Researching livelihoods and
services affected by conflict

Using village context analysis in Afghanistan: methods and wider implications

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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).

Acknowledgements

Contents

Acronyms

AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
CA	Customary Authority
CC	Citizen's Charter
CDC	Community Development Council
CDD	Community-driven development
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
SLRC	Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
CA	Customary Authority

Glossary

Malik	Village leader
Strongman	A local informal power holder who may or may not be armed
Whitebeard	Respected village elder

Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to draw out the programmatic significance of the findings that there are systematic differences between villages in Afghanistan in the behaviour of village elites and their support for the welfare of village households and the delivery of basic level public goods. It is designed to speak directly to Afghanistan's National Solidarity Programme (NSP).

The focus of this paper is not about the provision of funding for village infrastructure, which is widely seen to have been successful, but more around assumptions on the role of Community Development Councils in contributing to the building of state-society relations in the very specific and current context of Afghanistan.

It argues that village context, characterised as the relationships of responsibility and accountability between customary village leadership, village elites and other households is a variable and has to be understood in relation to the wider network of relationships that exist between the village and authorities and power holders at district and provincial level.

It outlines an approach by which village context can be more systematically characterised and understood. This implies a greater flexibility in design and implementation practices in relation to any future development of the NSP.

1   Introduction

This paper draws from research findings on village variability in Afghanistan (see Pain and Sturge, 2015a; Pain and Sturge, 2015b). These research findings in turn built on earlier empirical field observations of differences in village development trajectories and the behaviour of village customary elite (Pain and Kantor, 2011). These observations indicated that there was variation in the behaviour of village elites in their interest in supporting the welfare of households within the village and in the delivery of village-level public goods such as security. Some villages were more developmental in character and had a long history of being so, while others were run largely for the exclusive benefit of the elite and had limited public good provision. These observations on the behaviour of village elite and their effects, the variability of this between villages and the distinctive character and durability of village identity are not unique to Afghanistan and have been widely reported in South-East Asia.

The research (Pain and Sturge, 2015a) sampled 92 villages in two Afghanistan provinces in an investigation of whether such variability was more widespread and systematic. It found that there were systematic differences between villages and developed methods by which this variability could be characterised and villages clustered on the basis of similar or dissimilar characteristics.

There are practical implications of these observations on village differences and the reasons underlying them. Introducing new organisational structures into villages – a feature of many development interventions in Afghanistan, and most notably of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) – always has effects on pre-existing customary structures. Moreover the outcomes of these introductions are often subject to what is already there. Comparative evidence suggests that sometimes there can be positive synergies between customary practices and introduced structures (Tsai, 2007). However, it is also the case that at times there can be elite capture of external resources that simply reinforces existing patterns of exclusion within the village. The question arises therefore as to whether it is possible to identify and respond appropriately to village conditions where elite capture is likely and where it is not. Elites are a fact of life: some can be obstacles and other can be promoters or supporters of development processes (Kyamusugulwa and Hilhorst, 2015).

The response to the research findings (Pain and Sturge, 2015a) was varied. There was strong interest in some quarters given the analytical focus on village differences that corresponded with the specific programmatic experiences of many agencies. The question of elite capture which the findings addressed has been a particular concern for the NSP. For some, there were questions of how do we work with the 'bad' elite – those who capture resources for their own benefit and undermine the overall aims of development interventions. For many the question that was raised was how to use the method or, as posed a World Bank staff member, 'How can we use this operationally?' More specific questions were raised such as: 'How should we design or undertake Community Development Council (CDC) elections to address these issues?' And, 'How, moving forward, can we better design the Citizens Charter to take account of these factors?' There are certainly differing views on what NSP was designed to do or not to do and design intentions have changed over time. There were responses that saw the findings as hostile to NSP or plain wrong or saw the paper as merely an academic exercise.

It should be made clear at the outset that the role of NSP in giving block grants to villages has provided a level of funding that they have never experienced before. There has been widespread appreciation of the provision of public infrastructure funded from these grants and there are reports from many sources of the positive assessment of the NSP in this respect 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 broader claims have been made for the role of NSP, including that 'community-driven development strengthens state-society relations in Afghanistan' (World Bank, 2011: 133). The same report asserted that 'democratically elected gender-balanced councils [have built] representative institutions'. While there are clearly cases of developmentally minded villages where outcomes might be seen as supporting the World Bank's assertion, as the evidence from the research reported here indicates, there are also villages where this is not the case. Further assumptions about the nature of state-society relations embodied in the quotes from the World Bank are challenged by the evidence about how relationship-based networks, rather than formal rule-based order, effectively constitute the state and economy in Afghanistan (Jackson, 2016). Moreover, if, as Jackson argues, the international community interventions have actually reinforced personality-based networks, then even taking a medium-term perspective on the possibilities for CDCs it is difficult to be optimistic that the wider context within which villages are situated is likely to change much.

Thus the critical focus of this paper is not about the provision of funding for village infrastructure but more around assumptions on the role of CDCs in contributing to the building of state-society relations in the very specific context of Afghanistan. There is of course a very wide literature on community-driven development in general and for South Asia.[1] But learning from comparative evidence requires first a robust understanding of the specific empirical context and this is what this paper aims to provide.

The aim of the research was not to develop a village typology for Afghanistan and suggest, for example, that there are five or six different types of villages and type 1 or 2 are developmentally minded and types 4-6 are not. Rather, based on a purposive sample we were interested to see, using statistical methods of factor analysis and clustering techniques, whether a typology could be developed for the selected group of village-based on the relation between their foundational features (altitude, land resources) and public good provision outcomes. We concluded that they could.

The purpose of this paper is to draw out the programmatic significance of these findings and suggest ways in which they could be used particularly to identify villages where elite behaviour might prove challenging. It had been intended that a framework for mapping of village would have been tested with interested parties, but security considerations has not made this practicable. Instead, detailed discussions and round-table meetings were held with the NSP team

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[1] The author has been undertaking research on Community Forestry in Nepal since 2001, a programme that has been seen to be one of the more successful community-based activities in the region.

in the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), at the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), with a group of NGOs at the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development, and with key staff at the World Bank.

This paper is written to specifically engage with the NSP programme and the design for its fourth phase, which is likely to be focused around the developing Citizen's Charter (GoIRA, 2015). This is discussed in part 2 of the paper. Part 3 develops an analytical framework to explore the wider implications of the research findings in relation to NSP. Part 4 summarises the key findings from the research and draws in additional analysis from findings in relation to CDC turnover, the effects of clustering and dividing villages in relation to CDC formation and the role of elites in managing external connections for the village. Part 5 is in essence the practical part and provides in response to a set of questions argued responses and practical suggestions as to how some of these challenging issues should be addressed. The final section of the paper considers the wider implications of the findings.

The paper is modest in its intentions and its core argument is that the NSP intervention in its design elements can in some contexts be incoherent in relation to the incentives and motivations that structure community life. Understanding the sources of this incoherence, and where it is likely to arise and why, is what village context analysis provides.

But there are of course broader implications of the findings. There is a much wider debate on community-driven development (CDD) in conflict contexts as an intervention to build state-society relations, improve social cohesiveness and improve welfare. This debate has been driven by the mixed and equivocal findings from what are termed 'rigorous impact evaluations'[2] of CDD impacts in different contexts (King, 2013). Such evaluations incorporate a counterfactual although, as will be discussed in part 4 and as the findings of this research support, there are issues around how rigorous these evaluations are when context is not factored into the assessment. Core issues that King has raised relate to the ambitions of CDD approaches and incommensurate objectives and their questionable grounding in social theory and robust theories of change (Bennett and D'Onofrio, 2015). One strand of the debate has been to argue for building a much better understanding of context to inform design, monitoring and evaluation (Bennett and D'Onofrio, 2015) and it is to this specific dimension that this paper responds.

Village context can be characterised as the relationships of responsibility and accountability that exist between the customary village leadership, village elites and the other households in the village and their actual practice. Distinguishing between what village leaders and village elite *say* they do and what they *actually* do is necessary to take account of the difference between the idealised public statements that they may make and how they actually behave. Responsibility relates to the management of internal village affairs and the provision of basic public goods. It is also the basis of expectations by village households and individuals on the role of village leadership in relation to the wider world and the securing of resources and assistance for the village and its inhabitants. Village context does not exist in isolation and it affects and is affected in turn by the wider context of district and province.

