

There are also the national NRVA surveys, which have included various objective assessments of health which allow comparison of, for example, immunisation rates over time or (as in the 2007/08 NRVA) disaggregation by poor/non-poor of various health indicators. The methods and data generated through these assessments are robust but are simply measures of progress or outcomes; they do not necessarily provide direct insights into the underlying causes of differentiated access to health care services.

The second subject area on which there is a literature centres on policy issues related to modalities of health care provision – in particular around public–private provision, management practices, financing and policy priorities (Belay et al., 2010). Cutting across both of these subject areas is an academic literature that addresses particular health areas, in particular gender issues, mental health and disability. The third source of evidence, as already discussed, is to be found in studies on household livelihoods that point in particular to the significance of health events as major shocks for poorer households and highlight the costs of meeting health needs and consequences in terms of debt, and the trade-offs made between health and other household expenditures (Grace and Pain, 2004).

There is no doubt that the various indicators show increasing delivery of health services and improvement on specific health outcomes. A 2008 survey of the quality of service performance across six areas or domains<sup>17</sup> at primary care facilities supported by the BPHS using a BSC as a performance measure reported improvements, but identified problems with the development of infrastructure (Johns Hopkins and IIMHR, 2008). It also found that progress had been variable across the provinces, with Kabul performing particularly poorly and data from four southern provinces (Zabul, Uruzgan, Kandahar and Helmand) unrecorded. An independent commentary on the health system which revisited an assessment made in 2002 (Waldman et al., 2006) was also cautiously optimistic about progress but noted that health service delivery was starting from a very low baseline in 2001, with a lack of managerial capacity and physical infrastructure, poor distribution of financial and human resources and uncoordinated and undirected efforts of NGOs delivering health services. It also commented that the assessment (as with the BSC survey) was based simply on input and process indicators and said little of the effects on health status outcomes.

A nationwide MOPH survey in late 2006 provided some complementary evidence on improving health outcomes. It reported that infant mortality rates had fallen by 22 percent from 165 per 1,000 live births in 2001 to 129 and under-five mortality rates by 26 percent from 123 per 1,000 live births to 91. This

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<sup>17</sup> These areas included patients and community, staff, capacity for service provision, service provision, financial systems and overall MOPH vision.

corresponded with an increase in antenatal care coverage from 5 percent in 2003 to 32 percent in 2006 and an increase in inoculations coverage for diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus from less than 20 percent to 35 percent over the same period. Through comparison of objective measures, the 2007/08 NRVA was also able to show improvements in vaccination rates for children aged 13–24 months (Ministry of Economy and World Bank, 2010). An assessment by the World Health Organization (WHO), drawing in part on NRVA data, detected improvements in assistance by skilled birth attendants, but noted that travel distance to a health facility remained a major barrier to seeking medical health (WHO, 2006). Further, if ranking by wealth status, the richest quintile had 38 percent of births with attendance whereas the poorest quintile had only 7 percent. The 2007/08 NRVA also pointed to wealth differences as being key correlates of accessing health care, with lower coverage for poorer households as compared with richer households across a number of measures, including access to antenatal care and skilled birth attendance. However, as all these sources observe, while some of the trends are encouraging, as in for example declining infant and under-five mortality rates, Afghanistan still performs very poorly in comparison with other low-income countries (Belay et al., 2010).

Much of the debate on the delivery of health service provision has focused on the management side, encompassing the role and modalities of contracting partners (including the role of for-profit actors in health service provision), financing the health service and so forth (Belay et al., 2010; Waldman et al., 2006). But there is also a critical literature on the effects of location and wealth status in accessing health services, reflecting concerns over inequities in illness and health seeking practices.

Geographic location and remoteness is one consideration, and a factor that cannot be addressed using the NHSPA survey. The MOPH 2006 survey found strong evidence of distance affecting care seeking for reproductive health. A 25 percent drop in the utilisation of skilled birth attendants by women was found for those living more than six hours from a health facility in contrast with those living within two hours. A 2002 study (in Bartlett et al., 2005) found that in Ragh, a remote district in Badakhshan, there was 1 maternal death for every 15 childbirths (corresponding to a 1 in 3 chance of dying of maternal causes given a fertility rate of 6) and more than 14 times the maternal mortality ratio of Kabul.

Analysis of the 2004 data from the NHSPA survey by Steinhart et al. (2009) deepens the understanding of the effect of wealth status on health seeking practices. Households from the wealthiest quintile within the catchment area of health facilities are twice as likely to seek care as people from the poorest quintile. Across a range of indicators (immunisation rates of children, reproductive health services) there is a consistent gap between richer and poorer households. The out-of-pocket costs associated with seeking health care are part of the explanation: both the NHSPA survey and the MOPH 2006 survey point to significant out-of-pocket payments. The MOPH survey found that the median per capita out-of-pocket expenditure was \$14 a year and annual per capita was \$36, with 40 percent spent on drugs and supplies and 19 percent on transport. In comparison, estimated annual public spending on health in 2006/07 was \$9.45 per capita, so private out-of-pocket expenditure in the survey was found to represent 72–9 percent of total expenditures on health (Belay et al., 2010).

The absence of any form of health insurance inevitably means a health event can have significant implications for households, a finding that is backed up amply by various livelihood studies (Grace and Pain, 2004; Kantor and Pain, 2011). The use of informal credit to meet health expenditure is widespread (Klijn and Pain, 2006). In summary, the need for social insurance to meet the costs of health events remains a primary area of social protection that has yet to be addressed.

### **6.2.2 Education provision**

While access to health has its debates – as exemplified by questions over female patients being seen by male health workers – the basic issues have proved far less contested than those around education provision. The history of education provision by the state has historically been controversial in two respects (Guistozzi, 2010). First, there have been long-running tensions between, on the one hand, fluctuating attempts by the state to provide secular education and, on the other, the socially embedded religious education provided through the madrasas (religious schools) – reflecting a continuing contest over the position of Islam in Afghanistan. Second, there has been conflict between the government seeking to use education as part of a nation-building exercise and local communities that have valued education more for instilling moral and cultural values, leading to dispute over the content of educational curricula and the language of instruction. Thus, attacks on and the destruction of schools,

now witnessed increasingly in insecure provinces, are not a new phenomenon – they were also a feature of the mujahidin response to the Communist government after 1978. As Guistozi observes, the presence of schools reflects the direct presence of the state, and where the state is contested they are likely to be a target.

