

Review of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (NMFA) support to ACTED in Faryab Province, 2013-2015

FINAL REPORT

Acronyms

ACTED	Agence d'aide à la Coopération Technique Et au Développement (Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development)
CBO	Community Based Organizations
CDC	Community Development Council
CHA	Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DAIL	Department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
DoLSAMD	Directorate of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled
DRRD	Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSRDP	Faryab Sustained Rural Development Program
FMFB	First Microfinance Bank of Afghanistan
KII	Key Informant Interview
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoLSAMD	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NMFA	Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NOK	Norwegian Krone
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
SHG	Self-help groups
SWM	Social Water Management
TOR	Terms of Reference
WUA	Water User Association
WUG	Water User Group

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Executive Summary

ACTED has done a good job in Faryab. [...] They have a good relation with people and people are satisfied with them. They have never been involved in politics and even people of Faryab consider them as an aid distributor or charity organization, which aims for the best. People know that they are foreigners [who are] trying to help them and it has never been a problem that they are foreigners. However, things are different today. The context is worse, it is more difficult to work with communities, even for ACTED. They must adapt themselves – and their partners as well, be they donors or implementing partners¹

The third phase of the *Faryab Sustained Rural Development Program (FSRDP)*, funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), began in 2013, with the primary goal of sustaining rural development in nine districts of Faryab province.

Given the current worsening security situation in Afghanistan broadly and Faryab province more specifically, this evaluation is particularly timely: the identification of the success and challenges of existing of the current project are necessary to identify a realistic roadmap for the NFMA and ACTED, as this will prove a pivotal time in identifying necessary internal and external changes.

While the study showed that, broadly, ACTED's work to date has been both relevant and, given the clear implementation challenges faced, successful, it also poses serious questions around the current programme model's applicability and sustainability moving forward.

Key programme and implementation successes:

- The relevance of ACTED's programming in Faryab is unquestionable: supporting good governance is more important than ever given the challenges the local government is facing in retaining control over the province. Gender remains a particular challenge in a province combining lack of security and a general conservative culture. ACTED has effectively targeted SHG toward women and included women in other forms of programming such as vocational training.
- The cooperatives and groups planned (water user groups, agricultural cooperatives, self-help groups, youth councils) were successful formed and beneficiaries reported benefiting both socially and practically.
- Beneficiaries of self-help groups and livelihoods training reported improved economic opportunities as a result of these.
- ACTED effectively maintained a position of neutrality in the province, enabling it to interact with not only the government but other politicised groups to allow for the safe implementation of programming.

Those very qualities which have proven the strength of ACTED's work to date – a focus on underserved areas, and a heavy community presence – are unrealistic given the evolving political and security landscape of the province, as necessary accountability and security parameters are not consistent with the reality of Faryab as it now stands.

¹ Key informant interview, Former ACTED M&E, Kabul, 6 January 2016

Strategic tradeoffs: the need for a new way forward

The provision of programming in an insecure province such as Faryab requires a number of tradeoffs (access versus security, remote management versus excessive autonomy, etc.) to ensure feasibility. Although, as noted above, thus far these have been justifiable – leading to successful programming – the evolving security situation requires a re-evaluation of positioning on these points. This re-evaluation strongly supports the need for a new approach to programming in Faryab province, as on a number of points the worsening security will prompt these risk tradeoffs require crossing a line which to becoming inconsistent with the responsibilities of an organisation providing aid sponsored by a foreign government.

Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3 below highlights the chain of effects the worsening security situation is having – and will continue to have, more strongly – on a number of programme strategy, management, and monitoring points.

Figure 1 - Challenges to programme strategy posed by increasing insecurity

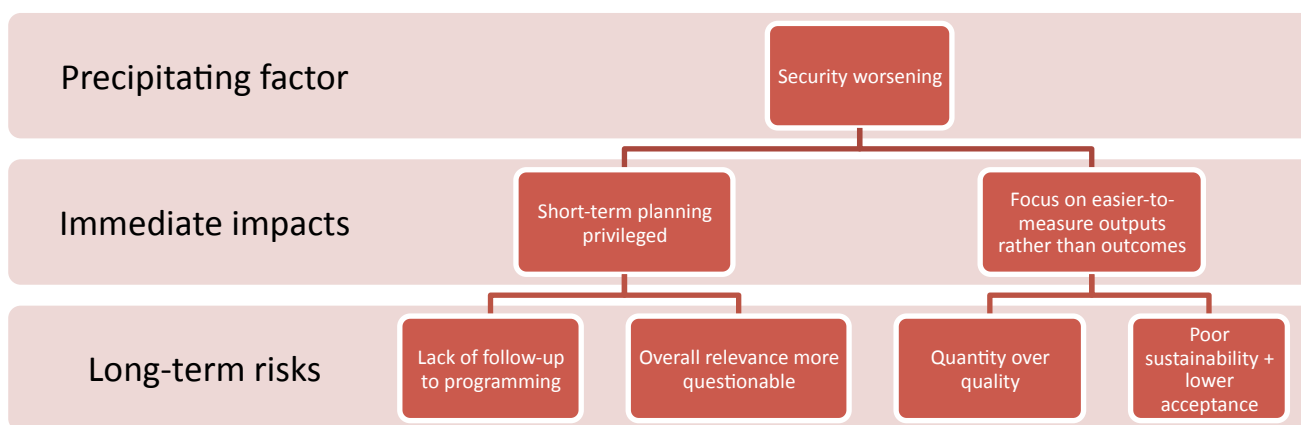


Figure 2 - Challenges to programme management posed by increasing insecurity

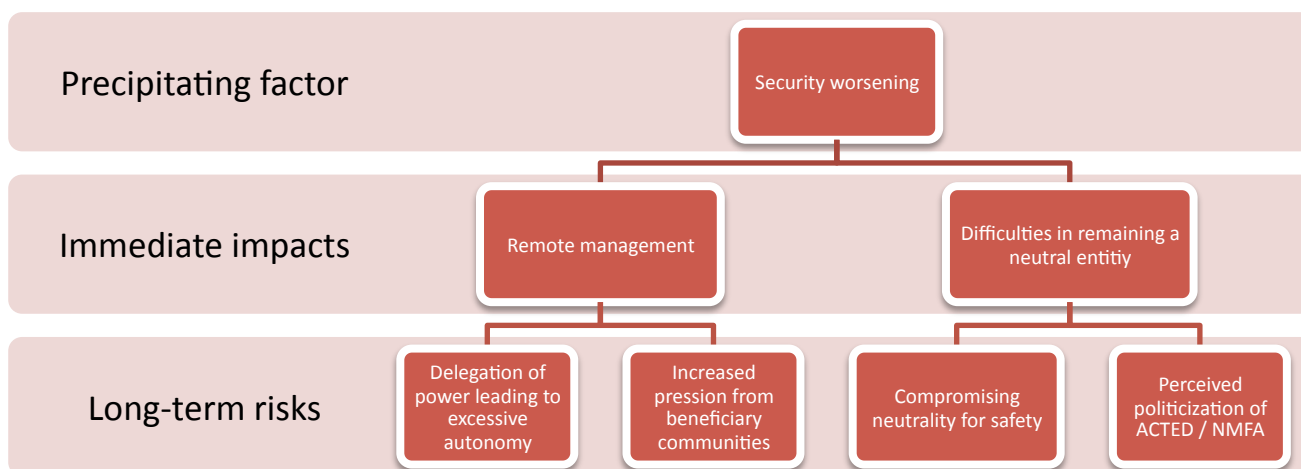
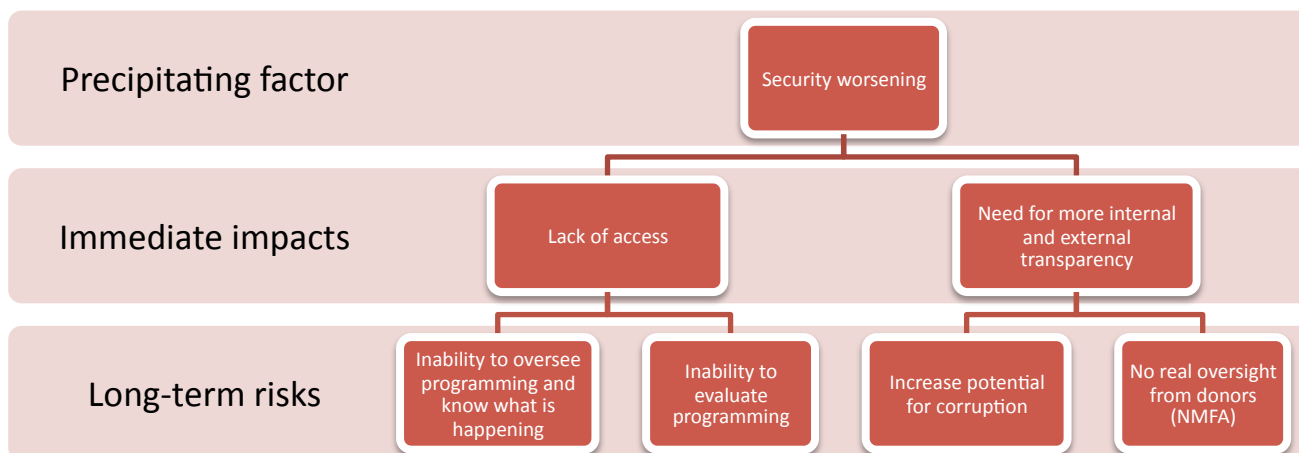