The findings from the village context research and the broader findings of the overall SLRC/AREU research programme raise questions about design elements and goals for the Citizen's Charter and these will be briefly discussed. They also raise broader questions about how international aid

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[2] Evaluations that compare the programme intervention with a counterfactual of what happened in the absence of the programme.

and national government actors relate to and work with local institutions. This in turn links to the broader SLRC research questions about the interactions between service delivery, legitimacy and state building and how state capacities are built or undermined, and these are briefly discussed in the final section.

2   The Citizen's Charter

2.1   Background

Afghanistan's NSP has been rolled out over three phases (2003-2007, 2007-2010 and 2010-2016) incrementally bringing its coverage to around 36,100 designated communities by the end of Phase III (MRRD, 2015). This, it is estimated, will cover about 88 percent of total rural communities by the end of the third phase. As is well known, the core of this massive community development exercise (a total budget of USD 2.7 billion over its three phases) and a flagship programme of the MRRD has been a block grant and the formation of CDCs. The broad objectives of the programme has been to 'build, strengthen, and maintain CDCs as effective institutions for local governance and social-economic development' (MRRD, 2015: 12).

The World Bank has been a key partner in the exercise, a major source of funds and an active monitor of its implementation progress. Its core indicators of progress in relation to the role of the CDCs are summarised in Box 1 and address changes in perceptions of legitimacy, functions, service delivery, representation, elections and external linkages.

Box 1: Core indicators of progress for the NSP in relation to the role of the CDC

Project Development Objective Indicators

Minimum of 70% of sample communities recognise CDCs as the legitimate institution and representative of communities

Minimum of 60% of CDCs perform their functional mandates in the areas of community development and coordination, project implementation and conflict resolution

Minimum of 70% of sampled communities have improved access to services

Minimum of 70% of sampled women representatives in the CDCs take active part in decision making related to community development

Intermediate Results Indicators (selected)

Minimum of 80% of CDCs have new elections for leadership through democratic election and secret ballot at the appropriate time

Minimum of 30% sampled CDCs attempt to form linkages with government and non-government actors

Source: World Bank (2015)

In addition, the Monitoring and Evaluation Department of the NSP in MRRD has developed an 'Institutional Maturity Index' (MRRD, undated) for the CDCs which covers assessments of the following:

- Capacity building (attending training)
- Functionality (Holding meetings, minutes of meetings, attendance etc.)
- Participation and decision making (consultation and participation)
- Project maintenance and sustainability
- Transparency and accountability
- Linkages (to government authorities, NGOs, donors and other CDCs)

- Conflict resolution and peace building
- Self-initiatives of the CDC
- Vision and future direction (future plans for development and resources).

CDCs are rated on a scoring system and it is presumed (although not shown in the format) that the score levels are linked to thresholds that grade the level of maturity achieved.

The indicators of both the World Bank and CDC maturity index are essentially the public text of what constitutes success and outcomes of programme processes and they put to one side the reality of a networked relationship-based state (Jackson, 2016). To take just the first of the World Bank project development indicators, which assesses 'recognising the CDC as the legitimate institution and representative of communities', there are issues around exactly how they can fairly be assessed. Who, for example, is judging 'legitimacy' and 'representativeness' and how, and does the data collected on 'communities recognizing their CDCs as the representative in decision making and development of their communities' amount to the same thing? As the data reported below on the effects of splitting and clustering villages for CDCs, CDC communities are often not coterminous with village boundaries, and older perceptions and practices of who is seen to be legitimate and representative of the village do not disappear.

More generally, these indicators speak more to process compliance rather than being clearly linked and instrumental to some other wider objective, and there is a lack of clarity and agreement over what those objectives are. Indeed villages are not islands and they exist in a sea of other dysfunctional local- and meso-level governance practices (Jackson, 2014, 2015), so quite how one would know if CDCs were effective and what that means is far from clear. The World Bank monitoring indicators are aggregate figures and address what CDCs do with no reference to what is happening around them. This is understandable given the scope and scale of the NSP. But to take just two dimensions – those of legitimacy and linkage making – it is perfectly clear from the evidence presented in this paper that legitimacy and linkage-making is often conferred and undertaken by informal processes and customary structures rather than through any rule-bound discipline-based impartial practice which the NSP governance agenda incorporates. Thus it is perfectly possible for the CDC and customary authority to both be legitimate at the same time, but used for fulfilling very different purposes.

The NSP has been subject to a major impact evaluation during phase II using randomised control techniques (RCTs). The findings from this evaluation (Beath et al., 2013) were somewhat equivocal in relation to the impacts of CDC formation, reporting somewhat more favourably on some (women's representation, for example) than others (village-level governance and economic impacts). The evaluation has been the subject of reviews commissioned by MRRD and critiqued on grounds of method, use of concepts and interpretation of the evidence (Ahlquist, 2015; Sukhtankar, 2015). While these reviews are relevant, a wider discussion on the use of RCTs follows later in Section 4.1 and these issues are not pursued here.

Whatever the debates and questions around what the NSP has achieved and how in its first three phases, it is on the groundwork of the NSP that the planned Citizen's Charter has been elaborated.

2.2   The Citizen's Charter

The development of this project is at an early stage and still under design and many of its details are unclear. Indeed, the current documentation (GoIRA, 2015) is essentially a sketch of an operational plan with little explanation of how or why the planned interventions will or can lead to the expected outcomes. The comments made here therefore are summary and are subject to correction, but it is clear that the Citizen's Charter (CC) initiative is seen as the successor to the NSP although it is intended to expand to include urban as well as rural areas. It seeks to build on the formation of CDCs and community development plans to create a new social contract between community households with the government. It envisages that 'CDCs will act on behalf of citizens to demand services, hold line agencies accountable for the delivery of services and ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable can access services' (GoIRA, 2015: 7) and that line agencies will work through CDCs to deliver these services. This in turn is seen to support rural households become more productive, more livelihood-secure and improve wellbeing primarily through the development of the agricultural sector. The clustering of CDCs to gain efficiencies of scale for service delivery is also being considered. Underpinning the CC is new legislation that it is planned will give CDCs formal legal status as the lowest rung of government, thus cementing the service delivery connection.

The planned CC thus appears to have multiple objectives seeking to combine improvements in economic wellbeing, with building a social contract with the state and improved community governance. Given both the limited evidence for improvements in village governance and economic wellbeing offered by the NSP evaluation and the critique of mixing incommensurate objectives (King, 2013) with unclear theories of change (Bennett and D'Onofrio 2015), the ambitions for the CC are clearly a subject for debate but not the focus of this paper.

What does concern this paper is what lessons can be carried forward from the village context analysis to inform a better understanding of context in the new programme. To address this, the implications and framing of the village context findings need to be pushed a little further. This paper does this by drawing on the analytical framework developed by Pritchett (2015) to understand the mixed findings and common failure of investments in school enrolment and education systems to lead to improved educational learning outcomes. Pritchett develops a conceptual structure based on relations of accountability and their design elements or components to investigate what he calls 'systems coherence' in these relationships of accountability. He argues that in fact many investments in education are incoherent in their design components and in relation to achieving improved learning outcomes. This explains the mixed impact of specific interventions seeking to improve them. Although the framing of the issues in this way is somewhat technocratic and sidesteps the highly political and relational dimensions of networks of access in Afghanistan, it provides a central argument in this paper: that is, the NSP intervention in its design elements can in some respects and in some contexts (note that this is not generalising about NSP in all contexts) be incoherent in relation to the incentives and motivations that structure community life. Understanding the sources of this incoherence and where it is likely to arise and why is what village context analysis provides. This speaks directly to design elements of the programme and its monitoring and therefore to operational relevance.