Cultural attitudes towards the purpose and value of education are highly variable. Prior to 1978, there were distinct regional differences in enrolment rates of boys and girls, and between urban and rural children in primary school. By 1978 (Guistozi, 2010, citing statistics obtained from the Directorate of Statistics of the Ministry of Education), in Badakhshan in the northeast and Faryab in the north, the respective enrolment rates for boys were 76 percent and 73 percent and for girls 13 percent and 23 percent. In contrast, in the southern region provinces (Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul and Uruzgan), less than 50 percent of boys and less than 8 percent of girls were in primary school. Overall enrolment rates were at least double in urban areas than in rural areas, partly reflecting the much higher provision of schooling in urban areas. Even within provinces, there were considerable differences between villages: for example, some villages started schools in the 1950s whereas neighbouring villages effectively lacked access to education until several decades later (Pain, 2010a). For many, the refugee experience contributed to a change in attitude towards education and its value, not least for economic reasons. The decline of the education system under the Taliban and its strictures against the education of girls in urban schools further contributed to a pent-up demand for education (Guistozi, 2010).

In 2002, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) promoted a back to school campaign which led to the enrolment of more than 4.3 million children in Grades 1–12. Between 2001 and 2009, primary enrolment increased from 0.9 million (only just under the 1980 enrolment level of 1.12 million: Guistozi, 2010) to nearly 7 million, and the proportion of girls increased from almost nothing to 37 percent. The number of teachers has increased significantly, but there are still major issues over qualifications, and only 31 percent of teachers are women. There has also been a major school reconstruction programme, with over 5,000 school buildings being rehabilitated or constructed, although still only 50 percent of schools have usable buildings (Sigsgaard, 2011). No statistics have been found assessing the contribution of non-ODA assistance, for example military-sourced expenditure, either through or independent of the PRTs, to this programme, which is likely to be significant, particularly in the southern provinces.

Education provision is provided through three types of institution (Burde and Linden, 2009). The first is the public school system, run by the government and designed to serve multiple villages and serve 95 percent of students. The second are the madrasas, formal religious schools run locally by religious authorities which provide a religious-based education – an estimated 2 percent of students are enrolled in these, although this is likely to be a considerable underestimate. Many of these (but not all) are supported by the formal education system. The third are community-/village-based schools designed to serve individual villages, which account for about 3 percent of students. These have been supported in particular by USAID and implemented through four NGOs in the more remote areas or within marginalised communities.

As with health, there is a range of sources of evidence on education provision, access and outcomes in Afghanistan. Inevitably, a great deal of this data is concerned with supply-side considerations, not least because of the time lag between education investment, student enrolment and educational outcomes. Accordingly, much of the data is process rather than outcome oriented, although there appears to be no educational equivalent to the health system of a basic score card to monitor service delivery. There are monitoring data to be derived from the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2010) which provide the basic statistics on enrolment rates, educational infrastructure provision and teacher training. Some of the published literature focuses more on educational content and curriculum development (Georgescu, 2007) and teacher training modalities. There is a rather limited body of evidence concerned with the demand side of education (Guimbert et al., 2008; Hunte, 2006). There is also increasing concern over the significance of conflict and insecurity for education, with schools and school teachers being a particular target for the insurgency. The effect of conflict on education is the subject of the recent Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2011). As noted above, the lack of data on inputs and impacts of military-related spending that relates to education makes any assessment on the links between insurgency and attacks on schools provided by military funding not possible.



Despite encouraging statistics on the increasing enrolment of students and the school building programme, the links between poverty, lack of education and lack of access to it persist. Evidence from the 2007/08 NRVA supports the general position on the correlation between poverty and lack of education; it found that the poverty rate (the percentage of households below the poverty line) for households where the head does not have education is at 35 percent, whereas those with a literate head have a poverty rate of 27 percent. Further, it is clear that basic education coverage remains low overall, with a net primary enrolment rate for 6–9 year olds at primary school of 37 percent. Although this has increased significantly from 25 percent enrolment since 2005, a large gender disparity still exists, with girls' enrolment 12 percent lower than that of boys. There is, however, an issue of over-age enrolment, and consequently enrolment rates are highest – 62 percent – for 11 year olds (Ministry of Economy and World Bank, 2010).

The NRVA data reveal little difference overall in enrolment rates between poor and non-poor households. However, the data need to be disaggregated by location: although 83 percent of schools are in rural areas, they enrol only 65 percent of all students, whereas the 17 percent of urban schools contain 35 percent of students. Enrolment rates in urban areas are significantly higher than those in rural areas (52 percent and 35 percent, respectively). The data also reveal disparities between enrolment rates of children from poor and non-poor households in urban areas that do not exist in rural areas.<sup>18</sup> In urban areas, 55 percent of the non-poor enrol but only 46 percent of the poor, supporting the evidence from livelihood trajectory studies on a significant lack of access by the urban poor to basic services including education (Beale and Schutte, 2006). Whether or not there are higher rates of child labour in urban areas owing to household economic insecurity is not known.

As Guistozi (2010) argues, many of the old tensions around the role and content of education with respect to its religious nature remain. Strong conservative opposition to state education and the enrolment of girls, particularly in the south and southeast, have persisted and, even in 2002, insurgency groups were campaigning against schools, protesting in particular over secular education. Yet many communities continued to support the presence of schools, and the Ministry of Education in 2007 claimed that school defence shuras had spread to nearly half of the country's 9,000 schools (Guistozi, 2010). Nevertheless, attacks on schools by insurgents have persisted (in 2007 there were 236 violent incidents in school) and some 800 schools remain closed, predominantly in the southern insecure provinces. Guistozi argues that the lack of a clear and well-thought-through strategy towards educational content that could address conservative concerns reflects divisions of opinion, both between ministry officials and donors and within the ministry itself. He also suggests this has been compounded by major problems in educational delivery, particularly in terms of educational quality, teacher training, teacher absenteeism, teaching materials, facilities and supervision.

According to official figures, school enrolment dropped in 2005 to 4.3 million from 4.4 million in 2004, and since then has risen only slowly (Guistozi, 2010). There appears to have been a shift of enrolment back into the madrasas (which declined in significance after 2001), supported in part by a decision of the then Minister of Education to develop a state-controlled madrasa sector.

Much of the debate in education policymaking has been around the supply side with respect to school buildings, teachers and curricular context, with less attention to the demand issues and reasons for non-enrolment. Drawing on case study material from urban Kabul, Kandahar and rural Faryab, Hunte (2006) draws attention to some of the dynamics of household decision making – in terms of both who makes the decision and the reasons for sending children to school – which indicate a complexity of issues that makes it difficult to generalise about the demand for education. Relevant factors idiosyncratic to households are related to the balance of power between spouses, cultural context and refugee experiences. Economic costs, particularly among the poor – both the opportunity cost of sending a child to school and the direct costs of doing so – are also important factors in decision making. Local social norms can also be influential (Hunte, 2006) and, where the village clergy support education for girls, there can be 100 percent enrolment by girls in school (Pain, 2010a); conversely, very few girls may go to school where the attitudes of the village elite and clergy are conservative with

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<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Economy and World Bank (2010): 'The overall poverty line is the sum of the food poverty line and the non-food allowance. A household is defined as poor if the total value of per capita consumption is less than the poverty line.' By definition, the non-poor have per capita consumption above the poverty line.

respect to girls' education (Shaw, 2010), particularly if the school is not close by. Only 29 percent of Afghanistan's population lives within 5 km of a primary school (MRRD & CSO, 2009).