Figure 3 - Challenges to programme monitoring posed by increasing insecurity



Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, the following two key recommendations have been identified. **To avoid misuse of NMFA funds and accrued security risk to ACTED staff and beneficiaries, where these cannot be implemented, activities should be suspended.**

RECOMMENDATION 1: Concentrating activities in (relatively) secure areas.

The relevance of ACTED's programming across Faryab cannot be denied. However, organisations have responsibilities to their staff and to their donors, to make sure that staff are not facing unnecessary risks and funding is being used responsibly. This means privileging activities in the provincial capital and surrounding districts. It might lead to the following practical consequences:

- A much stronger emphasis of the Norwegian MFA on monitoring the activities of ACTED, with clearer and standard transparency and accountability requirements, to ensure proper use of funding.
- A potential (likely) reduction of the scope of ACTED's activities funded by the NMFA under FSRDP, as some – most – activities cannot be monitored and as their implementation often cannot be verified on the ground.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Improving accountability on all parts

The question of accountability – from an implementation and financial perspective – has been raised at several points with regards to ACTED. ACTED, however, is not the only actor here. The NMFA itself can take several steps to improve accountability, and minimise the potential for corruption and misuse of funds:

Firstly, the TORs for programming, and requested documents from partner organisations require more detail.

Secondly, the NMFA should, as standard practice, require benchmarking for budgets. This was given as a project-level recommendation above for ACTED, but truly should be standard in all programming. Eventually, a database can be created by the NMFA recording costs of typical activities in different regions. Budgets should not be approved without a way to evaluate the accuracy of projected field costs.

Lastly, a triangulated monitoring system should be developed in all the areas of operations. The triangulated approach would mutualize the efforts and expertise of ACTED M&E staff, communities (through community based monitoring approaches²) and focus exclusively on accessible areas.

If these two recommendations are not filled, neither ACTED nor the Norwegian MFA would have: 1) any reason to think that activities are actually implemented on the ground; 2) any way to monitor that the funds have been disbursed and allocated in an effective and impactful. Despite ACTED's efforts, this is clearly not the case yet.

In situations where these two primary recommendations can be filled, nine further recommendations have been identified:

- Further adapt agricultural programmes to local climate and market
- Create a centralised, standardised beneficiary database
- Conduct comparative cost assessment with other NGOs
- Improve accountability around communications procedures with the provincial government
- Continue to recruit staff from Faryab and specifically the targeted districts, and promote the hiring of more female staff
- Support mechanisms to bring together beneficiaries and employment opportunities
- Link together beneficiaries and individuals / organisations who can provide loans for business development
- Set up partnerships strategy with other NGOs in Faryab
- Support direct capacity building of the local government

² The NGO Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) has developed innovative tools that could easily be replicated and tailored to the Faryabi context: <http://communitymonitoring.org>.

Introduction and Methodology

1.1. Norwegian involvement in Faryab

The Norwegian government's involvement in Faryab province began in 2005 as the Norwegian military led the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in the province. Unlike others, the Norwegian PRT stopped developing civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) projects, after June 2007, and Norway instead started channelling most of its development assistance to Faryab through multiyear contracts and long-term programs with international NGOs.³

Funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA), the *Faryab Sustained Rural Development Program* (FSRDP) falls under this civilian-led strategy, with a clear focus on promoting good governance, and despite serious security concerns in Faryab province, support by the Norwegian government is ongoing.⁴ The Agency for Cooperation and Technical Development (ACTED) was awarded a grant of NOK 120,000,000 (approximately USD 14,535,000 at the time of award) for the funding of the third phase of this programme, which has been running from 2013 to 2016, with the primary goal of sustaining rural development in nine districts of Faryab province.

1.2. Political and economic context

Despite the involvement of the Norwegian government and others, the current situation facing Faryab province is fairly bleak:

Political environment: *security concerns are serious and worsening.* In July, Radio Free Europe rhetorically asked, "Is Faryab Province Quickly Slipping From Afghan Government," as the chief of the provincial council stated that Maimana was at risk of falling to militants.⁵ Recent events in Kunduz have made this fear all the more real: since the (temporary) fall of Kunduz, the Taliban have made several attempts to expand their influence in the North of the country. Faryab is at center of their efforts and they are particularly entrenched in the districts of Almar, Qaisar, Ghormach, Qaramqol and Dawlatabad.⁶ The Taliban have established footholds in far-flung mountainous areas and are now increasing attacks from there, for example the Mian Dara area, a 45 kilometers long valley in Pashtun Kot district only three kilometers from central Maimana. The highway between the two main cities in Faryab, Andkhoy and Maimana, is no longer safe. **This poses clear questions about future programming in Faryab – how can organisations implement programming where they cannot go? Should organisations implement programming where they cannot go?**

³ Geert Gompelman, *Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan's Faryab Province*, Tufts University, Feinstein International Center, January 2011.

⁴ Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) Evaluation Department (2010), *Evaluation of Norwegian Development Cooperation with Afghanistan 2001-2011, Report 3/2012*, p. 98

⁵ Pannier, B. (16 July 2015), "Is Faryab Province Quickly Slipping From Afghan Government Control", for Radio Free Europe, <http://www.rferl.org/content/afghanistan-faryab-militants-fighting/27131168.html>

⁶ Ali, O. (2012), *A Taleban Foothold in the North: Faryab fighting up after transition*, Afghanistan Analysts Network



Economic environment: *Employment perspectives are limited, in particular for women and youth.* The worsening security situation has had a negative impact on the employment situation, with more limited employment opportunities among NGOs and international organisations as these pull out of Faryab and their funding is diminished, and market opportunities are diminished as travel to other provinces becomes more difficult. The 2013 *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA)* reported employment rates of 66.5% among urban men and 77% among rural men, and 10.8% and 15.9% for women, respectively. Likewise, the Faryab labour market is characterized by underemployment as a majority of the workforce is absorbed in agricultural and livestock activities – which are mostly seasonal. Underemployment is more acute for women in Faryab, as many are un-paid family workers or confined to low-paid seasonal jobs such as shawl and handicrafts making or harvesting and threshing crops. Those who are not employed in agricultural activities are often engaged in low-profile jobs like making handicrafts or shop-keeping. While many people rely on income earned from economic activities, almost one third of the total population (31%)⁷ rely on remittances for their living that are mostly sent by their family members working in Iran. Since 2012-14, the international drawdown has progressively been accompanied by a parallel decline in funding from international donors, leaving Afghan government ministries – and key government functions in Faryab – with large budgetary deficits. As rightly pointed out by an economic expert in Kabul: *“The economic situation of the province matches its security context – it has sharply deteriorated and can be seen as desperate today.”*⁸

1.3. Objective of the midline evaluation

Recently, there have been calls from both the UN and the Norwegian government for strengthened use of evaluations, as the 2015 NMFA budget calls for *“systemic evaluations with consequences for the budget [to] be performed to strengthen the result of development policy.”*⁹ Considering Faryab’s security, political, and economic environment, the present report is therefore very timely, to, as noted in the consultancy agreement:

- As designed, act as a mid-line evaluation, examining the programme’s work with regards to its purposes and goal, and going over experiences so far, and
- Provide recommendations on how the programme can be improved in the future.