3 Understanding relationships of accountability in Afghan villages

The starting point, as Pritchett puts it, is to ask the hard question: why, given the levels of investment in CDD, have the results from rigorous impact evaluations of CDD implementation in different countries provided such a mixed picture and why are they generally disappointing (King, 2013)? After all, USD 2.7 billion has been invested in the NSP's three phases in Afghanistan, and the impact as judged by the rigorous impact evaluation (Beath et al., 2013) were at best pretty modest. While the robustness of these conclusions has been subject to debate, one possible explanation for the apparent modest impact from NSP may relate to the analysis that King (2013) offers – panacea-type goals that are mixed and underpinned by generalised theories of change that are poorly informed by social theory (Bennett and D'Onofrio, 2015).

One suspects, though, that part of the objection of the MRRD NSP team to the conclusions of the impact evaluation was that they could point to CDCs and villages where the outcomes of the NSP intervention were a lot more positive and where more impact could clearly be found than that indicated by the evaluation. The MRRD's view is consistent with the evidence found in this research on village context analysis and related research (Pain and Kantor, 2011) and the findings that where the NSP programme has engaged with developmentally minded villages, positive synergies have been built between the village and the NSP programme.

It could be suggested that the reason why NSP was more successful in some villages than in others was because some villages were more receptive to the intentions and objectives of NSP. The village wanted to develop and expand public good provision and the village elite were supportive of this. But receptiveness is only the proximate determinant. Equally, the NSP interventions – supporting elections, holding meetings, taking minutes, setting up bank accounts, etc. – are only proximate determinants of CDC outcomes (and sometimes they work and sometimes they don't). So then the question becomes: 'what accounts for the contextual heterogeneity in the proximate determinants of NSP success?' In other words, why are the preconditions in some villages more favourable to the NSP intervention than in others? It is not good enough just to say that they are or are not favourable. That is like saying that poverty is caused by lack of income and simply seeking to raise income to reduce poverty. The deeper and more useful question is why such people were poor or had low income in the first place. Thus it is not just a question of some village elite being born and being motivated to be more developmentally minded than the elite in other villages. Such an orientation is not an intrinsic feature of the village elite. It has to be something to do with the conditions in the village that gives rise to such behaviour and is endogenous to such villages.

So what is it about these developmental villages that distinguishes them? After all, in many cases developmental-type features such as investment in education can be traced back a long time. Some villages had been investing in education for boys for five or six decades or so and were early investors in girls' education as well. This suggests a certain path dependency.

Following Pritchett's argument (in relation to schools), a CDC (which may or may not be coterminous with a village) can be characterised simplistically under the NSP programme as a system with which the state through NSP seeks to engage. The language of the CC proposal with

reference to 'citizens' and 'the charter' justifies the value of this characterisation. It is noted here and returned to later that, in practice, district and provincial government also engages with villages (and villages with them), but in ways distinctly different from the way in which the design of the CC envisions the relation between the state and the CDC.

Pritchett's model has three sets of four dimensions: a set of four actors, a set of four relations of accountability and within each relation of accountability, four dimensions or elements. These relations are expressed in terms of 'principal-agent' (P-A) relations where the principal asks for the services that the agent provides. The four sets of actors are: (1) the state and its various tiers and levels and the implementing ministry (MRRD) for NSP; (2) the Organisational Provider of village services – the CDC – which has been established by the NSP; (3) the membership of the CDC; and (4) the households under the CDC.

These four sets of actors are connected through relations of accountability. There are according to the scheme four relations of accountability between these four actors. There are those of politics (citizens to the state); there is the compact or agreement between the state and organisations (consistent with what the CC envisages); there are management relations such as between MRRD and CDCs, and there is Voice or Client Power between households and the CDC.

Each of these relations of accountability have four elements (or what Pritchett calls design elements): delegation, finance, information and motivation. With delegation – the MRRD for example specifies what must be done by a CDC, such as hold meetings, set up a bank account, etc. Households through elections delegate to CDC members representation of their interests. There is finance which the CDC can use to buy services or invest in public goods. There is information which the MRRD for example collects on how the CDC performs. Finally there is the element of motivation whereby members of the CDC are motivated or not to fulfil the tasks assigned to them by the MRRD and the state.

Pritchett suggests that within education systems there are 'weaknesses in specific dimensions of the existing system design elements that provide alternative conjectured explanations for performance of agents in their system' (Pritchett, 2016: 18). That is, there is a lack of coherence or inconsistent motivations for people to act between one objective and another. For example, in the case of learning, because learning is not clearly stated as an objective in the delegation of responsibilities to schools versus other targets that are set (e.g. enrolment or buildings), then there is weak learning performance as all that is recorded is pupil attendance. Similarly, despite the fact that parents know the school is bad, they do not have the possibility of motivating schools or teachers to perform better because they have limited authority over them. Pritchett suggests that three specific types of incoherence can be found.

The first form of incoherence can be within a relation of accountability – for example, the relation between delegation and finance or between finance and motivation. Finance has been specifically used in the NSP to motivate the formation of CDCs so that they can get money for projects. Certain other functions have also been mandated to CDCs (see Box 1) such as undertaking dispute resolution or making linkages with government or other organisations. These do not specifically carry with them funding. The persistence of dispute resolution through customary authority, for example, or the making of linkages to district or province through personal networks suggests that CDCs are not sufficiently motivated to fulfil these tasks because other factors outside the NSP relationship motivate them to behave in a different way.

The second form of incoherence can be for the same element – for example, information across different relations of accountability. For example, the monitoring information that is collected by MRRD on CDCs is largely concerned with finance, input provision and to some extent organisational performance of the CDCs. A good example is the collection of data on the election of women to CDC membership. This is essentially input information and says nothing about the ability of women to act as citizens or agents in CDCs with equal weight to men. Many of the informants in the research when asked about the role of women on CDCs simply suggested that women were there in name only and nominated to fulfil the CDC requirements. They knew that the presence of women on CDCs did not signify real change or give women voice.

The third form of incoherence arises where there are contradictions between two powerful relationships of accountability that affect the same people. Consider the position of the *malik* who is also head of the CDC. On the one hand, the NSP expects him to behave in a good, discipline-based manner of accountability within the CDC, between the CDC and NSP programme and between the CDC and households. On the other, there is the expectation from households within the village for him to behave in an entirely different way using networks of access and discretion through patronage connections to secure resources or assistance.

Pritchett's model addresses incoherence within a system of education supported by the state. However, in the case of villages and the NSP in Afghanistan there are other dimensions of incoherence that not only challenge assumptions about state–CDC relations but also those of the state and its various tiers which set the context within which villages are located. To explore these we need to turn to the key findings from the village context mapping.

4 Key findings from village context mapping

The study of 92 villages in 10 districts (five in Badakhshan and five in Nangarhar province) set out to answer two core questions:

- Is there systematic variation in the ways in which existing customary structures in village government influence the ways in which public goods are accessed and delivered?
- Can this variation be characterised and used to inform programme design and implementation so that it takes better account of variation in village preconditions, discriminates between village types and designs and manages programme interventions and assesses their effects according to village context?

Significant differences were found between villages in terms of the role, nature of and relative numbers of their elite, and the study villages could be grouped into two main types (with a possible third intermediate type). Where land inequalities were low, the elite were likely to be both relatively economically insecure and more numerous. The village elite was therefore likely to have a shared interest in promoting and supporting social solidarity and ensuring the provision of public goods. Where, however, the elite were relatively small in number and where they were economically secure, often as a result of large landholdings, the incentives to promote social solidarity and widen access to public good provision were likely to be more limited. Here the elite were prone to act more in their own interests rather than in the interests of the village population at large. In using the term 'prone' we are acknowledging that there was a spread of behaviour even within a type, so in a village with highly unequal land distribution there were elites that could be more public minded while in villages where there were more numerous elite they could be self-interested (see Annex 4, Descriptive Statistics in Pain and Sturge, 2015a).

Three implications of these findings are highlighted (for further discussion, see Pain and Sturge, 2015a).

First, in the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions to bring changes in the ways in which villages are governed or collective action organised, villages cannot be treated as if they are all the same. Some villages are governed better than others and there are reasons why this is so. This will have an influence on efforts to bring change to village governance.