Burde and Linden (2009) report on a randomised evaluation based on a sample of 31 village with over 1,500 children between 6 and 11 in two districts in northwest Afghanistan, with 13 villages receiving community schools a year before the remaining villages were supported with similar schools. The 'untreated' villages in the second year were used as a control group against the villages receiving the schools in the first year. This provides broader evidence of the significance of distance with respect to school enrolment and performance: the presence of a community school in the village increased enrolment by 42 percent; moreover, enrolment of girls increased by 23 percent more than that of boys, indicating the gendered effects of this.

### 6.3 State, society, governance and aid

'In 2001, fearing ethnic strife, the international community pushed for a strong central government in Kabul. But such fears were based on a false reading of Afghan history and fostered a system of regional and ethnic patronage. If in 2001 the West was afraid that the absence of a strong centralized government in Kabul would prompt Afghanistan's dissolution, by 2011 the West has come to fear that a dysfunctional centralized government could cause this same outcome. Such a turn of events was caused by several factors, perhaps most of all by many Afghans' dissatisfaction with a centralized national administrative structure that cannot cope with the country's regional diversity or with expectations for local self-rule. The government in Kabul has been further undermined by the country's fraudulent 2009 presidential election, the absence of political parties, poor security, and general corruption' (Barfield, 2011).

This recent comment by Thomas Barfield strikes at the heart of any discussion about state–society interactions in Afghanistan, the securing of social protection and basic services, the role of aid in supporting this and the linkages between aid interventions and governance outcomes – core questions raised in the terms of reference for this paper. Barfield's assessment (which is difficult to disagree with) highlights the lack of legitimacy of the government in Kabul. The recent shift in donor support away from a direct focus on building a central government that appeared to be fuelling precisely the forms of ethnic-based patronage they had feared, towards investing in provincial structures and decentralisation, has been done in an attempt to bolster support for the central state. This reflects the problematic normative assumptions about state–society relations with which donors have worked, and their fear of the fission of Afghanistan into secessionist elements. As Barfield comments,

'Afghanistan has been a single state for 250 years. If the country was going to split it would have done so in the 1990s, during its protracted civil war. Yet it did not. No Afghan leader of any political stripe or ethnicity endorsed secession at any time during the last century' (Barfield, 2011).

Thus, the model of a central state to which the donor agenda has worked, with its assumptions of the creation of a discipline-based bureaucracy, has been confounded by a reality that is more relationship based and decentralised, reflecting in part the country's troubled and complex history of state–society relations. Whatever one might think about the means by which most of the regional power holders have gained their position – as warlords, drug dealers and brokers – the fact remains that many of them have come to achieve legitimacy for the regional social order they have created. This has included to varying degrees the provision of basic public goods, as in the case of Governor Atta in Mazar-i-Sharif and Governor Sherzai in Nangarhar (Mukhopadhyay, 2010). The fact that the central government fails to function effectively does not mean there is disorder at the regional or provincial level. There is also strong evidence of the capacity of villages to self-organise and govern their affairs and provide basic public goods, within the restraints of the resources to hand and the structure of the village social hierarchy.

In discussing levels of provision of social protection, it is necessary to be clear about how this is conceptualised. The need to secure social protection arises in relation to risks and the vulnerability of individuals and households to these. In addition to practices of risk management (reduction, mitigation and coping) identified by the World Bank in relation to economic risks (Holzmann and Jorgensen, 1999) as central to the survival of the poor, attention must also be paid to structural risks or hazards brought about by patterns of social inequality and political exclusion which can lead to the marginalisation of



specific social groups, including women, that are characteristic of the social order. It is clear that women in Afghanistan occupy a marginal position, but the degree is highly variable (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2010; Grace and Pain, 2011; Maletta, 2008). It is also clear there are widespread informal means of managing these risks (informal credit, migration) and, where village elites have a vested interest in the community, a village moral order can provide a basic entitlement to food security within the limits of the resources of the village (Pain and Kantor, 2010). But social protection is typically seen to relate to formal interventions provided by the state and other agencies to cushion the poor from these risks (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux, 2007). The transformative social protection agenda is seen to focus on both economic and social sources of risk. It does this through a graduated response, going from (1) basic protection (filling deficits in basic needs through targeted resource transfers), to (2) preventive measures to avert deprivation (income diversification and formal and informal social insurance), (3) promotive interventions to build income and capabilities (skills development, public work programmes) and (4) transformative interventions that address social inequalities.

The evidence points to an overall decline in livelihood security in Afghanistan over the past 10 years, with the need for basic protection on the rise if anything, fuelled in particular by poor harvests and rising food costs. While WFP is widely recognised as having played a key role in the effective provision of assistance to food-insecure households and communities (Saltmarshe and Medhi, 2011), the re-establishment of OCHA in Kabul in 2009 (Donini, 2010) to coordinate humanitarian assistance is a reflection of the rising humanitarian need in the country and the limits to basic social protection. It is also significant that, in none of the policy positions of any of the donors in relation to agriculture and rural development, has consideration been given to prioritising national-level food security through raising self-sufficiency as a first step and one that might contribute to building state legitimacy (Chang, 2009; Pain, 2009). Although this is a position taken by a number of key officials in the Ministry of Agriculture, donor positions have been focused more around market-driven development (Pain, 2009).

While efforts by donors to provide access to basic services, particularly with respect to health and education, have had detectable impacts, the evidence with respect to market-driven approaches to generate preventive and promotive social protection is limited. With the notable exception of gender, interventions to address social and structural inequalities have not been on the agenda; if anything – given the combined effects of military-linked contracts and the opium economy – levels of income inequality have increased markedly over the past decade (see Pain, 2010b for a specific discussion in the context of Kandahar), reinforcing power inequalities (Herold, 2010).