To do so, the research has three objectives:

- **Firstly, from an evaluative perspective,** to provide an assessment of ACTED’s activities to date in the context of the FSRDP Phase III funded by the NMFA,
- **Secondly, from an implementation perspective,** to highlight successes and challenges of this programming thus far, and
- **Thirdly, from a strategic perspective,** to provide recommendations based on the above, specifically targeted to the second half of the programming and potential future ACTED-NMFA collaborations in Faryab province. As part of these recommendations, the report will consider the roles and responsibilities of both ACTED and the NMFA in Faryab province, in the current context, and how, as necessary, to re-evaluate the relevance and feasibility of activities.

⁷ Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development: *Faryab Provincial profile*, 2012

⁸ KII with the World Bank, October 2015.

⁹ ACTED (2015), *Faryab Sustained Rural Development Programme Phase III Annual Report, 2014*, p. 4

1.4. Methodology

Overall approach

This evaluation was designed to gather as much information as possible given a) the limited timeframe provided by the NMFA and b) the current security situation in Faryab rendering most fieldwork locations inaccessible to all but members of the local community.

To do so, Samuel Hall designed a mixed-methods approach centred around the OECD-DAC criteria to evaluate intervention logic and impact:

- **Relevance:** “The extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries’ requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners’ and donors’ policies.
- **Effectiveness:** “The extent to which the development intervention’s objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance.”
- **Efficiency:** “A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results.”
- **Impact:** “Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development
- **Sustainability:** “The continuation of benefits from a development intervention after major development assistance has been completed.”¹⁰

Based on the contacts available to ACTED amongst staff and beneficiaries, a methodology was developed with the full support of both ACTED and the NMFA to gather representative information on each of the six outcomes targeted by the programming. Programme managers were consulted about each activity, and a representative sampling of both/either (dependent on available contacts and willingness to be interviewed) implementing staff and beneficiaries were interviewed.

Topics of particular concern

The report was specifically designed to gather information on four areas highlighted as being of particular interest to the NMFA and ACTED. Rather than specifically inquire about these, the general OECD-DAC evaluation of ACTED’s programming was designed to gather information about them across activities.

1. *Gender:* Women are one of the focuses of the second expected result to this project (improved economic potential of excluded groups) and a clear priority for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; SHGs were specifically targeted towards them. This research includes a specific gender focus to evaluate not just their effectiveness and impact but in particular their appropriateness in the current context.

2. *Youth:* Similarly, the focus on youth (defined by the United Nations as encompassing those between the ages of 15 and 24) is one on which ACTED has been working not just with the NMFA but also with other donors.¹¹

¹⁰ Adapted from SMES (2009), “Monitoring and Evaluation with Logical Framework Approach,” Module 4 of the SMES Monitoring and Evaluation Training Manual, Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation System (SMES) Project.

¹¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), “Definition of Youth”, p. 1, accessed at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

3. *Corruption*: Singled out in the TOR as a focus of the project, this research gathered information about possible instances of corruption in programming. When possible, the research team also compared costs for the various activities to those of other, similar projects from other donors, to underline potential problems there.

4. *Security*: The current security situation in Faryab province has already impacted activities and is generally considered to be worsening.¹² This research will provide recommendations on how to adapt activities moving forward to this more limited field of action.

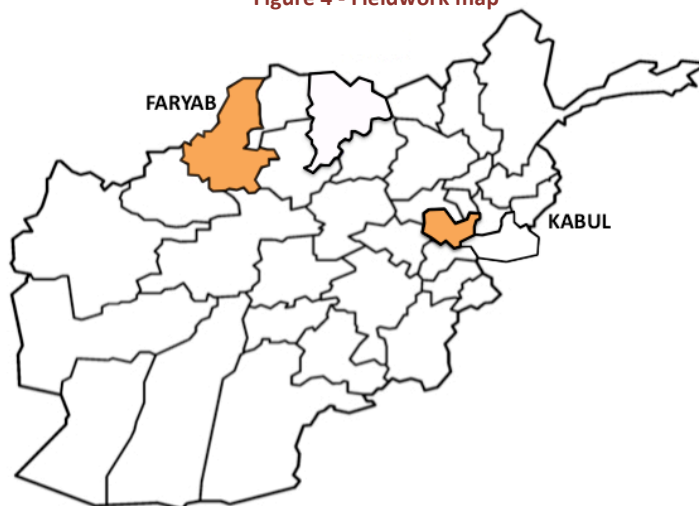
Geographic scope

Activities were implemented in nine districts in Faryab province. Given the current instability in Faryab province, a number of project activities are inaccessible.

A two-pronged fieldwork plan was therefore designed:

- **On location:** Samuel Hall's field coordinator will conduct a training in Andkhoy for Faryab-based Samuel Hall enumerators. This was followed by fieldwork conducted by the field coordinator in Andkhoy, and by the enumerators in the district capital of Maimana. In Maimana, enumerators conducted qualitative fieldwork with beneficiaries coming from surrounding districts. Enumerators included 2 men and 2 women, led by a male field coordinator.
- **Kabul based:** Using contact information for beneficiaries provided by ACTED, Samuel Hall enumerators conducted a quantitative survey with beneficiaries and staff of the various activities, and key informant interviews with ACTED staff and their governmental counterparts. Enumerators included 4 men and 2 women, led by a male field coordinator.

Figure 4 - Fieldwork map



Quantitative data collection – 314 interviews

Based on the contact information provided to date by ACTED, Samuel Hall conducted two quantitative surveys by phone from Kabul, with questions for a) staff and b) beneficiaries, based on the contact information provided by ACTED (**NB: some interviewees participated in more than one activity, for example, WUA and agricultural cooperatives**):

¹² Pannier, B. (16 July 2015), "Is Faryab Province Quickly Slipping From Afghan Government Control", for Radio Free Europe, <http://www.rferl.org/content/afghanistan-faryab-militants-fighting/27131168.html>

Table 1 - Quantitative interviews conducted

	Staff interviewed	Beneficiaries interviewed
Water user groups	0	29
Water user association	2	57
Agricultural cooperatives	0	110
Wheat seed multiplication plots	0	91
Model vineyards / greenhouses	0	13
Self-help groups	17	17
Good governance / other trainings	0	30
Health trainings	17	0
Preparation for the Kancor examinations	74	0
Community youth groups	3	17
Vaccination campaigns	13	0
Total interviewees:	112	202

Qualitative data collection

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) (5 total): researchers conducted 4 focus group discussions in Maimana and one in Andkhoy:

- Female participants in SHG (2)
- Youth members of CBOs (1)
- Beneficiaries of vocational training (1)
- Beneficiaries of Kancor preparation (1)

Case Studies (4 total): researchers conducted four case studies with beneficiaries of ACTED vocational training. These focused on the relevance and the impact of the vocational training, as well as the quality of the vocational training centres themselves.

Key informant interviews: researchers conducted several different types of key informant interviews:

Current ACTED Staff (11)

Former ACTED Staff (1)

Governmental Counterparts (14)

OTHER NGOs / UN organisations (2)

Site observations (2 total): Researchers visited training centres in Maimana and Andkhoy.

NB: to ensure the safety of interviewees, and enable them to answer directly, they are identified by directorate / organisation in the footnotes. It is important to note that more than one person was interviewed per directorate as can be seen in the full KII list to be found in the annex.