Second, there is a need to have a much more nuanced view of working with village elites. Village elites fulfil important functions in village governance in relation to the broader institutional landscape of risk and uncertainty. In many cases they clearly have considerable legitimacy. The village, despite its shifting boundaries, remains for most of its inhabitants the most significant institution in their lives and collective action at the village level will continue to have a primary role in ensuring the provision of public goods.

Third, rather than seeing new organisational structures such as CDCs running in parallel to existing customary structures, greater attention needs to be paid to the processes of institutional 'bricolage' whereby the old (the customary structures) and new (CDCs) borrow from and mutually reshape each other's practices and ways of thinking (Cleaver, 2012).

The focus of the above analysis was on the clustering of villages and the characterisation of the different types of villages. There was, however, additional data on CDCs and influential people that were collected and not reported in Pain and Sturge (2015a). This related to the effects of clustering and dividing villages in CDC formation, the turnover of CDC membership during elections, and the role of influential people in managing the external relations of villages. These aspects are relevant to this paper and the findings are briefly reported here (see Annexes 1, 2 and 3 for the more specific findings on the clustering and dividing of villages in CDC formation, the turnover on CDC membership in elections and networks of access).

4.1   Processes of institutional bricolage

As the findings in Annexes 1-3 make clear, the introduction of new institutional arrangements such as the CDCs do not displace what is there already: the new arrangements operate subject to pre-existing ones. Villages find ways to manage the new CDCs if they are joined with other villages or the village is divided to make the new organisational arrangement coherent with prior arrangements; elections are managed – for example through the widely reported means of block voting – so that the CDCs incorporate older forms of legitimacy and authority, and informal networks and patronage relations with the external world are maintained by the village customary authority in parallel to the CDCs to ensure access to resources and the maintenance of relations with district and provincial authorities. There is of course considerable variability between villages as to the way in which this is done and much depends on the nature of the village elite.

These processes are what can be understood as institutional bricolage in which, as Cleaver explains (2012: 45), 'existing social formulae…patch and piece together institutions in response to changing situations'. These institutions are neither completely new nor completely traditional but rather a 'dynamic hybrid' combining elements of the 'introduced', 'customary', 'formal' and 'informal'. Thus the development of new institutions and their functioning strongly depends on pre-existing conditions which shape their future trajectory.

In sum, the evidence from this characterisation of village context and what underpins it points strongly to the enduring role of village customary authority both to ensure to varying degrees the collective wellbeing of the village as well as to maintain external connections with the district and beyond. Villages are networked to the district and beyond through these connections that function on a personalised and patronage basis. The networks are shaped by various identities based on location, lineage, ethnicity and political affiliations in which history is a significant factor. Other forms of organisational logic such as CDCs have been introduced into villages and have had variable effects. But what underpins village governance and its variable nature and performance is a different logic to that which has been introduced. In some circumstances it may become more overtly democratic in form – holding elections, for example, with turnover of CDC membership. However the context of risk and uncertainty that characterises the wider institutional landscape in which the village and its households must survive ensures that customary authority endures through its ability to forge and maintain relationships with that wider world.

Thus to return to questions of accountability within villages (even in villages with just one CDC) and issues of coherence, there can therefore be several aspects of incoherence between the design intentions of NSP and the motivations and capacities of households or individuals to act in the manner expected of them by NSP. Two are noted here.

A first is the assumption that households and individuals are autonomous, as expressed in the notion of 'citizens' which carries with it presumptions of freedom to act and express choice. Not only is that freedom limited or constrained for many household members (wives, daughters, daughter-in-laws and sons) but many households are locked in dependent relations with others (and at times subject to them, as in relations of tied labour, *'hamsaya'*). They are not autonomous and the capacity for voice is limited.

A second aspect that should be noted about the CC is its assumptions about building what it calls a new compact between the state and its citizens. In other words it envisages what might be seen as the classical western social contract between the individual, as citizen, and the state. But there are other forms of social contract as Leonard with Samantar (2011) point out with respect to Somaliland, whereby a social group makes effective and morally enforceable decisions about how conflicts should be addressed and public goods should be delivered. This is more of a collective rather than individualised social contract where legitimacy and authority are earned and reputation gained through performance. This arguably is what characterises current Afghan village life; the challenge that the CC faces, but does not appear to address, is how to shift from a logic of collective contract at the local and accountable level to the abstract and generalised contract between individual and the state.

The CC documentation rightly recognises that there are issues of trust here (e.g. how can you trust the Afghan state given its history?) which the CC seeks to address. However moving from personalised trust, which is what characterises Afghanistan's current political and economic life (Jackson, 2015; Minoia et al., 2014) to more generalised trust is a slow and gradual process. As the growth in formal credit systems shows, the development of impersonal institutions to manage financial relations (and by analogy political relations as well) is an outcome of the growth of expanded trust networks rather than the cause of it. The question is whether or not the CC is putting the cart before the horse.

There is a third incoherence between the design intentions of NSP (and the CC) in the assumed relations of accountability. There is a clear assumption in the documentation on the CC that ministries such as the MRRD, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) will be in a position to deliver in an unfettered manner services directly to CDCs on the basis of their demands and can be held accountable by CDCs for this delivery. It is claimed (MoIRA, 2015: 6) that 'operational coordination will be through provincial government...who will define targets and evaluate the previous year's progress...[and] clear roles and responsibilities will be defined for the provincial and district governor's office'. The evidence on how provincial and district governments actually function in relation to service delivery is a direct challenge to this assumption. A recent study (AREU and World Bank, 2016) of the variability in service delivery in basic health and education and outcomes points to the significance of the nature of secondary political settlements at the provincial level and the forms of rent seeking practised as key determinants of what services actually get delivered. Service delivery is thus subject to provincial and district political interests rather than the reverse. The evidence on the critical role of personalised connections between village and district in terms of service delivery is consistent with this. Not only do villages vary in their behaviour, then, but so too do districts and provinces for similar reasons.

These three examples of potential incoherence in relations of accountability – between household and CDC, between individual and collective social contracts, and between CDC and

district and provincial governance – and field evidence of the variability in these, brings us to the issue of rigorous impact evaluation.

Rigorous impact evaluations have been undertaken in many countries on CDD and, as Pritchett describes, on education systems and interventions to improve primary learning outcomes. But they have produced highly variable results across countries and contexts. CDD impacts in relation to one objective found in one country are not necessarily found in a second (King, 2013). Sometimes strict monitoring of attendance works to improve outcomes in one context but not in another (Pritchett, 2015). Pritchett is particularly critical of the approach to rigorous evidence generation through techniques of randomisation across control and treatment populations and his arguments are relevant to rigorous impact evaluation of CDD and the NSP evaluation in particular:

> *The problem with this approach is that we now have enough evidence to know that this approach will not work for precisely the reasons it was known it would not work. Without a reasonably complete analytical specification of the systemic context in which the experiments are done such that one can know that context A is sufficiently similar to context B, there is no 'external validity' and hence rigorous evidence isn't. That is rigorous evidence from context A about the causal impact on learning of program Z has no implications at all for the expected impact of program Z on learning in context B (much less is it 'rigorous evidence for context B). (2015: 34)*

This in part may account for the lack of consistent evidence found from CDC-type interventions across country contexts reported by King (2013). But it also speaks directly to the arguments of this paper and the evidence on which it draws: namely that village context varies and unless that is taken account in the design of the evaluation (and the intervention) then a 'rigorous evaluation' is not rigorous. It may well be that the contextual variability that the NSP has encountered (and which is evidenced at district and provincial levels as well – AREU and World Bank, 2016) has led to highly uneven outcomes, some rather positive, others not. But the core question, central to this paper, is about building better understanding of the context in which these interventions are made in order to be able to assess questions of comparability across, in this case, villages.