Agricultural and rural policy pushed by donors, along with the strong market-driven position of USAID (Pain, 2009), has advocated a strategy of encouraging mixed portfolios of farming and non-farming activities to increase household incomes and reduce poverty. The World Bank-funded AREDP pushes market-led agricultural growth as a means of increasing rural employment in the nonfarm economy and reduce poverty. Yet the evidence is not kind to assumptions that agriculturally based market-led growth and rural livelihood diversification will be the route to livelihood security for many. In areas closely connected to markets and well-endowed with natural resources, market-driven agriculture may be viable, although the distributional benefits of the growth outcomes remain unclear. But for the many households that are already in grain deficit, shrinking farm sizes, poor natural resources, market remoteness and drought risks make agriculture a poverty trap. The evidence from household trajectories (Kantor and Pain, 2011) points to greater relative prosperity for rural households being achieved through non-rural and urban routes rather than through farm and rural-based ones. Further, for the 44 percent of rural households that report agriculture as a primary income source, 54 percent cultivate for household consumption (Ministry of Economy and World Bank, 2010) and many are grain-deficit households (i.e. net purchasers of grain). To expect, as policy does, such households can place a greater emphasis on the market through the commercialisation of agriculture to meet household needs ignores the pervasive risks of markets, the power inequalities within them (Lister and Pain, 2004) and an aversion to market engagement (Christoplos, 2004; Flaming and Roe, 2009). Equally, strong evidence of existing high levels of diversification into nonfarm employment suggests this is distress diversification rather than diversification that has promoted prosperity (Kantor and Pain, 2011). The evidence on diversification and poverty rates is supported by results from the 2007/08 NRVA (Table 13) which points to limited returns on farm and nonfarm employment. In addition, as the health of the rural economy has declined in many areas, women's economic role may actually increase, even if gender norms limit their bargaining power with respect to income levels (ibid.).

**Table 13: Income diversification and poverty rates by main income source**

Main income source	Average no. of income sources	Household poverty rate (percent)
Subsistence farming	2.5	34.7
Market Farming	2.5	28.4
Agriculture wage labour	2.1	36.8
Nonfarm wage labour	2.0	38.3
Trade, craft, transport	2.1	28.7
Transfers	2.8	42.4
Other	2.0	
Total	2.3	35.8

Source: Ministry of Economy and World Bank (2010)

Microcredit, through MISFA, has emphasised the provision of credit for productive purposes in order to stimulate growth, but has been concentrated more on urban and peri-urban areas. Its movement into rural areas as a credit scheme has done little to address the wider need for savings and insurance products as a precondition for a wider movement into market engagement. Indeed, evidence from the use of microfinance in rural areas points to its significant use to meet consumption smoothing requirements rather than productive investment and to repayment being dependent on informal credit (Kantor, 2008). Thus, the development of financial instruments to support the development of social insurance has been limited and secondary to efforts to drive market-based engagement for the poor.

Although the need to address poverty and human security – consistent with a social protection agenda – was evident in the early years after 2001 (Saba and Zakhilwal, 2004), the relative attention given to poverty reduction and the gaining of livelihood security appears to have declined in significance. It received limited attention in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and almost disappeared after the London and Kabul conferences in 2010 (Kantor and Pain, 2010b). This seems to have been driven by donor alarm over increasing insecurity in the country and concerns over state legitimacy, resulting in an increasing focus on anti-corruption and political reconciliation supported by the promotion of growth and economic opportunities: concern to promote pro-poor growth appears to have all but disappeared. Linked to this, the symptoms of poverty (lack of income and assets) have increasingly come to be seen as its causes, rather than poverty being understood as having its roots in social and economic inequalities. This has biased poverty reduction approaches towards action by the poor to lift themselves out of poverty while ignoring the reasons they are poor in the first place.

The instrumental use of aid to further the objectives of building legitimacy for the state, but essentially supporting the creation of a rentier state, has become increasingly evident. Aid and its funding practices have become enmeshed in the mixture and overlap of military, security, state building and developmental objectives. The World Bank (2011b) points to the role of the NSP in helping building legitimacy for the state, citing evidence of improved perceptions of NSP beneficiaries for government officials, but Böhnke et al. (2010) point out in their assessment of the contribution of German aid that improved perceptions of government are not bankable, do not accrue interest and need to be continually reinforced over time to be maintained. With rising insecurity and levels of corruption, there is little evidence that this is happening.

The assessment of changes in perceptions by Helmand's population (building increasing support for the Afghan government and rejecting the Taliban) are at the heart of the monitoring of the UK government programme in the province, jointly implemented by DFID and the British-funded PRT in a programme driven primarily by political and military considerations. Commissioned in late 2009 (some three years after the UK government started on the Helmand programme), the underlying theory of change driving the Helmand plan is drawn straight from current counter-insurgency and stabilisation 'theory' thinking.

It argues that ‘enduring security and stability will only be possible in Helmand if the state is able to demonstrate an adequate level of responsiveness to the needs of its citizens, fundamental to establishing its legitimacy and thereby providing a more attractive alternative to either the insurgency or ongoing instability’ (Ahmar and Kolbe, 2011). While the funding modalities of the programme place it firmly outside the DAC criteria of ODA, the associated exercise in evidence building is noteworthy for the level of effort and sophistication of design that has gone into attempting to generate evidence to support the programme’s underlying theory of change. Not only has there been an attempt to build longitudinal data through the carrying out of repeat surveys, but also considerable effort has been used to explore the spatial dimensions of aid delivery, using geographical information survey methods and linking surveys to this. From an evidence-building perspective, the limitations of programme monitoring are consistent with issues across Afghanistan. As noted above, up until 2009, most of the evidence there was focused on inputs and (to some degree) outputs rather than outcomes and impacts (ibid.), and it was limited by basic data problems and the involvement of multiple actors and donors. On the other hand, the instrumental use of health and education initiatives to meet stabilisation rather than development goals, and for these and other interventions to be targeted for political reasons, are specific to the modalities of intervention in Helmand.

It is too early to assess whether the theory of change implicit in the Helmand model will generate the durable outcomes expected of it. The underlying theory and the hopes for a legitimate central state are not supported by Barfield’s analysis of state–society relations in Afghanistan, which points more to expectations of local rule and a deep distrust of a central state, deepened by the experience since 2001. A more specific analysis of the hypothesised link between aid and security building in Helmand between 2006 and 2008 (Gordon, 2011) – which predates the monitoring effort and a shift in strategy to provide a more coherent programme – points to differences of opinion between the British army and DFID with respect to the causal relationship between interventions and effects. The former argued for projects directly building consent over the short term whereas DFID staff emphasised a longer-term process of economic and political transition.

By definition, these different models would support the prioritisation of different indicators and evidence of change. The relatively high frequency of monitoring (quarterly reports) suggests short-term interventions intended to build consent directly have won out as the more dominant model in practice. Gordon’s analysis also suggests that, at the time of his assessment, the stabilisation model pursued by the UK was arguably focusing on the wrong drivers of conflict, assuming these to be lack of development and government presence rather than (in his analysis) poor governance and insecurity. Inevitably, the targeting of interventions for security purposes led to winners and losers, reflecting the particular power dynamics at play in the province and somewhat diminishing evidence of impartial delivery of public goods by the government. Gordon’s overall conclusion probably still holds good:

‘[...] perhaps the most striking conclusions relate to the complex way in which perceptions of “stability” and government legitimacy can be derailed when security and controls on “development” processes are insufficient. In such situations “aid” may have as many negative, unintended effects as positive ones and, at the very least, is not a panacea’ (Gordon, 2011).