Constraints and limitations

The main challenges faced during fieldwork were the following:

- **Security:** The current security situation in Faryab limited the access of researchers to the districts where projects were implemented. As a result, the phone-based methodology described above was developed to ensure geographic distribution amongst respondents, however, this was constrained by another limitation, namely:
- **Incomplete and incorrect beneficiary lists:** the beneficiary lists provided by ACTED did not include all beneficiaries reported in annual reports. For example, no database exists of all CBO members. Additionally, a significant proportion of the phone numbers provided either did not pick up or were not in service (48% of numbers tried were inactive; of the active 52%, 2% did not pick up, and 4% did not report having participated in any ACTED-funded activities).
- **Gender:** The ability of women to move freely in Faryab province is heavily dependent on their family – meaning that those women able to come to Maimana for the FGDs may represent a more liberal sample amongst female SHG beneficiaries.

Cross-cutting themes and issues

Before evaluating the specific project activities, this section will consider the crosscutting themes of the FSRDP programming and evaluate general challenges to ACTED's projects in Faryab.

- How have the local context and situation impacted the programme? How has ACTED addressed these?** The relevance of ACTED's programming in Faryab is unquestionable: supporting good governance is more important than ever given the challenges the local government is facing in retaining control over the province. Gender remains a particular challenge in a province combining lack of security and a general conservative culture. ACTED has effectively targeted SHG toward women and included women in other forms of programming such as vocational training. The long-term impact of this remains less clear; women often face challenges in applying their new skills to employment.¹³ That being said, even in instances where women cannot apply their new skills, the social and personal impact that these trainings have are positive.
- How well designed is the implementation of the programme? Is there sufficient local ownership?** Governmental input in programming varied greatly by activities; a number of officials complained that they had been, in effect, sidelined in the programming. In the short term, this may allow for timely completion of projects, and limit discussions; in the long term, this limits the capacity of government to officially support and/or take over programming. A recurring comment from interviewees was the lack of local hiring by ACTED – but in fact, nearly all staff on this project came from Faryab province. This suggests that local hiring needs to be done at a “lower” level (e.g. district rather than province) to enable ACTED staff to access project sites, assuaging concerns around project monitoring and decreasing the potential for misuse of funds and corruption.
- How appropriate and effective are monitoring and evaluation procedures?** Although, based on conversations with staff, progress has been made from previous iterations of the project,¹⁴ a number of practical problems were noted in the ability of ACTED to monitor activities and insufficiencies in the current set-up.
- Moving forward, how sustainable is this programme in its current form?** The direct targeting of aid workers suggests that further work needs to be done in transferring responsibility for programming to local government entities and community-based organisations, as the ability of NGOs to support programming in more rural districts especially will continue to decrease.

¹³ A 2014 evaluation of a job skills training programme for the World Bank found that, even in the case of a well-executed training programme, less than 10% of beneficiaries found employment as a result. This research underlined that while the social and personal aspects of such trainings are clear, care must be taken to make sure beneficiary, community and local government expectations are in line with expected results.

¹⁴ Key informant interview, former ACTED Youth Programme manager, 26 November 2015

2.1. Key contextual challenges addressed by ACTED to date

Mitigating security problems

“Faryab has been one of the most insecure areas in Afghanistan for the past few years. You have both external insurgents, and also internal politics, which destabilize the situation. The main security risk is from the transit – from provincial centres to districts, community acceptance does not help with this. This is the main challenge where our staff movement has been limited. Unfortunately the situation isn’t always easy. This also poses problems for our contractors are also facing a lot of difficulties in the areas taking the construction materials, engineers to the sites. While they implement the project at the local level, the insurgents may cause problems – we have had materials burned, looted.”¹⁵

The problems described above by the ACTED country head are not limited to ACTED. The direct targeting and harassment of the NGOs working in Faryab has proven quite serious in the recent past, including kidnapping and killings of NGO staff. Other NGOs implementing humanitarian projects in Faryab have suffered from attacks ranging from verbal harassment to physical assault on their staff as well as on their offices and projects.

“Unfortunately in Faryab in 2012 we lost two of our staff in Kohistan. They were member of NSP project and when they travelled to the district they were kidnapped by Taliban and killed. (...) In 2014, we lost another staff member in Kwaja Sabz Push district, first four staff members including the driver were kidnapped and after a month they killed one of them and released the other three.”¹⁶

As a result of these problems, ACTED has enforced severe restrictions on mobility and a greater emphasis on remote and community-based monitoring – with the clear implications that this has on the ability to a) implement programmes and b) monitor them. For example, in the case of Self Help Groups, the awareness raising for the latest SHGs has been done over the phone.

The general response by NGOs in Faryab to the security challenges, in addition to limiting staff movement, has been to emphasize the role of the community in keeping staff safe:

“The community is why we are still in Faryab, many times our staff was kidnapped and released with the help of the community. The Community is supporting us, we have offices in the districts of Faryab and it is very difficult if not impossible without the community’s support. They are looking after us they are informing us on the threats, telling us when not to come to the office...”¹⁷ - DACAAR

“Although we are present in insecure areas, in terms of security since we are close to the communities and the CDC members as well as the government officials at the provincial level. Before the incidents happen, we receive reports and messages, for example in Kunduz we closed the office before the incidents happened there was only one guard left when the Taliban came.”¹⁸ - CHA

While remaining close to communities – and ensuring their involvement in the programming, certainly can help organisations to avoid some security issues – it is not sufficient to mitigate the challenges posed by insurgents and wide-spread fighting. To date, ACTED has been able to successfully keep a relatively

¹⁵ Key informant interview, ACTED Country Director, Kabul, Afghanistan, 27 October 2015

¹⁶ Key informant interview, Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (CHA) Community development Programme Manager, 23 November 2015

¹⁷ Key informant interview, DACAAR Chief of Projects, Kabul, Afghanistan, 17 November 2015

¹⁸ Key informant interview, CHA Community development Programme Manager, 23 November 2015

“neutral” position in Faryab province, with lines of communication open not just to the government and local communities but also other politicised forces:

“Some of ACTED’s employees work and try to reach to an agreement with Taliban militants in order to implement the project [...] For example, if they have a project in one of Ghormach district they will consult with them as to in which village they should implement it, therefore, Taliban are satisfied because [ACTED is] forced to implement the project in the village which belongs to them.”¹⁹

Although this forced collaboration contains its own challenges, the very fact that it can occur means that ACTED as an organisation is more able to ensure the security of its programming than other organisations with no such lines of communication. As another key informant put it,

They [ACTED] do not work with the government, they work with people and Taliban never can create any problem for any of their projects because people are involved in those projects and there is interest and benefit of people. If Taliban would like to create any problem then people will stand against them and the Taliban never wants to lose the trust of people.²⁰

Overall, though, organisations such as ACTED and their donors must seriously consider whether or not to continue implementing programming in these remote areas – and at what cost. Supporting local authorities in taking over responsibilities will not suffice if organisations and donors wish to be able to continue monitoring where their money is going. Programmes must be specifically designed to allow for external monitoring with adapted indicators.

Implementing women-oriented programming

Although not as strictly enforced as under the Taliban, gender norms still limit the roles and rights of women in Afghanistan. ACTED’s baseline survey, for example, indicated that 23% of women in Faryab could not travel, 20% could travel 1 km safely, 43% stated 5 km, and 12% could travel over 10 km.

This renders the implementation of projects targeting women difficult on several fronts:

- Ensuring that women can go to the programming locations
- Ensuring that women are allowed to participate in these activities
- Ensuring that enough qualified female staff can be recruited for these activities.

In ACTED’s programming, these challenges manifested themselves clearly at several instances:

- The 2014 Annual Report notes difficulties in recruiting female beneficiaries for the Maymana Vocational Training Center project and for expanding this projects in other districts. Indeed, in 2014, they were 79 trainees in the centre of which only 18 were females. Past livelihoods project in Faryab province have achieved much higher rates of female inclusion.²¹
- Recruiting sufficient female teachers is also difficult, due in great part to lack of qualified female instructors.