Pritchett's conclusions about the heterogeneity of results from investments in educational learning outcomes are phrased in terms of working hypotheses which have been rephrased here to address the NSP. He draws on the idea of 'coherence' and 'incoherence' in accountability of relationships between actors (in this case between government, CDCs and their leadership) to advance these and expresses them as follows (adapted from Pritchett, 2015: 34-35):

i. The heterogeneity of empirical results is driven by doing the 'same' programmatic/policy interventions in systems of very different coherence.
ii. Interventions will work to improve one or more outcomes (improved welfare, improved social relations, improved governance) when:
   a) there is sufficient system coherence to produce a drive for better outcomes
   b) the intervention is consistent with existing coherence (e.g. relaxes constraints on actors achieving the results that they are motivated by the existing system to pursue).
iii. Conversely, even otherwise rigorously proven interventions in other contexts will not work to produce better outcomes (welfare, governance, etc.) if the system is sufficiently incoherent.

The evidence on how villages work and the contexts in which they engage point to multiple but variable levels of incoherence in accountability between leaders and members of CDCs. On the one hand, there is what is demanded of them by the NSP and, on the other, what is expected of them both in terms of collective accountability within the village and by the village in terms of the everyday complex and shifting relationships that have to be managed at the district, province and beyond. The NSP has expected a discipline-based individualised (as citizens) technocratic accountability between the CDC and its funders. But the customary village leadership which is strongly represented in CDC has a strong motivation driven by collective pressure to pursue connections through personalised networks in order to survive in a system characterised by patron-client networks. How can the CDC be expected to build impartial technocratic linkages with line agencies at the district level when it knows that the *malik* can through personalised relations more quickly leverage resources for the village – even if that requires something in return? This is not going to change quickly or easily and formulaic programming will not make it any easier.

The good news is that contexts are variable and in some villages, as this body of work shows, there is greater or sufficient coherence between the NSP programme, the motivations of the CDCs and village leadership for synergies to be achieved. The question is how can this variability be recognised, understood, programmed for and evaluated.

5   Applying the lessons from village context analysis

So how can the findings from the village context analysis be made, in terms of the request, 'operational'? Some of the operational significance of the findings relate to design issues that have been raised in the proceeding sections. As has been indicated there is a friction between technocratic logic that drives the NSP and CC design and implementation and the logic and motivations that drive village life. What the evidence from the village context analysis (Pain and Sturge, 2015a) and provincial social orders shows (Jackson, 2014, 2015) is the power and relational dimensions of social interactions and the logic of networks of association and patron–client relationships. Addressing these is not a technical issue and drawing on a relations of accountability framework is useful to point out where the particular points of friction arise.

The NSP (and the planned CC) was designed to build new relationships of accountability. These aim to change (or create) a specific relationship between the state and its citizens (as expressed in the CC) as well as between the (new) village leadership and its constituency (village households). How can the NSP and CC identify the village contexts where there is sufficient coherence between the logic and interests of village life and programme design and where there is likely to be incoherence? How can this be responded to in design, monitoring and evaluation? The fundamental purpose of this paper is to address the first of these questions.

5.1   What does village context mean?

As noted earlier, village context for the purposes of the NSP can be characterised as the relationships of responsibility and accountability that exist between the customary village leadership, village elites and the other households in the village and their practice. Village context does not exist in isolation and it affects and is affected in turn by the wider context of district and province.

It is also not fixed and unchanging. Interventions, such as the formation of CDCs in villages, have changed expectations of responsibilities and accountabilities, but these changes may be village-specific. In some cases the new arrangements may be effectively resisted by the elite by direct capture or sidelining new organisational structures. In others they may be absorbed, partially or completely, and used. It is unlikely that the introduction of new forms or arrangements of responsibility and accountability have completely displaced customary practices. Much will depend on the incentives and motivations that drive the practices of customary village leadership and the extent to which they cohere with the logic of the interventions and the wider context in which the village is located.

5.2   Why does it matter and why should it be taken account of?

Existing practices and repertoires of responsibility and accountability may be largely consistent in intent (e.g. customary authority has a vested or altruistic interest in the wellbeing of village households and the provision of public goods), even if not in form, (e.g. it is an inherited position or earned not by election but through performance over time) with those of the planned intervention. In such cases there may be sufficient coherence between the customary practice and the new intervention. This can create synergies in the drive for the expected outcomes of the

intervention. Thus the 'success' of the intervention (reflected perhaps in the MRRD's CDC maturity index) may be built on favourable preconditions. Where there is not this coherence then there may be resistance, elite capture or simply marginalisation of the CDC. This variability raises questions of design, monitoring and evaluation as well as the nature of the facilitation strategies deployed in engaging with different villages. Villages should not be treated as if they are all the same.

5.3   How can we characterise village context?

How can we know when conditions in a village are likely to be more favourable to (or coherent with) the intervention's intentions and when are they likely to be more adverse (or incoherent)?

There is no simple recipe or formula that can provide a clear answer. There is, however, a checklist that can be used which will help guide understanding of the conditions that an intervention is likely to face. This draws from the methods developed in the village context analysis to characterise village context and cluster different types of villages. The method cannot simply generate an answer but is designed to develop a reasoned analysis of what conditions in the village are likely to be and why they may or may not be coherent with the intentions of the intervention.

5.3.1   A: Analysis steps:
Key factors to be taken into account

Altitude: this is a proxy measure for a number of variables but, generalising, high-altitude villages are likely to have small landholdings, poorer natural resources (more rain-fed land and less irrigated land) and less inequalities in land holdings than villages in plains with irrigation.

Land ownership distribution patterns and the degree of concentration of irrigated land ownership: land ownership is often (but not always) a significant determinant of elite status within a village. Afghan villages are characterised by inequalities in land holdings. Sometimes these can be extreme, where one landowner owns 50 percent or more of the village lands. Examples of this can be found in many of the intensively irrigated river (low altitude) plains of Kunduz, Balkh, Herat, Kandahar and Jalalabad. Such inequalities may also occur outside these areas but the significant feature is the ownership of irrigated land given the food resources and income that this land can command. Where there are such inequalities, with one household owning much of the land, then it is likely there will be many households with little or no land. Such households may often exist in a dependent status through sharecropping or labour relationships with the larger landowner. Under such conditions landed elites effectively control the village and elite capture is a distinct possibility.

It has to be said that the question of landlessness has scarcely featured in the debate on agricultural policy in Afghanistan and there is considerable evidence of how significant it is. The evidence from the village context analysis reported levels of 50 percent or more of households being landless in the study village (Pain and Sturge, 2015: 11).

In other villages land holdings may be more equitably distributed and under such conditions there may be several households that have equivalent land holdings and therefore power may be more dispersed. In yet other villages elites may only be marginally better off than other households and equally vulnerable to food insecurity and household disasters.

The point is that the distribution of land holdings within a village and the extent to which there is a small or large group of landed households may indicate something about the nature of power and its exclusiveness within a village.

The challenge is that formal village-level data on land holdings in the form of cadastral assessments (as found in India, for example) is generally not available. This does not preclude the opportunity of obtaining approximate assessments of what constitutes large, middle and small landowners in the village as well as their relative numbers and the number of landless households. Such information was relatively easily collected in the village context analysis through discussion with informants and could easily be incorporated into the CDC facilitation approach. The degree of land inequalities provides an important assessment of the chances of there being a small village elite who might seek to capture external resources for their own benefit.

Identity of customary authority: A key aspects of understanding village governance is knowing who is part of the customary authority within a village and from where they derive this authority. As the village context data shows, authority is derived from many sources including performance over a lifetime (a kind man or known to be fair), reputation or inheritance (the comment was often made, 'his father was a *malik* before him and so was his grandfather'). The criteria for gaining position as customary authority may often not be so different from criteria that makes someone electable to the CDC. The issue is the extent to which there is overlap between being part of customary authority, a member (or in particular head) of the CDC and also a member of the landed elite. Further, if that position say, as head of the CDC, is held over successive elections, then it raises questions as the extent to which authority is concentrated within a village and how it might be exercised. Analysis of CDC election data (not just number of elections but what turnover of CDC membership is) would build understanding of this.

Village ethnic identities: Given the patchwork of discrete ethnic identities found in Afghan villages and the evidence that such identities can be significant factors in the networks of access that can be built, this is a factor that needs to be taken account of. When there are ethnic minorities located in specific villages surrounded by a different ethnic majority these can create specific village solidarities as well as patterns of exclusion or inclusion. These need to be taken account of in clustering villages of similarity and difference.