## **6.4 The role of the private sector**

Unpacking the role of the private sector in service delivery and driving growth raises a number of important conceptual and analytical issues. As a description of many international actors operating in Afghanistan as consultants or contracting companies, the notion of a private sector holds good and the US aid model has worked mainly through large contracting companies. Many of the organisations working in, for example the NSP, MISFA or the delivery of health services are NGOs contracted to provide specific services and work with public or aid funding, and therefore are not working primarily to a profit model. But to talk of a private sector in Afghanistan in the sense of markets operating independently of and regulated by the state has little empirical substance. In the same way as the political arena operates subject to personal relations and uncompetitive behaviour, markets operate in precisely the same way in Afghanistan (Lister and Pain, 2004) and are a key source of economic rent to the political elite. The private sector in Afghanistan is primarily informal and subject to multiple forms of social regulation and exclusion at multiple levels by the political elite and powerful traders.

There are certainly those (e.g. Cusack and Malmstrom, 2011) who take a positive view of the potential for small-scale businesses to grow and can point to successes. But there is also a free market romanticism in current policy and across Afghanistan's reconstruction agenda which, while attentive to the failure of political processes to be competitive and impersonal, somehow assumes markets are different.<sup>19</sup> Thus, surveys of the investment climate externalise the political obstacles to economic growth rather than seeing them as intrinsic to how markets actually function (World Bank, 2009). A recent study (Lea et al., 2011), drawing on the 'binding constraints to growth' approach (Hausmann et al., 1995), probes more deeply. This approach parallels the 'good enough governance' arguments of Grindle (2011), in that it seeks to understand the key constraints to growth and focuses on identifying the factors constraining growth at any one particular time and place, rather than working to more generic models of market development. The study is specific to the northern region of Afghanistan and finds that lack of security is the key binding constraint; secondary issues include access to land and associated security of land tenure, the ability to retain profits through business and corruption.

An account of the growth of Mazar-e-Sharif's urban economy (Pain, 2011), a city which has visibly flourished under Governor Atta's rule and where the level of public good provision – roads, electricity and so forth – is relatively good compared with other parts of the country, indicates that the basic political preconditions for growth (Williams et al., 2011) are not in place. The evidence supports more the existence of some core political obstacles to growth given the fact that public position is used to personal advantage and private interests draw on political connections to further their interests. These obstacles to growth include lack of security of assets (or freedom of appropriation), rent-seeking behaviour in markets and patronage spending in relation to the distribution in public goods.

As discussed above, there have been high expectations that agriculture and Afghanistan's rural economy could be transformed to provide the growth and poverty reduction effects needed for development. While there have been debates on the relative balance between meeting food security needs versus a market-driven model of agricultural development (Pain, 2009), the emphasis has been given more to a market-based model, responding to demand both overseas and internally (Pain and Kantor, 2011b). Without question, growth in the rural economy is needed; without it, poverty and food insecurity will not be addressed. But as the evidence from the livelihood trajectory study shows (Kantor and Pain, 2011), not only has growth of the rural economy largely not taken place, but also markets remain a key source of risk for the poor.

The one example of dynamic rural growth that can be found is in the spread of opium poppy during the first five years after 2001. This generated positive effects on household poverty and food security, created employment and had multiplier effects in the rural economy given the rise in household incomes and the resulting demand for other goods and services. It is the example that makes the case for the possibility of an agriculturally driven rural transformation. To explain it simply in terms of illegality misses the point. The structure of the opium market can be seen to set the standard that has to be reached if there is to be a rural transformation that will durably reduce opium poppy cultivation. The core reason why opium poppy has been such a good smallholders' crop is because of the ways in which its market worked. The market, responding to strong international demand, was essentially a monopsony in which one buyer purchasing the product worked through a multitude of sub-agents and set the price for purchase.<sup>20</sup> Credit and input support was provided and farm-gate purchase assured. All these reduced the market risk to cultivators of the crop.

Monopsonies are not unique to opium poppy. Many of the outgrowers' schemes<sup>21</sup> for crops that require timely and appropriate processing – such as sugar, tobacco and tea, for example – have worked in precisely the same way. The market support given to producers under such conditions – guaranteed prices, technical information, input support and provision of other public goods, including education –

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<sup>19</sup> Barbara Harriss-White (1996) suggests the failure to recognise the theoretical limitation to the neo-classical notion of the market or the practical incapacity of actual existing markets to decently structure life reflects a deep romanticism about markets, including such aspects as fictitiousness and remoteness from experience.

<sup>20</sup> A monopsony occurs where there is essentially one buyer in a market that sets the price of purchase; in contrast, a monopoly, which is the more common characteristic, is when there is one seller of goods or services to a multitude of purchasers. Both monopsonies and monopolies are seen to restrict competition in the market place.

<sup>21</sup> Smallholder crop schemes for commercial crops that often require large-scale processing.

have often made these good commodities for smallholders to grow given the limitation on market risks associated with them.

Agricultural transformations in the recent past, as with the Green Revolution in Asia, point to the need for a synergy between rising productivity, rising demand and strong state support for rural commodity markets through subsidies on prices, credit and inputs to help reduce the risks around markets for smallholders and to thicken markets. All this should be based on a long history of prior investment in core public goods, including irrigation infrastructure, roads and electricity (Dorward et al., 2004). To the precondition of adequate investment in public goods can be added two further core groups of factors closely associated with growth, although these are not necessarily its causal conditions (Williams et al., 2011). The first is confidence in and security of property rights; the second relates to competitive, suitably regulated but internationally open markets operating under stable macroeconomic conditions.

Self-evidently, many of these basic preconditions do not exist in Afghanistan. There are severe limitations in the basic stock of public goods, although these have improved over the past decade; macroeconomic conditions have been far from stable; there is little sentiment within donor policy for subsidies on prices, credit or inputs; the deep level of poverty in rural areas is a major constraint to demand; and there is little evidence of growing urban demand. And, as discussed above, the extent to which security of property rights exists and markets are competitive is open to question.

## 7 Conclusions

'[...] the desire to bring democracy, freedom, "good governance" and an improvement in the status of women to Afghanistan were laudable goals in themselves, but the result has been a ghastly masquerade, involving descriptions of the present Afghan government and political system not one of which corresponds to reality. Meanwhile the equally laudable desire to bring development to Afghanistan has ensnared us in calculations of "progress" which are virtually Soviet in their misrepresentation of the facts and the experience of ordinary Afghans' (Lieven, 2010).

In many ways, the above judgment encapsulates many of the core conclusions of this paper. Yes, there have been improvements in access to basic services funded by aid money, and measurable progress has been made in access to basic health and education, although delivery has been uneven across the country. Meanwhile, although quality of health provision is improving measurably, albeit from a low level, major concerns over education quality persist and are poorly captured by the metrics of assessment. Programmes such as the NSP have brought a level of funding and provision of public goods to villages that they have never experienced, and benefits may have resulted in terms of both expectations and appreciation, although the durability of such perceptions may be in doubt. The plethora of other projects and programmes funding public good provision in roads and other infrastructure has undoubtedly improved access to public goods.