¹⁹ Key informant interview, former ACTED staff, Kabul, Afghanistan, 7 January 2016

²⁰ Key informant interview, Former M&E ACTED, 6 January 2016

²¹ For example, graduated beneficiaries of NRC’s YEP programming in Faryab province, as of 2014, included 442 women and 270 men. While the security situation has made inclusion of women more challenging, this livelihoods programme had 62% female beneficiaries, versus 23% to date in the programming under review.

To address these, and the broader cultural challenges, ACTED took specific precautions with regards to its female-specific programming, especially the Self Help Groups. These can be viewed as controversial in heavily conservative areas. Therefore, ACTED

- Progressively implemented them in the districts of Faryab to increase the communities' acceptance.
- Highlighted the potential capacity of these SHG to create immediate financial and social benefits
- Conducted gender trainings to sensitise male relatives of the beneficiaries and members of these communities.

However, the gender trainings intended for the male relatives of the beneficiaries to sensitize them on gender issues did not even succeed in reaching half of the SHGs (Relatives of only ten SHGs have received gender trainings).²²

Furthermore, the majority of the SHGs established are located in the provincial province or in the nearby districts indicating that ACTED's specifically targeted gender activities are still very limited geographically to the centre of the province and nearby districts. The more broadly ranging activities tend to be of the agricultural and natural resources components, which have more limited impact on women. **Future iterations of these could include an additional focus on women's rights in the associated trainings.**

²² ACTED (2015), *Faryab Sustained Rural Development Programme Phase III Annual Report, 2014*

2.2. Limited local ownership of the FSRDP-III

Local participation and ownership of the FSRDP-III remains limited, as reports from key informants note that collaboration with the local government varies significantly by activity (despite MoUs signed with the ministries in Kabul), and the commitments in the MoUs are not always held up at the local level. Despite positive moves on this front, ACTED continues to be perceived as having limited local hiring (whereas in actuality, of the 266 ACTED staff on the project, 259 are from Faryab province).

Limited collaboration with the local government

The key informant interviews conducted with the heads of the different directorates of the provincial council clearly showed the need for a deeper cooperation with the governmental institutions at the local level. Generally, the *mechanisms* for collaboration exist, and ACTED participates in them (both direct relationships with the concerned directorates, as well as inclusion in broader NGO coordination meetings such as cluster meetings), differing reports were given on the *practices* in place. While ACTED reported close collaboration with government officials – and indeed, in some sectors, such as education, these were quite satisfied – and committed to submitting a copy of the MoU, project executive summary, budget and the entire project action plan as well as systematically involving local governance actors in all program events and to organizing regular field visits,²³ many interviewed government staff reported not being involved enough in the design and implementation of projects.

“The position of directorate of agriculture should be determined in their project, we should be the partner of project not the supervisor of project. (...) They should include us from the survey and designing a project till the end of project and our staff members should be responsible and co-worker in all aspect of their project with them. When they are making a plan for their project, they should consult with us, and the villages’ members. (...) For example, they established poultry for women but they did not bring all documents for us, and the land on which they built the poultry, does not have legal document and they do not consult with us before starting their project.”²⁴ – KII, Directorate of Agriculture

“I suggest that for each project they should have a monitoring group to monitor the progress of project and give information to people on the budget, timeline, contractor, implementer and services of project in order to make the project more transparent. We did not have any problems in the past but we want the project to be more transparent, because when they start the project we do not know who are the contractor and implementer of project? What is the fund? What is the deadline? And what services they should actually render under this project?”²⁵ – KII, Directorate of Agriculture

“ACTED never shows us their projects’ proposals, although I asked them many times and as the partner I should have the right to check whether they are performing their projects according to the proposal or not. I need to know how many beneficiaries they consider for their work and how much budget they consider for each line of activity and I do not know why they do not want to share their proposals with us.”²⁶ – KII, DoLSAMD

²³ ACTED, (2011), *Communication Mechanism and Tools for Provincial level GIROA Authorities*

²⁴ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 16 November 2015

²⁵ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 15 November 2015

²⁶ Key informant interview, DoLSAMD, Faryab, Afghanistan, 17 November 2015



It should be noted that some of these criticisms can be explained by the need to balance the information given to the local government and the potential for using this information for other, less positive, purposes (for example, possibly increasing risks for corruption by spreading financial information around).

This limited collaboration poses one further key challenge: as noted by one key informant, the only way to ensure project sustainability is to “[involve] the government, which should build trust with the people, and go to the area to say, ‘we have gotten this project fund from the international community, we would like you to take care of it.’” The government should tell people that if they fail to take care of maintenance, they will not implement any further projects.²⁷ Given the current situation in Faryab, the government’s role in ensuring the responsabilization of beneficiaries is even more crucial.

Human resources management

The management of human resources, especially of the staff present on the field, is an important impediment to the success of ACTED’s projects in Faryab. While ACTED’s decision to implement severe restrictions on mobility and a greater emphasis on remote and community-based monitoring was motivated by legitimate security concerns, a number of interviews indicated that this had severe consequences on the implementation and the monitoring of the projects.

Firstly, the restrictions on mobility imposed on ACTED’s staff have limited the contacts with the community and the beneficiaries, which resulted in a lack of understanding of the needs of the community as well as the specific characteristics of the field – despite the community-based programming of which ACTED boasts.

“DACAAR implements better projects, because ACTED don’t conduct survey, they don’t go to the field to train the farmers practically but DACAAR does. (...) Other organisations also operating in Faryab, they distribute soybean and they are better than ACTED because they consult with farmers, community leaders, community members and the provincial government before implementing their projects. They also conduct survey before starting the project; they go to the field and also monitor their progress.”²⁸

“The main problem of ACTED is the lack of links with the community. They are relying on locals and not going to the areas of implementation at all. [...] ACTED’s staff are not willing to go to the field, so their functioning is too centralized.”²⁹

Secondly, ACTED staff are perceived as not being from the areas where they are working, despite significant effort going into ensuring that the majority of staff are from Faryab. Several key informants complained that staff were not hired from the area. This suggests two points: firstly, that ACTED should emphasize their local hiring in conversations with governmental interlocutors to ensure that relevant counterparts are aware of it (97% of employees are reported to be from Faryab province). Secondly, that hiring may need to be “localised” at a lower level (i.e., district- rather than province level).

“Their staff members should be hired from the area because, if you bring someone from Mazar-e-Sharif or other provinces, they do not know the area and also they are not familiar with the people of area and they face with many problems.”³⁰

²⁷ Key informant interview, former ACTED staff, Kabul, Afghanistan, 7 January 2016

²⁸ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 15 November 2015

²⁹ Key informant interview, DACAAR Chief of Projects, Kabul, Afghanistan, 17 November 2015

³⁰ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 15 November 2015



“I suggest that ACTED’s staff members should be hired from Dawlatabad, because if they hire the staff members from Dawlatabad, they know the area and people better.”³¹

“Recently, people complained from ACTED with regards to their staffing, they asked ACTED to hire their staff members from Faryab not from other provinces because we have professional people and they know the area and people and secondly this project is for Faryab and our people should be benefited from all its privileges.”³²

Finally, the impossibility for ACTED’s staff to monitor some projects in the more insecure districts have made them very reliant on other actors who do not always respect the criteria and standards set for the projects.

“ACTED implemented the projects successfully in secure areas as we were witness and visited the sites and projects in person [...] For insecure areas, we received some rumours that the projects were not implemented with high quality and quantity and they used low material in their projects and there were corruption in their projects. Since we are [also] not able to travel to those areas and we did not visit their projects in person, it is early to judge about their projects [there].”³³

2.3. Monitoring and evaluation – specific problems

Monitoring and evaluation has been in the past highlighted as a weakness of the FSRDP project.³⁴ While improvements have been made (a monthly report is made for each component, for example, detailing outputs and challenges) there were several instances where lack of necessary information made this evaluation – and by extension, any other – difficult.