History of public good provision: The proxy used during the village context analysis for public good provision was the history of provision of education. It was found that where villages had established schools for boys early on (meaning during or before the mid-1970s) many of them had also established schools for girls at an earlier stage as well. Early access to education had had two effects. First, many had been able to complete school and find jobs in government and thus provided a key connection for the village. Second, it had also given rise to an educated elite in the village who were more likely to be supportive of the public good. In a significant number of cases 'education' was given as a reason why someone was elected to a CDC or why they had authority within the village.

The reason why the timing of education access seems to be a significant factor is that early on, getting a school to the village appears to have been strongly dependent on the customary village leadership and their vision of the future. This in many cases seem to have created positive path dependencies and developmental outcomes in terms of seeking resources for other public goods as well. These are the villages that may often be the success stories of the NSP.

The above set of basic parameters can be supplemented with observational and recorded data on the NSP intervention and its effects within a village. Data on not just the number of elections but the identity of its membership (and turnover of committee members) of the CDC might indicate where there are problems. A careful analysis of who has actually benefited from specific NSP-funded interventions (e.g. where are the roads located, who gets the well?) would indicate where there are likely to be problems of elite capture.

5.3.2 Developing a matrix

Table 1 proposes a simple matrix for scoring of villages in relation to the above features. It does not give absolute values (e.g. what is high, medium and low for altitude) since the comparisons that are sought are relative rather than absolute: in other words it is variability between villages within a district that is the point of interest. What is high or low (or concentrated land ownership in one district may be very different from a district in another province. The point of the matrix is to stimulate reflection about contrasts between villages and identify potential similarities and differences.

Table 1: A simple relative matrix to guide analysis of village context

	Elite capture possible	Intermediate	Elite capture less likely
Altitude	Low	Middle	High
Land ownership			
- Proportion of irrigated land	High	Middle	Low
- Degree of concentration of ownership of irrigated land	High	Middle	Low
- Proportion of landless households	High	Middle	Low
Customary Authority (CA)			
- Proportion of CA who are large landowners	High	Middle	Low
- Proportion of CA who are on the CDC	High	Middle	Low
Village ethnic identity (in relation to district)	Majority	Mixed	Minority
Education			
- Start date of boys	Late	Middle	Early
- Start date of girls	Late	Middle	Early

But if for example one village scored for most of these suggested dimensions in column two of the matrix, then the chances of elite capture might be considerably higher than for a village that scored mainly in column four. What is proposed therefore is simply a working tool that is consistent with the evidence found in the village context analysis and which will need to be developed and ground-truthed. The tool should be taken as an argument to be developed.

5.3.3 B: Implications
<u>What does this mean for elections?</u>

The question here is what variability in elite behaviour might mean for the design and implementation of elections for CDCs. The underlying intent of this question was whether or not election design could mitigate or thwart elite capture. There is, however, an incoherence between the logic of existing practice (collective accountability) and the intentions of the democratic ballot (individualised anonymous accountability). The performance of last year's national presidential elections evidences this contradiction and some of the problematic assumptions about introducing democratic practices into Afghanistan (Coburn and Larson, 2014). It is not resolvable by technical means and it has to be accepted that the form or procedure of the election may have nothing to say about the content (of who votes for whom and why and what pressure they may come under to do so). It is also perfectly possible for sufficiently fair elections to take place for the CDC while the real decision and authority lies elsewhere. CDCs may not necessarily challenge the existing status and practices of elites.

<u>How should we address the 'bad' elites?</u>

How do we address issues of elite capture or the 'bad' elites? NGOs, as a participant in the discussion at the NGO meeting on village context analysis clearly stated, have often effectively done this (although not for the NSP which is a national-level programme) by not working in such villages – in other words an avoidance strategy. This has probably been a pragmatic operational decision which would be difficult for a national government programme to take.

However, a case could be made for a differentiated incentive structure, all other things being equal (there might be for example be variation in the effectiveness of facilitation activities), as part of a longer-term strategy for engagement.[3] All CDCs, for example, could receive a basic start grant and depending if there is evidence of clear *outcomes* from the use of that grant (which requires more than just focusing on monitoring processes of CDC *formation*), a further and enhanced grant would be allocated. Those villages where elite interests cohered more with the objectives of the programme would have a vested interest in ensuring the outcomes were achieved and further funding secured. These benefits are likely to become more widely known and demand for better outcomes could be created in villages which had only received the basic start grant. This demand might come either from the elite of these villages to maintain their legitimacy and authority, or from households in the village, thus indirectly putting pressure on their CDC leadership.

International NGOs and donors might be able to pursue such an approach. However, given the disjuncture between the intentions of the CC and the actual practices of district and provincial

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[3] The same point might be made of the counter-narcotics campaign where the focus of the interventions has always been where the opium was growing rather than where it was not. The pointed observation was made during field work in Badakhshan in 2006 by one farmer about the incentives to cultivate opium given what he knew through the radio about the level of development assistance being delivered to Helmand.

governance (Jackson, 2014, 2015) and the relatively small sum of USD 60,000 per village in the bigger scheme of district and provincial economic resources, seeking rule-based government at village level in a context of elite capture at district and provincial level seems somewhat unrealistic. If, as in Nangarhar, the NSP programme is being implemented but at the same time district governors are appointing village-level *maliks* and holding district *malik* councils, these are contradictory processes.

A first step is to recognise that the danger of elite capture exists. A second step might be to offer a much more conditional and graduated engagement which proceeds according to the progress being made. This does not mean a rejection of the long-term objective but it starts with where things are rather than where one would like them to be. As with the arguments about building 'good enough governance' (Grindle, 2011), a process which breaks down an intervention into sequential logical steps that proceed subject to conditions being met and intermediate outcomes achieved would place greater emphasis on the process rather than just the achievement of the stated goals. Thus, rather than seeing democratic processes as the means, they might be more the outcome of change.

As argued elsewhere (Kantor and Pain, 2010) time needs to be built into programme development and intervention to assess how elites engage. Where elites have a virtual monopoly of power, a different strategy of engagement involving longer engagement processes and coalition building may be required, but it will not be easy and in turn could generate perverse effects (e.g 'difficult villages' being seen to get more attention).

<u>What and how should we monitor and evaluate?</u>

It follows that different design processes have to be followed to address village context where elite capture is likely, and where there is greatest incoherence between programme intentions and the logic of existing practice, different implementation practices are required. In turn, these generate different information requirements (in relation to monitoring and evaluation). If one seeks to apply rigorous impact evaluation techniques, then it will be necessary to ensure that they are applied to context of sufficiently similar contexts.

6 Wider implications

The preceding section has indicated how village context might be more systematically analysed. Village mapping might help to understand better the different contexts in which the NSP and CC are being introduced and suggest more differentiation in approaches. But a reading of this paper also indicates some strong reservations about the feasibility of the planned CC and its ability to reconcile the contradictory processes at play between programme design intention and actual practices at village, district and provincial level.

At a minimum the findings suggest that some fundamental changes to NSP/CC and community-based development approaches are needed. The context analysis argues for a greater understanding, agility and flexibility in design and implementation practices than has been given so far to the CDD model given its ambitions for coverage and uniformity of process (rather than, necessarily, outcomes). These ambitions have been further raised with the proposed CC.

But village context analysis cannot help with some of the more fundamental challenges of taking forward such an ambitious agenda in a country still fractured by conflict, where central government is increasingly losing control of large swathes of territory and in which the layers of government above the village remain massively dysfunctional. Indeed, the analysis points to the extraordinary difficulties of trying to implement the NSP and the CC under such circumstances.