But the dividends and returns from nearly 10 years of aid to Afghanistan have been meagre for many Afghans. Many of the rural and urban poor are certainly no better off than before, and for many livelihood security is worse. The lack of employment and work in both the urban and rural labour markets is a testimony to this lack of progress.

Attempts to engineer a social transformation and to shift Afghanistan from its existing social order to one more reflective of Western norms have largely failed to take root and, if anything, have helped consolidate a rule of patronage and personalised relationships. A significant part of this failure can be attributed to conflict between irreconcilable goals and means in relation to fighting terrorism, addressing insurgency, responding to the opium economy and liberal state building, and the effects these have had in terms of muddling objectives and practices on the development agenda. But a goodly part of the mess can also be attributed to conflicting cultures, goals and practices between donors.

Why hasn't evidence spoken to policymaking practices to help deliver a more attuned and coherent intervention? In part, it appears from the evidence (Parkinson, 2010) that the processes and imperatives that drive policymaking are poorly attuned and have limited receptivity to evidence that challenges the simplified narratives of intervention. The evidence points to a complexity of context that formulaic programming does not address, problematic assumptions underlying policy and programmes and poor practices of implementation (see Pain and Kantor, 2011b with respect to the AREDP). In part, and as Lieven (2010) suggests, the vindicators of progress are self-serving and, while capturing the public text of what should or is expected to happen, miss what is actually happening. The drive in evolving programme practice to maximise impact and effectiveness through results-based monitoring and evaluation systems, with implicit theories of change often poorly grounded or tested against understanding and analysis, leads to assessments of outcomes that are more in the realm of fantasy and hope than based on reality. In part – and the arguments of Grindle (2010) support this – the limited time horizons of funding and programming lead to expectations of change that are simply unrealistic and mean the steps and sequencing of change that need to take place for outcomes to be achieved are not taken. Too much is expected over too short a time.

Within the specific scope of this paper, one clear lesson that emerges is that the state-centricity of the reconstruction programme and the focus on formal institutions have led to a profound neglect of informal processes and institutions which continue to hold Afghanistan together, support regional social orders and maintain village republics and the household. Not only is 'informality' seen to be a problem, but also it is poorly understood, particularly in the way it becomes deployed as 'formal' organisational structures are layered over it.

A second lesson is that, with respect to evidence building, an approach that disengages assessment of change from specific programme interventions might offer a more robust understanding of what is actually happening. The use of panel studies combining both quantitative and qualitative assessment, as practised in the medical field, for example, in long-term monitoring of HIV/AIDS and its impacts, would offer a great deal more than existing interventions in terms of learning about what is actually happening and what change can be attributed to. Such studies are clearly beyond the scope of most implementing agencies. But deepening the NRVA survey, for example, with a complementary panel study of households over time, would provide exactly the depth of understanding of household trajectories and their variability and the critical examination of drivers of change that is missing at present.

## 7.1 A future research agenda

What might this mean for a future research agenda in relation to the objectives of SLRC? The fundamental challenge that has to be addressed for Afghanistan lies in managing and supporting a process of change, as North et al. put it (2007), from a limited order where personalised relations determine access to one that is more open access and discipline or rule based. This means we have to understand much better the existing political and economic market place at multiple levels, and central to this understanding is addressing the behaviour of elites at these different levels and the norms and values that underlie this behaviour. The issue thus becomes the incentives that might drive changes in elite behaviour to widen access to both political and economic resources for the non-elite and bring more formality to the informal.

Three major interlinked research themes suggest themselves as key research needs in response to the arguments and conclusions of this paper:

- Building a better understanding of context and the ways programmatic interventions designed to build public good provision and livelihood support engage at village and district level with the existing political orders, and with what effects. Not only is there evidence of regional patterns of social order, but also there is indicative evidence of provincial and village patterning linked to the interrelated nature of the political settlement at provincial and district levels and elite behaviour at the village level. This would have both practical implications for programming as well as conceptual value in contributing to a multi-level analysis of context.
- Generating a greater understanding of the means by which regional strongmen come to build political authority, the circumstances and forces that drive the provision, level of and distribution of public goods and the incentives that can be provided by external actors to widen this provision. A core output of this research would be to identify how external actors can, under varying conditions of regional order, interact to influence the incentives for such order to deliver core public goods more effectively.
- Economic life: enabling a better understanding of how markets work in practice and how they are socially regulated. This is fundamental to exploring the nature of growth and its distributional outcomes. Case studies of markets, through sectoral contrasts, would offer insights into the role of social institutions in markets and how these link to the political order. These sectoral contrasts would cut across the urban/rural divide but could include studies of the labour and livestock markets as well as of those in relatively high value products such as dried fruits and nuts. This would provide a much better understanding of how economic life is structured and ordered both from an actor's perspective and from a sectoral or market chain analysis stance.



# Annex

## Annex 1: Terms of reference

### Evidence papers protocol

In our general and technical tender for the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) we raised concerns about the current state of literature on fragile states and on service delivery, social protection and livelihoods. We argued that the literature tended to provide generic overviews of issues (sometimes even literature reviews of other literature reviews) rather than more rigorous empirical and context-specific analysis. We identified four core weaknesses:

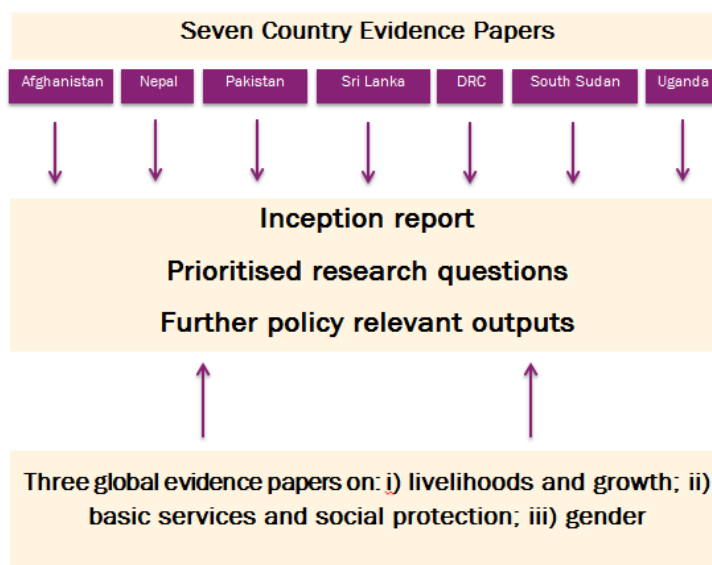
- A case study focus on small geographical pockets or individual sectors that led to a partial rather than comprehensive portrayal of people's own lives and livelihoods in fragile and conflict-affected situations;
- A lack of comparable studies due to the use of different methods, definitions and contexts;
- A focus on snapshots or stock-takes of livelihoods, social protection and service delivery and a lack of longitudinal analysis that enables our understanding, particularly at household and community level, to be dynamic instead of static; and
- Research that is isolated from rather than integrated into economic analyses of growth and development