Lack of complete beneficiary lists

Complete beneficiary lists were requested for this evaluation to be able to reach beneficiaries by telephone for interviews. While we understand that in some cases, beneficiaries may not have, or be willing, to share telephone numbers (especially women), an up-to-date beneficiary database should exist to track progress. Instead:

- Quality of information collected varied significantly by component, and ranged from phone numbers and personal information about the beneficiary to nothing at all (in the case of CBOs, for example, which sometimes just collected the key contact’s information)
- Beneficiary databases are put together on an ad hoc basis – format for these varied even within activities from district to district – and in many cases, are not digitalised.
- For several activities – such as beneficiaries of vaccination projects and health trainings – no beneficiary lists existed – or at least, none were provided. Certainly, the need for follow-ups is more limited than with say, vocational training beneficiaries. But the lack of even a contact number for a community leader means that there is effectively no way to confirm information provided by community health workers on the work done.

³¹ Key informant interview, Shirin Tagaab River Zone Water Management Office, 18 November 2015

³² Key informant interview, Directorate of Education, Faryab, Afghanistan, 17 November 2015

³³ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 15 November 2015

³⁴ Key informant interview, former ACTED Youth Programme manager, 26 November 2015

Lack of specificity around indicators in the log frame

The log frame developed by ACTED for these activities contains indicators for all expected outputs. However, **these are limited in number – and range in appropriateness, “evaluability,” and clarity.**

For example, to evaluate outcome #1 – improved natural capital – “sustained growth in legal rural incomes for cooperative members” was given as an indicator. Firstly, in Afghanistan, especially in rural areas, household income is difficult to measure accurately. Identifying statistically significant sustained growth in income would require a substantial growth in income – and fail to measure slight but important changes. Secondly, without contact information for all cooperative members, it is difficult to measure their income. An alternative, more concrete indicator would have been to measure household assets at the start and finish of the project – with the added advantage that it is easier to gather information on such concrete measures.

With regards to clarity: the log frame includes various terms such as ‘good’; ‘optimal’; and ‘sufficient’ that are subject to interpretation. These require further clarification. Similarly the concept of “made employable” is not clear and not indicative of the improvement of the economic potential of targeted groups. Indeed, acquiring skills is not the sole condition needed for employment. Job opportunities and communities’ acceptance are for example important factors that intervene in the employability of people. A better indicator would be for example to calculate the number of people reporting income attributable to skills development programming.

Translation errors in evaluation tools

The Samuel Hall translator noted slight, but in some cases, significant, differences between the English and the Dari versions of the ACTED Baseline survey (along with some missing translations), as can be seen in the table below.

Table 2 - Selection of translation errors identified in the baseline

Dari from the survey	English version from survey	What the dari translates to
مواشې محصولات فروش و تولید	Production and sales of livestock and products	Production and sales of products
غذا ساختن مهی برای فروشات	Sales of prepared food	Sales for preparing food
در کار از غیری (مزدورکاری زراعت کویکنار)	Agricultural wage labor (non-opium)	Dari does not make sense
یا جا و – غذا فقط مواد تمام از منزل	All input, food and accommodation	All input, only food and accommodation
تولیدات برای مشخص پول مقدار زراعتی	Fixed Amount of Agricultural Production	Fixed amount of money for agricultural products
غله	Corn	Grains
هستید؟ سزای چند مالک	How many houses do you own?	How many warehouses do you own?

If such translation errors are present across the evaluation tools, this poses serious concerns around existing measures of outputs.

2.4 Risk factors looking forward

The security situation in Faryab is worsening, which presents challenges for implementation and increases the potential for corruption and misuse of funds as monitoring becomes limited – which could worsen some of the questions about ACTED’s financial management detailed below.

Deteriorating security conditions in Faryab

The complex and deteriorating security situation has been the biggest challenge for the work of the NGOs in the province. Armed clashes between Armed Opposition Groups (AOG) and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are frequent. In addition, different political groups notably Dostum’s Jombesh-e Melli party, the Azadi party, Jamiat-e Islami and Hezb-e Islami parties often clash for different reasons ranging from expanding their influence to competing over the drug trafficking routes.

Last August, the Vice-President Dostum returned to his military uniform and spent weeks leading an operation in Faryab. All the districts in Faryab including Ghormach were declared clear from the Taliban after the end of the operation, however within days, the insurgents made a mockery of the general’s efforts, reclaiming those territories and more.

In addition to the heavy presence of Taliban members in Faryab, the important influx of foreign fighters poses another serious threat to the security of the province.

“There is no national soldier and only 10 policeman in the whole province. There are many foreigners from the bordering countries joining the insurrection and Faryab is a training centre for Taliban especially Almar and the areas bordering Turkmenistan”³⁵

“Since August, we have received 60 incident reports in Faryab in different districts so the situation is definitely getting worse. (...) Even the highway between Maimana and Andkhoy that was previously safe is currently extremely insecure, even the government officials as for police escorts when they take this road.”³⁶

One key informant evaluated the accessibility of key districts in Faryab province at the current time:

Table 3 - Accessibility of districts in Faryab Province³⁷

District	Accessibility
Blichergh	More accessible because, although government is not in control, non-Taliban groups with good relations to the government are (Qomandans)
Gurziwan	70% under government control
Pashtun Khot	50% under government control; the south and south-east are more accessible
Almar	Only the centre can support programming
Kohistan	60% accessible
Andkhoy	Only the city of Andkhoy can support programming
Qaidar	40% accessible
Shirin Tagaab, Khwaja Sabz Posh, Dawlatabad	30% accessible

³⁵ Key informant interview, DACAAR Chief of Projects, Kabul, Afghanistan, 17 November 2015

³⁶ Key informant interview, CHA Community development Programme Manager, 23 November 2015

³⁷ Key informant interview, former ACTED staff, Kabul, Afghanistan, 7 January 2016

Existing questions about financial procedures

The scope of this research does not include a full financial audit, and was limited by time in terms of following up on all potential instances of corruption mentioned in interviews. Two points, however, should be underlined for further investigation:

Firstly, ACTED's staff costs are perceived as outweighing the actual spend on projects.

"[In the respondent's opinion] The government is not much satisfied from the ACTED because their services were not enough for their projects, if we compare their administration costs and salaries they pay to their staff members with the services/donation they provided to farmers, you can see their office costs are much more than their funds for farmers."³⁸

Secondly, concerns have been raised around the procurement processes as ACTED's costs were greater than those of other organisations operating in the area – for no additional quality.

I think there is a problem in their procurement office, for example DACAAR and ACTED built green houses, the green house for ACTED is cost 265000 Afs while DACAAR spent 200,000 Afs and their quality is much better than ACTED's one. When I asked both organizations to give me the breakdown for expenses, DACAAR gave me but ACTED did not give me and it is a question for me now. They are not much responsive and do not have much coordination with us.³⁹

The **transparency** of ACTED's work was called into question by a former staff member, who stated that:

ACTED always would like to get the reputation and financial advantage for itself [...] ACTED's staff members are involved in corruption and they always make deals with contractors and people in the projects to benefit from those projects. There is not a strong management to follow-up the project and bring transparency. If they send an M&E team to supervise at the end you will find that they also made a deal with other staff members and make a fake report. [...] I was responsible to report to [the government] but I did not have the right to report the real work to them.⁴⁰

If this report is in fact accurate in all parts, it should be of strong concern to both ACTED and the NMFA. The very fact that financial irregularities / corruption are *believed* to be happening should be of great concern as it means that future counterparts will most likely expected financial benefits, regardless of whether or not they have in fact occurred to date.

³⁸ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 15 November 2015

³⁹ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 16 November 2015

⁴⁰ Key informant interview, former ACTED staff member, Kabul, Afghanistan, 7 January 2016

Evaluation of ACTED Activities

This section examines in greater detail the activities conducted to address the two specific objectives of this project, namely,

- To increase incomes and strengthen livelihoods assets in Faryab, and
- To ensure community development on a long-term basis through community based organisations.