That conclusion in part responds to aspects of the overarching questions of the SLRC programme: what are the modalities of interaction between the donors, the state and local-level governance, what are their effects on building state capacity through the delivery of basic services and how does this affect people's views on the legitimacy of the state? While there can be no doubt that the NSP has provided an unprecedented level of funding and support for infrastructural development to Afghan villages, there is little evidence of effects on building state capacity or conferring legitimacy to the state through this process

To conclude, one might ask the heretical question: if not NSP, then what? One can understand the investments and interests in the NSP and the planned CC that makes such a question almost unacceptable. But it needs to be asked, not least because of its stated intention to deliver services and ensure that the poorest have access. If improving service delivery and access is the objective, is the CDC the best route to do provide access or should we be following the trend elsewhere (Ferguson, 2015) of making direct social welfare payments to individual households to ensure that access is achieved? If the issue is addressing elite capture, then rather than assuming benign village, district or provincial government, central government and sectoral ministries should assume elite capture in providing services such as health and education. The task then becomes one of challenging exclusion and corruption.

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Annex 1: Villages and communities: the effects of clustering and division

Central to the NSP has been the concept of 'community', which is essentially a grouping of between 25 to 300 families for eligibility for the block grant (MRRD, 2015: 6). As is clear, 'community and 'village' do not necessarily correspond:

> *Given that the NSP has yet to be provided with an official list of villages in the country, with clear boundaries, names and population statistics, NSP has to rely on a variety of different sources to arrive at estimated numbers of uncovered communities in each district of the country. While district governors can often provide lists of villages within the districts they govern, these are not helpful to the NSP as the NSP definition for a 'community' (as stated above) may not always coincide with that of a 'village'. To the extent possible, NSP tries to align its 'communities' as closely to the villages shown in CSO and other available data/maps/lists but given the difficulty to access such information and also the fact that often such information is outdated, it is difficult to do so in a large number of cases. NSP and CSO both currently estimate that there are around 41,000 rural communities/villages in Afghanistan. Given all this, NSP has decided that, starting with NSP III, a formal community identification process will be required before the FP [facilitating partner] actually starts community mobilization. (MRRD, 2015: 17)*

The modalities of the NSP block grant is that it allows an allocation of USD 200 per household and a maximum of USD 60,000 per community (in effect, 300 families). Although the NSP February 2015 operational manual (NSP, 2015: 5) stipulates that 'the block grant ceiling per community will apply irrespective of the size of the community and will be not be accepted as a reason for splitting of a community into two or more communities' in order get more money, the fact remains that such divisions have happened in the past. Thirty-four of the large villages studied here had more than one CDC in the village. In addition, villages that are too small – less than 25 families – are not eligible for a block grant and such small villages are encouraged to joint with neighbouring villages to reach a minimum size to allow for the formation of a CDC and attract a block grant. There were also three villages that were joined to other villages to form CDCs in this study.

The consequence is that the boundaries of 'communities' formed under NSP often (in this research 37 of the 92 villages) do not correspond with the boundaries of the social or administrative boundaries that existed prior to the NSP. Not only is this an element of variability relevant to impact evaluations, but new definitions and organisation of communities that are not consistent with pre-existing units of social organisation can at times generate new rivalries and alliances (Bennett and D'Onofrio, 2015: 16).

The Citizen's Charter is considering clustering, building on earlier NSP pilot work on clustering, to bring villages together in order to achieve efficiencies of scale in relation to service delivery. Whatever the merits of the argument for clustering in this way, there are questions as to how such an instrumental approach to organising CDCs (which may or may not be villages) might or not might impact on the ways in which villages organise their affairs.

The effects of clustering villages together was reported in three cases of this study and each case tells a different story (Box 1). In one (NG04), the clustering had had no effect on either of the customary structures in each village and was reported not to lead to conflict. In the second case (BD02), a joint CDC between two villages had clearly caused dissension, and in a third (NG20) the clustering had led to a reduced role for the customary structures but increased unease because one village exercised more power in the CDC than the other.

Box 1: Three cases of small villages being combined with another to form a CDC

NG04: The shared CDC had no effect on customary structures or on the role of influential people in the village. In each village the customary structure has its own role and the CDC didn't bring any change. The selection of CDC members was based on the number of households in each village, with one member elected for each cluster of 20 households. The villages have almost equal representation in total. Projects were selected based on consultation with the clusters. In case of any disagreement they selected projects based on votes cast by cluster members.

BD02: The joint 16-person CDC has created a lot of confusion among the communities, who do not trust each other and accuse the CDC members of stealing money and running projects as they want.

NG20: The NSP has affected the customary structures of both villages, leading to a decline in the role of customary structure in both villages. Now the NSP/CDC *shura* is more powerful and customary structure is no longer independent. Decision-making is now based on consultation whereas in the past the *malik* decided all issues.

The other village combined with this one allegedly has a larger population, and thus has more representation and more power to decide on projects. The NGO in charge failed do an accurate survey to plan for electing members from both villages, which is why there is a power imbalance between them.

More common was larger villages being split and having two or more CDCs. Nineteen villages had been split (or split themselves) into two CDCs, three villages had three CDCs in each village, two had four CDCs in each village, one had six CDCs and one reported seven CDCs. Again there is something of a mixed picture on the effects of the divisions (Box 2) In many cases the subdivision of villages into separate CDCs had no effect and may have reinforced the role of customary structures to manage village affairs. Thus a distinction was made between the management of the village as a whole (see NG05, BD31) by customary structures and of development activities by individual CDCs. In one case where a second CDC was introduced after the first was established (NG36), there was a power struggle in which the *malik* came out on top. But there were also cases (e.g. BD42, NG22) where the creation of multiple CDCs within one village had led to a weakening of power of customary authority. So both splitting and clustering of CDCs can weaken the role of customary authority, but in many other cases the reverse is true, particularly when villages are divided into several CDCs.

Box 2: Effects of dividing villages into several CDCs

BD31: This village is divided into three CDCs, with the division based on the family selection. The CDCs did not have any effect on the customary structures of the village because the whitebeards are at the village level, and they are involved in all conflict resolution cases (it does not matter which conflict relates to which CDC). For each separate CDC the members of the CDC are responsible for making a decision based on the needs of the people in that CDC, but it has to consult with the village and select the project which is the priority of the people. The CDC in the middle of the village is the most influential because it has more families compared with the other two CDCs and is located in the centre.

NG05: The CDCs are made based on population size. They have not affected the role of *malik*. The head of one of the CDC is the *malik*, and his CDC is the most influential. The *malik* is involved in the decisions about projects taken at the village level, and he selects projects from which all villagers can benefit.

NG36: There was only one CDC in the village at first but later, with the support of the external facilitating partner, they divided the village into two CDCs. They believed that having two CDCs would bring more money to the village and there would be twice the representation at district level (cluster level and District Development Assembly). But new sources of power came into existence and soon conflicts began between the customary structures already in the CDC and the new members. New power-holders were trying to dominate everything and decrease the power of the *malik*, who was head of one of CDCs as well. For the first two years there were power struggles but the new power-holders failed to decrease the role of *malik* and other customary structures within CDC. Now the situation is more calm and everything is going well.

BD42: This village has been divided into three CDCs based on population and coverage area. This has divided and weakened the customary power structures so now the CDCs are more active and working in the way they should. All projects are divided according to priority and the three CDCs jointly work on development projects and share information regarding development activities. One CDC is more active compared to the other two as it has more rich and influential people among its members.

NG22: The village is divided into six CDCs. This was based on population and its geographical location. The NSP had only effects through the projects on the village and not on customary structures. In most CDCs customary structures are also present, which manages tensions. Most of the village decisions are made by customary structures and the *malik*. The NSP/CDC seems to be responsible for NSP projects only. The customary structure advises on CDC issues, whereas the CDC has no role in issues concerning customary structures. One CDC is a bit more powerful than the others.

What NG22 (Box 2) evidences, and this was reported in many villages, is that customary authority and the CDC operate in parallel although often the CDC functions subject to customary authority. It was often stated that the CDC was for doing development work and all other village affairs were managed by village customary authority. 'Other village affairs', particularly related to dispute resolution (and all villages provided a rich record of disputes that had arisen and how customary authority had addressed these) and as will be seen below, the maintaining and building of relationships outside the village.