The production of evidence papers during the inception phase of our RPC provides an opportunity to us to test the extent and depth of these weaknesses and to begin to tackle the weaknesses. In the inception phase of the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) we will be producing 10 evidence papers (Figure 2):

- 1 Global synthesis of what we know about growth and livelihoods in fragile and conflict-affected situations
- 2 Global synthesis of what we know about basic services and social protection in fragile and conflict-affected situations
- 3 Synthesis of what we know about growth, livelihoods, basic services and social protection in Nepal
- 4 Synthesis of what we know about growth, livelihoods, basic services and social protection in Sri Lanka
- 5 Synthesis of what we know about growth, livelihoods, basic services and social protection in Afghanistan
- 6 Synthesis of what we know about growth, livelihoods, basic services and social protection in Pakistan
- 7 Synthesis of what we know about growth, livelihoods, basic services and social protection in DRC
- 8 Synthesis of what we know about growth, livelihoods, basic services and social protection in South Sudan
- 9 Synthesis of what we know about growth, livelihoods, basic services and social protection in Uganda
- 10 Gender paper

This paper describes our methodological protocol for the production of the evidence papers. It describes how we will capture elements of the systematic review methodology without carrying out a systematic review. A full systematic review would have limited usefulness given: the large number of questions that we have to answer; the lack of agreed terminology or complexity of many of the themes (and therefore search strings) that our research covers ('fragile', 'social cohesion', 'basic services', 'livelihoods', 'growth'); and that recent reviews have demonstrated that only very small numbers of high quality research outputs are identified by systematic reviews

**Figure 2: Contribution of evidence papers to inception phase**



However, our evidence papers will certainly benefit from adapting some of elements of the systematic review, especially because we will have a large team working on the papers, spread across different geographical locations and institutional homes. Benefits include:

- More careful development of research questions (rather than research themes or areas), including deconstruction of research questions in terms of *population*, *intervention*, *comparator* and *outcome*. This is particularly important given the very broad parameters of our research;
- Ensuring a consistent sampling and interpretation of literature;
- Reducing bias in our analysis of policies and programmes;
- Systematically assessing research quality and using this to identify gaps in research outputs based on quality rather than quantity of outputs; and
- The opportunity to establish a baseline for assessing the current state of research and replicating our process in 5–6 years' time to assess our impact

### Research questions

Our research questions have been developed in consultation with RPC partners and affiliates and with DFID. They are significantly more complex than typical systematic review questions.

For evidence papers 1 –2 (Growth and Livelihoods, Basic Services and Social Protection), authors will be required to answer the following questions:

- **People:** What is known about peoples' own responses, disaggregated by gender, to conflict and their tactics for making a living and maintaining access to basic services and social protection?
- **Governance:** How do state and society interact in the institutional arrangements that mediate livelihoods, social protection and access to services? What are the gender dimensions of these interactions?
- **Aid:** What aid is being provided and its effectiveness in supporting access to basic services, livelihoods and social protection? What is known about the gendered impact of aid?
- **Private sector:** What is known about the role of the private sector in a) delivering services and social protection and b) stimulating multipliers and growth linkages?

- **Linkages:** What linkages between people-aid-governance determine outcomes in relation to livelihoods and access to social protection and basic services?
- **Data:** What current, gender-disaggregated data exists on poverty levels, livelihoods, growth, access to basic services, access to social protection and key health and nutrition indicators and what quality is it?
- **Quality:** What is the quality of the current evidence (including the extent to which gender is analysed)
- **Methods:** What methods are currently being used to research livelihoods, access to services and social protection
- **Gaps:** What gaps exist in the evidence, research methods and secondary data

For each of evidence papers 3– 5 (Afghanistan / Pakistan, Sri Lanka / Nepal, Uganda / South Sudan / DRC), authors will be required to answer the same questions:

- **People:** What are peoples' own responses, disaggregated by gender, to conflict and tactics for making a living and maintaining access to basic services?
- **Governance:** How do state and society interact in the institutional arrangements that mediate livelihoods, social protection and access to services? What are the gender dimensions of these interactions?
- **Aid:** What aid is being provided and its effectiveness in supporting access to basic services, livelihoods and social protection? What is known about the gendered impacts of aid?
- **Linkages:** What linkages between people-aid-governance determine outcomes in relation to livelihoods and access to social protection and basic services?
- **Private sector:** What is known about the role of the private sector in a) delivering services and social protection and b) stimulating multipliers and growth linkages?
- **Data:** What current, gender-disaggregated data exists on poverty levels, livelihoods, growth, access to basic services, access to social protection and key health and nutrition indicators and what quality is it?
- **Quality:** What is the quality of the current evidence (including the extent to which gender is analysed)
- **Methods:** The types of methods currently being used to research livelihoods, access to services and social protection
- **Gaps:** What gaps exist in the evidence, research methods and secondary data

For such a large research programme with multiple outputs, it is difficult to pin down the parameters of research questions as would be the case in a systematic review: there will be no single definition of *population, intervention, comparator and outcome*<sup>22</sup> that makes sense across all questions and countries. Guidelines and regular consultation will be used to ensure that across the team, there is some consistency in setting parameters.

### Searching and recording strategy

All of the evidence papers will be based on a thorough and systematic literature search. A broad range of relevant academic databases will be searched (see Appendix 1 for an initial list). The London-based team will coordinate the search so that there is no replication of effort across the different teams responsible for papers 1 – 5. For each evidence paper the team will list of databases/ sources to be used and the search terms that will be applied. Criteria will be developed for how to decide on the

<sup>22</sup> **Population** - who are you looking at? E.g. All beneficiaries of service delivery? Only poor people receiving services? All poor people? All people in fragile or conflict-affected countries? **Intervention**- what kind of programme/ change are you studying? E.g. receiving social protection, providing separate toilets for girls in schools, ensuring markets are regulated? **Comparator** - what are you comparing the intervention against? E.g. beneficiaries versus non-beneficiaries; cash transfer programmes versus public works programmes, or comparing beneficiary situation before and after receiving services. **Outcome**- what impacts are you looking at? How income changes? How attitudes towards the state change? If girls' school attendance increases?

relevance of sources. The list of databases and sources, search terms and criteria will be shared between the different evidence paper teams to ensure a consistent and replicable approach. The London-based team (evidence papers 1 and 2) will lead on the identification of formal published literature, particularly that found in open and closed access journals. The country-based teams (evidence papers 3–5) will focus on grey literature specific to their respective countries. All teams will regularly share other literature that their searches uncover.