Each activity has been evaluated on the five OECD-DAC criteria (relevance; efficiency; effectiveness; impact; sustainability) so to enable the evaluation of the progress of the six expected outcomes as summarised in the table below. Star ratings have been assigned based on the information gathered during the research around each aspect of the six expected outcomes. The ratings run from 1-star (weakest) to 4-star (strongest).

Table 4 - Overall evaluation of six expected outcomes

EXPECTED OUTCOME	Relevance	Efficiency	Effectiveness	Impact	Sustainability
1. Improved natural capital	****	***	***	****	**
2. Improved economic potential of excluded groups	****	***	**	**	**
3. Improved human capital	****	**	**	**	***
4. Improved social capital / increased integration of young people	****	**	***	**	****
5. Better governance (political) capacity	****	****	**	**	****
6. Improved physical asset	****	***	***	**	***

Generally, while the relevance of the activities was clear – the logic for their implementation well-reasoned and adapted to the local context – they faced challenges in implementation (hence, the lower efficiency and effectiveness ratings). The impact has generally been rated as neutral: as the project is still underway, like most of the activities, judging their full impact is impossible. The sustainability of the projects will be heavily dependent on funding – hence, those with high financial requirements have been rated lower on this metric. Overall, although they had criticisms, beneficiaries and governmental representatives interviewed had quite a positive perception of ACTED and the activities in conducted.

I have a good perception [of ACTED's activities] and I appreciate their works; they did a lot for us. Please deliver my thank you to Norwegian tax payers who helped us with their funds.⁴¹

However, a major *caveat* remains the lack of accountability and transparency. In a worsening security context, the neutral and external evaluation of the project has become almost impossible and the implementation has also increasingly been challenged on the ground.

⁴¹ Key informant interview, Directorate of Education, Faryab, Afghanistan, 15 November 2015

3.1. Natural capital

“Natural capital can be defined as the natural resources that communities and individuals can access and utilise. This includes the type of land available, for example: arable land, sloping hillsides, rangeland, marsh etc. It can also include the quality of land, for example: productive, over-grazed, and degraded, as well as the availability of water resources. Natural capital can also include other resources such as the mineral wealth (e.g. coal, clay, and gemstones), timber, and the bio-diversity of the surrounding countryside. The variety and adaptability of agricultural crops should also be considered a key aspect of natural capital.”⁴²

In the case of the FSRDP-III, natural capital was addressed through two key components:

- Agriculture
- Social Water management

The logframe for ACTED’s activities for this Phase III of the FSRDP includes five indicators on which these were to be measured.

Table 5 - Progress towards indicators, expected outcome #1, as of 2014 Annual report

Indicator	2014 Annual Report – Progress towards indicator
<i>Increased area under irrigation</i>	Increase of 3,504 hectares of irrigated land (from starting point of 53,055 ha)
<i>Increase in the number of households reporting water availability</i>	35% of households state that “conditions of the overall irrigation canal system” have improved in past two years
<i>Increase in the % of households sustaining “optimal” agricultural yields</i>	No information
<i>Sustained growth in legal rural incomes for cooperative members</i>	No information
<i>Increased on-site production of “key quality input supplies”</i>	Three high-yield wheat seed multiplication plots had been established

Under these components, the following activities were conducted (NB: water- and agriculture- related infrastructure construction will be addressed under expected outcome #6, “Improved physical assets”):

Social water management component:

Creation of water user groups and associations

As of September 2015, ACTED reports that this component is at 69% completion, with security the primary challenge faced.⁴³ The following numbers of Water User Groups / associations created were given (representing only one additional WUA created since the 2014 report, in Sherin Tagab):

⁴² ACTED (2015), *Faryab Sustained Rural Development Programme Phase III Annual Report, 2014*, p. 15

⁴³ ACTED SWM October 2015 Monthly Report

Table 6 - WUGs/ WUAs created, including those from all phases of the project

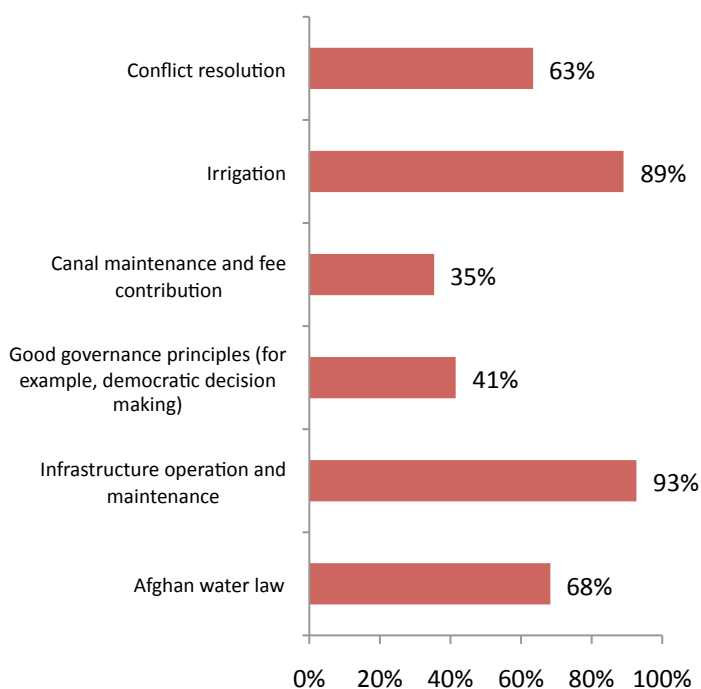
Districts	WUG	WUA
Almar	30	2
Qaisar	84	8
Kohestan	75	8
Pashtonkot	57	11
Khawaja Sabzposh	29	5
Sheren Tagab	22	4
Dawlat Abad	9	1
TOTAL	306	39

From a **relevance** perspective, the rationale for the creation of WUGs/WUAs is clear: in the heavily agricultural province of Faryab, ensuring that a) water is available, b) water distribution is fair, and c) people are aware of how to maintain infrastructure which distributes power are all objectives consistent with the needs of beneficiaries.

However, the **effectiveness** of these activities and their implementation is less clear. Comparing participants in water user groups & associations to other farmers in Faryab who have not participated in these reveals similar rates of access to water for irrigation (97% vs. 100%).

Of the skills reportedly taught to members of the WUGs/WUAs in trainings, a number have not (or not yet) been included in trainings. ACTED staff reported trainings on conflict resolution; seeking redress; good usage of water; community member responsibilities; community leader responsibilities; responsibilities of

Figure 5 - Trainings attended by WUG and WUA members interviewed



the *merab* (water manager), infrastructure maintenance; and organising voluntary “tasks”.⁴⁴ However, as can be seen in the figure below, beneficiaries did not report attending all of these.

ACTED staff interviewed noted implementation difficulties, although these were not detailed, and suggested that further awareness-raising is required in areas which are not yet aware of what WUGs/WUAs do.

“As I have been witnessed and learned from this project, people were less interested in the first phase, so there were many problems in the implementation process, but by the passage of time, these problems have been removed as the people been further aware of our operations and they are now much more interested.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Key informant interview, ACTED, Mobilisation staff, 15 November 2015

⁴⁵ Key informant interview, ACTED, Mobilisation staff, 15 November 2015



On the **impact** front, 98% of beneficiaries interviewed reported that the trainings offered by the WUGs/WUAs had increased their household income.

The reliance of members on the *merabs* for water distribution does pose some long-term questions around **sustainability**. 88% of respondents noted that the *merab bashi* (water manager) is in charge of managing irrigation systems for water distribution. However, while this distribution is considered to be very fair in 99% of cases when water is abundant, this figure drops to 88% when water is scarcest, with 5% calling it “very unfair” – yet this is when it is most important that water distribution be fair. Previous research on water user associations in Afghanistan has noted that reliance on the traditional *merab* system for water distribution can be problematic, the water user associations themselves should be leveraged further, as *merab* institutions are dominated by local power structures.⁴⁶ In a situation where external supervision is no longer present – highly likely given the current security situation in Faryab – it is incumbent upon ACTED to ensure that the WUAs themselves are more highly involved in water distribution and not just maintenance.