Annex 2: CDC turnover

A core indicator of performance of CDCs is the holding of elections (see section 3). As Coburn and Larson (2014) note in relation to national elections, what the international community sees as primarily a technical process and an isolated event has been commonly seen by the Afghan elite as part of wider political processes designed to keep power in the hands of the few and part of an ongoing process. It is likely that such a dichotomy of views exists at the village level as well. In principle, a study on elections and changing membership of CDC committees can provide insights into a number of dimensions of village life. These include the extent to which the elite are present on the CDCs, whether or not with electoral processes the elite are displaced, and the extent to which membership of the CDC is a desirable position and a statement of power within a village. In practice, much will depend on the extent to which key decisions are taken solely within the CDC, the nature of power structures within a village, and how they are expressed. Such an understanding of village-level power dynamics requires a very different sort of study from the one undertaken here.

Many of the CDCs studied had undergone two or more elections (32 of the 43 Badakhshan villages and 37 of the Nangarhar villages) since the CDCs were first established. Of the 32 Badakhshan villages, seven had not changed their membership in the election, seven had changed one or two members on the committee and 18 had changed three or more members. The statistics were fairly similar for the 37 Nangarhar villages, with eight making no changes, nine changing one or two members and 20 changing three or more members. For all villages of those who lost their position on the CDC, only a minority were on the list of influential people collected from each village.

While caution should be exercised in generalising, it was found that in many villages the most influential person often also held the position of head of the CDC. Twenty-one of the Badakhshan villages that have changed their membership had changed their heads of CDC; in only three cases were the new heads not on the list of influential people, and in only one case did the new head come from the small landowning class. In Nangarhar 19 villages had changed their heads; only two of the new heads were not on the village influential list and three of the new heads were from the small landowning class.

Thus there appears to be in many of the CDCs a turnover in membership, although we do not know either the motivations for those who stood, whether or not they stood for a second election, or if they simply stood down. But the fact remains for the key positions as head of a CDC, the majority of the heads were on the list of influential people and when a new head was elected, they tended also to be on the list of influential people.

What can be stated, as noted above, is that in many villages the CDCs were described as simply being concerned with being engaged in the development work and projects while the governance of all other aspects of village life continued through customary structures. Thus it is unclear to what extent evidence of CDC elections or turnover in committee membership tells us about changing practices of representation in a village, particularly if the village has been subdivided into several CDCs (or joined with another village). Equally it should not be assumed that villages do not have means of changing their customary authorities or are unable to remove non-performing village elite (e.g. the *malik*). Joachem et al.'s report (2016: 297) from an informant

who objected to the interference in village government, noting that if they did not like their *malik* they had the right to remove him and select another, is consistent with evidence collected in this study and other observations.

There is a further point. Social relationships underpin Afghan rural life and livelihood outcomes and many of these are based on some form of patron-client relationship with adverse terms for the client (Kantor and Pain, 2010). One cannot assume that households locked in dependent positions to landowners as sharecroppers or bonded labour (*Hamsaya*) are autonomous, given their dependent security – village data from this study has evidenced the extent of landlessness, finding levels of 40 percent or more of households being landless in the study villages (Pain and Sturge, 2015: 11-12). Such households are unlikely to vote as free agents in elections for CDCs.

Annex 3: External connections – networks of access

In each village questions were asked about the external connections that they had, how those connections were made (i.e. by whom), at what level the village connected to (district, province and capital) and what role these connections fulfilled. On this final point of the role of connections, there was a commonality in all the responses. For the village as a collective, external connections mattered in terms of getting resources and projects for the village or for resolving conflicts – internal conflicts that could not be resolved or more often conflicts with another village. For individuals, assistance was often sought to help process documents in the bureaucracy, find jobs for family members or help in placing children in high schools or university: in NGO6 for example, the Provincial Committee member played a key role in finding jobs for the villagers.

A number of summary observations are made on what was reported in relation to the nature of the connections.

First, external connections from villages are made on a highly personalised basis and the village elite play a key role in maintaining and exercising these connections. What was highlighted was the significance of customary authority in providing those external connections: in Nangarhar, for example, the *maliks* provided these key links and it was through them that individuals could pass requests or seek assistance, even if at times the *maliks* were selective in who could use their connections (as informants from NG002 made clear, 'not all people have access to these connections'). Where the connections were based on a common origin in the village, access seemed to be more general, but where connections were not based on a common origin they might be more exclusive. Thus in NG25, the most powerful external actors were noted to be from the area but not the village and that only the *malik* and some whitebeards had connections to them.

Particularly noted in Nangarhar was the inheritance of the *malik* position and the authority that came with it (NG07, NG29) and the very clear perception of the dual roles that the *maliks* fulfilled both in maintaining the external connections of the village and serving as head of the CDC. This was made clear in NG09:

> *The malik of this village [is] in contact with the District Governor. If anyone needs help from the malik in the DG office they can have access to this connection. As the malik is selected by villagers and recognised by district authority, this is why he is enjoying connections with different line departments, the district governor and chief of police. The malik is the only person who raises the voice of the villagers to district and provincial level. The malik is also the head of CDC and that is why he is also connected at provincial level. He is well-connected with the MRRD, and some line ministries. All villagers have access to his connections.*

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Second, the discussion of connections makes reference to specifically to key people or individuals in positions of power rather than the institution such as district government or provincial government, provincial council or central government that the key person might be a member of. Better-connected villages often spoke of connections at multiple levels, but where one of them was a key national figure, this could be the point of access to address provincial or district connections. Two villages (NG24 & 25), for example, made reference to President Hamid Karzai and the fact that someone from their village was an adviser to the former president, and they could make use of this connection to access assistance individually and for the village.

Third, the basis by which connections were made was based on close familiarity, linked to a common village identity or family connections. Thus in NG02, reference was made to a deputy minister who was from the village and that fact that 'if someone is faced with any problem at national level, they can use this connection'. In NG06 the PC member from the village was the nephew of the current governor and the *malik* was also related to the governor because the *malik's* father and governor's father were cousins.

Fourth, a consequence of this was that connections tended to be highly district-specific in terms of who could be connected to whom and where. Some districts were clearly better connected than others. Two districts that were particularly well connected were Dari Naw in Nangarhar, by virtue of the connection to the 'strongman' and MP Hazrat Ali (Jackson, 2014), and Khash in Badakhshan, through the Sharani family. Other districts appeared to be more marginal with weaker external connections, such as Kishim or Argo in Badakhshan.

Fifth, even in districts which were well connected, there were villages where external connections were clearly circumscribed. In these cases references might be made to a CDC member and their district connections but not beyond this. Such villages tended to be ethnic minority villages such as NG26, an Arab village in a predominantly Pashtun area.

Sixth, and reflecting the observations above, connections were often based on common identity. The Pashaie for example from Dari Naw exclusively made reference to their MP, Hazrat Ali, reflecting his key role in securing jobs and resources for his constituents (Jackson, 2014). Equally, in NG31, a Pashtun village, reference was made to one MP who had no role 'because he was an Arab'.

Seventh, party and political allegiance can also play a role; informants from NG06, NG10 and BD40 made reference to specific party allegiances and the effects of this. This was often commented on in relation to a well-known individual and his lack of presence or role in the village. Thus in NG02, reference was made to Governor Lodin, who was commonly described in a stock phrase as:

> a Hisb-i-Islami commander during the war times. He was very infamous for cutting ears of government soldiers capture[d] by him. During Karzai's time he became a parliamentarian and then member of the peace council and in 2014 was appointed as governor of Nangarhar. He has no role in this village.

A corollary of a lack of connection of a village or district to people in power at the provincial level is that the village or district may be denied resources. The playing off of districts in terms of funding is exactly what Jackson (2014) has described in relation to the actions of Nangarhar governors in their bids to secure and maintain power.

Equally, there is a *quid pro quo* for the *maliks* in term of benefitting from wider connections. In turn they fulfil the role of motivating people in elections and campaigning for presidential and PC candidates.

In sum, the evidence strongly supports the arguments of Sharan (2011) in characterising the critical role of informal networks and patronage relations in securing access to resources. As Sharan argues, and the evidence from Jackson (2014, 2015) supports, it is the dynamics of these informal networks that have shaped the process of formal institution building. Thus villages are connected to the external world on the basis of the personalised connections that they can build and maintain and customary authority plays a key role in maintaining these connections.