A database system (possibly EPPI Reviewer 4 – to be confirmed) will be used to manage and code studies found during the review.

The following will therefore be developed jointly by the research assistants / evidence paper leaders and research directors over the next month:

- A list of databases and sources to be used
- Agreed search terms to be applied and definitions for terms
- Criteria for deciding on the relevance of articles and other literature to be included in the analysis
- An agreed matrix for analysing and classifying the results of these searches

All studies will record the search process and the criteria by which literature is included or excluded (what search terms are used, where results are found, why literature was excluded etc) in a way that will enable the studies to be replicated in 2015 and ensure that the analysis is transparent and objective.

Evidence papers 3–5 will also require a review of the grey literature including policy documents, evaluations and other unpublished documents. This should be gathered in-country and globally by consulting with key stakeholders (donors, aid agencies, government etc) in an iterative process with the stakeholder consultation.

The review will cover both content (what are the key issues raised in the literature) and make judgements about the quality of the evidence and methods used.

## Analysis

The results from these searches will be systematically analysed using an agreed matrix for classifying results. This will be developed by the London teams for the global syntheses and shared and adapted by the teams working evidence papers 3–5.

The analysis process for the global syntheses will be agreed in week commencing Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> May. It is anticipated that either

- 1 Specific sectors will be allocated to the four team members (RS, RM and 2 x research assistants) and each researcher will iteratively build an analysis of that sector with sectoral inputs from sector specialist; or
- 2 Research themes (especially people-aid-governance) will be divided between the researchers and they will iteratively build an analysis of that theme with inputs for sector leads; or
- 3 Based on this division of labour the teams will produce a shared analysis of quality and methods. The team for papers 1–2 will produce weekly reports on progress and findings and meet weekly to share results of analysis. These reports will be shared with those working on other evidence papers.

The process (for the global synthesis) will be shared with teams working on evidence papers 3–5 who will adapt it to fit the specific context for their work. It is anticipated that evidence Papers 3–5 will follow the shared outline to maximise comparative findings. A draft outline is proposed below which will be revised based on comments now and discussion with the research teams once the reviews are underway. A decision will need to be made about whether each evidence paper has two-three separate chapters for each countries, or whether each sections includes all (2 or 3) countries.

## Box 2: Draft outline for country evidence papers

Introduction – 1 page

Country Contexts – 3 pages

A section outlining the basic social, economic and political context of the two – three countries in question. It should include core indicators such as the percentage of people with access to clean water etc from sources such as the Human Development Index.

Livelihoods and growth – 15 pages

Basic services and social protection – 15 pages

Each of these sections should be broken down into sub-sections on:

**People:** What are peoples' own responses, disaggregated by gender, to conflict and tactics for making a living and maintaining access to basic services?

**Governance:** How do state and society interact in the institutional arrangements that mediate livelihoods, social protection and access to services? What are the gender dimensions of these interactions?

**Aid:** What aid is being provided and its effectiveness in supporting access to basic services, livelihoods and social protection? What is known about the gendered impacts of aid?

**Linkages:** What linkages between people-aid-governance determine outcomes in relation to livelihoods and access to social protection and basic services?

**Private sector:** What is known about the role of the private sector in a) delivering services and social protection and b) stimulating multipliers and growth linkages?

**Data:** What current, gender-disaggregated data exists on poverty levels, livelihoods, growth, access to basic services, access to social protection and key health and nutrition indicators and what quality is it?

**Quality:** What is the quality of the current evidence (including the extent to which gender is analysed)

**Methods:** The types of methods currently being used to research livelihoods, access to services and social protection

**Gaps:** What gaps exist in the evidence, research methods and secondary data

Conclusions – 6 pages

## Annex 2: Search strings and databases

The table below presents the list of search strings used and databases consulted. However, the number of search hits should not be taken at face value, as many references are in fact irrelevant to our subjects. Moreover, although efforts were made to avoid duplicates, there may still be some repetitions within this document.

Search string	Hits	Comments
JSTOR: Afghanistan AND "livelihood*" AND "growth" AND "market*" AND "Aid" AND "AID"	219	
JSTOR: ((Afghanistan) AND (Politics OR "State-Building" OR "Livelihood" OR "growth" OR "market*" OR "value chain")) AND (cty:(journal) AND ty:(fla)) AND (year:[1996 TO 2011])	4,086	
JSTOR: (Afghanistan AND "livelihood*" OR "social protection" OR "basic service*") AND (cty:(journal) AND ty:(fla)) AND (year:[1996 TO 2011])	1,412	Very few are relevant
JSTOR: (ab:(Afghanistan) AND ab:(growth)) AND (cty:(journal) AND ty:(fla))	8	
Web of Knowledge: Afghanistan AND "livelihood*" OR "social protection" OR "basic service*"	2,122	
Web of Knowledge: Afghanistan AND "livelihood*" OR "social protection" OR "basic service*" (refined by article type and general category); Search on Title	199	
Web of Knowledge: Afghanistan AND livelihood (search by topic)	15	Some duplicates
Web of Knowledge: Afghanistan AND "basic services" (search by topic)	4	
Econlit: Afghanistan AND "basic services" (in journal article)	1	
Econlit: Afghanistan AND "livelihood" (in journal article)	2	
ADB: "Afghanistan livelihood social protection basic services"	509	Main search tool
ADB: Afghanistan	33	Main search tool
ADB: (search through the Country Page: <a href="http://www.adb.org/Afghanistan">http://www.adb.org/Afghanistan</a> )	n/a	Search by interventions and publication type
ADB: main publication portal: see here	97	Filtered by country
Asian Development Review	0	Handsearching
World Bank	122	Afghanistan Publication & Research catalogue
Peace Research Abstracts: Afghanistan and Livelihoods (search in abstracts)	1	
Peace Research Abstracts: Afghanistan and "basic services" (search in abstracts)	0	
Peace Research Abstracts: Afghanistan and "growth" (search in abstracts)	21	
Peace Research Abstracts		NO ACCESS
IBSS: Afghanistan AND health	647	
IBSS: Afghanistan AND education	221	
IPSA: Afghanistan AND education; Afghanistan AND "basic services"	7	NO ACCESS
IPSA: Afghanistan AND reconstruction	69	
IPSA: Afghanistan and "Social Funds"	0	
IPSA: Afghanistan and social	51	
Francis: Afghanistan AND livelihoods	0	
Francis: Afghanistan AND "basic services"	0	
Francis: Afghanistan AND growth	3	Irrelevant
Francis: Afghanistan AND health; Afghanistan AND education; Afghanistan AND health; Afghanistan AND water;	67+15+3	Mostly irrelevant

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