Agricultural component:

Creation of agricultural cooperatives

Agricultural cooperatives are included among the community-based organisations created by ACTED. Members of the cooperatives, in addition to trainings, participated in seed distribution and demo plots.

As with the water user groups and associations, while the **relevance** of the projects is unquestionable, their execution and long-term programming require further consideration, notably on the following points:

PROJECT MONITORING.

The locations of the agricultural projects can make it difficult to monitor all the components. Districts such as Almar and Qaisar pose clear security concerns.

“When the security situation was good, they [ACTED] could travel to the field and monitor their projects and give trainings to farmers on the field but later when the security situation got bad, they were not able to travel”⁴⁷

“DACAAR staff members go to the fields and visit farmers more often than ACTED. I do not know why ACTED cannot be like DACAAR and it might be due to facilities or insecurity.”⁴⁸

The project monitoring also suffered from structural deficiencies: lack of centralised beneficiary records was discussed earlier. From a practical perspective, this posed difficulties in for example the collection of fortified wheat seeds from the wheat seed multiplication plots:

“The only problem we face is collecting back the seeds they distributed to farmers because some of the farmers makes complain they could not take a good result and some of them are Qomandan Salar (Local Commanders) and even I cannot say anything when they do not give me back.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ USAID Afghanistan (2006), *Water User Associations (WUAs) in Afghanistan*, p. 2

⁴⁷ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 15 November 2015

⁴⁸ Key informant interview, Shirin Tagaab River Zone Water Management Office, 18 November 2015

⁴⁹ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 17 November 2015



"[ACTED] could not recognize/identify the original farmers [to whom they distributed seeds] at the end they came to me to collect the seeds and gave them to other farmers [...] also, they do not bring the fertilized seeds on its time for the farmers."⁵⁰

COOPERATION WITH RELEVANT GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS.

Previous sections noted the differing relationships between ACTED staff and governmental counterparts, depending on the activity. **Agricultural stood out as a sector where governmental counterparts tended to be most critical, noting several key points where communication was insufficient and the impacts this had had on the projects:**

Lack of transparency: Governmental counterparts had very little information about the projects prior to their start – critical to successful monitoring from the governmental side, and to be able to point out potential problems:

We did not have any problems in the past but we want the project to be more transparent, because when they start the project we do not know who are the contractor and implementer of project? What is the fund? What is the deadline? And what services they should actually render under this project?"⁵¹

Lack of implication of government at the start of projects: respondents noted several points where the lack of implication caused projects to fail, either because of legal problems or because ACTED did not have relevant information which would have impacted location selection.

Agriculture is a seasonal sector and we have to plant everything on time and also every area has its season, for example the season for potato in our area is the month of Dalve (January) and in Gurziwan it is Hamal (March). They started their project in all area at the same time and I told them many times that it is wrong, for example the case of potato, what should I do with potato seeds in the month of Hamal (March)? while I need it in the month of Dalve (January).⁵²

CORRUPTION.

One government official noted issues of corruption in a cooperative in Kohestan, noting that ACTED staff collected income from the usage of tractors given to the cooperative – the government is currently investigating this rumour to confirm the exact situation.⁵³ Whatever the results of this investigation are, it shows that the pivotal role of ACTED in Faryab – from a political, social, and economic perspective – expose the organisation and its representatives to criticisms, attacks, rumours, and false or true allegations:⁵⁴ *"ACTED is a symbol in Faryab. One could say that when ACTED sneezes, Faryab catches a cold. In a changing environment, it is important for them to understand that, more than ever, they have to be crystal clear, transparent, accountable, and take into account communities' point of view. The security context should no longer be an excuse. If ACTED delegates to local actors or puts a lot of responsibilities in the hands of their field people, they also have to implement a proper checks and balances."* (M&E consultant, Kabul, former-ACTED)

⁵⁰ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 15 November 2015

⁵¹ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 15 November 2015

⁵² Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 15 November 2015

⁵³ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 16 November 2015

⁵⁴ Unsustained corruption issues were noted by two former staff members, as well as a governmental interviewee.

MARKET AVAILABILITY.

On the vegetable seed distribution front, several government officials noted that not only were some of the seeds distributed inappropriate for cultivation in the local area, but also that there were in some cases no markets for them locally, limiting their potential impact to local consumption.

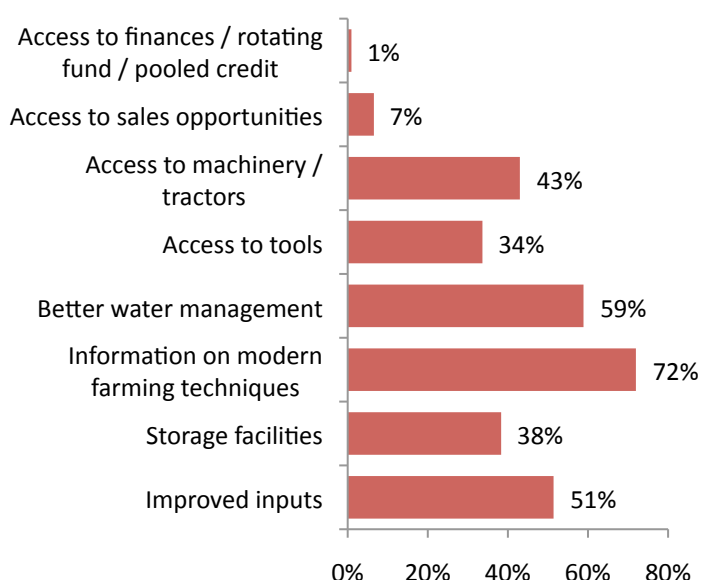
“We need a market for our products [...] for example we sell 7 kgs of dried raisin for 350 Afs which is very little [...] we need services with regards to market.”⁵⁵

FAIRNESS OF DISTRIBUTION OF BENEFITS.

While the access to tools and storage facilities promoted by agricultural cooperatives was generally rated as “very fair” (81% and 83%, respectively), better water management and information on modern farming techniques trailed this, with only 51% of those receiving these benefits rating distribution of these benefits as “very fair” – suggesting that training techniques can still be improved.

In fact, the spread of access to benefits amongst members of different cooperatives itself suggests that the structure of the agricultural programmes requires strengthening to ensure that all targeted beneficiaries receive them, as can be seen in Figure 6. The access to sales opportunities in particular is problematic as – as has been noted above – this is a key component to the success of other activities conducted by ACTED in the context of the agricultural cooperatives, such as seed distribution.

Figure 6 - Benefits of agricultural cooperatives that respondents can access



While the effectiveness and efficiency of the agricultural cooperatives could therefore stand improvement, the overall impact of these activities was generally well-rated by beneficiaries:

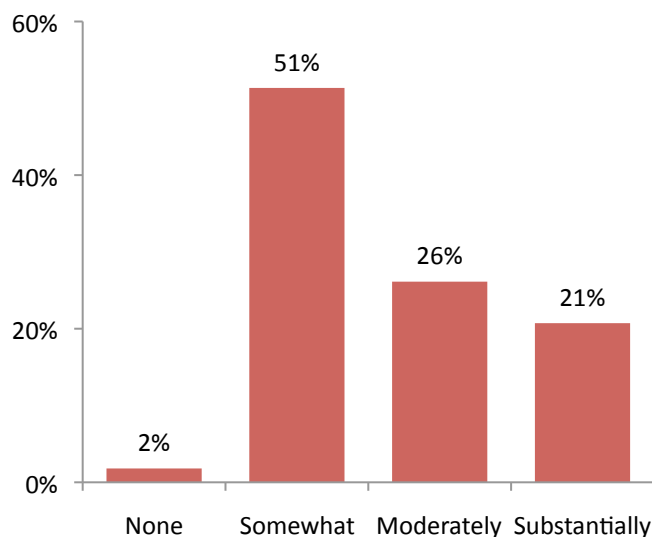
- 79% of beneficiaries interviewed noted that the agricultural trainings given led to their income increasing, with only 17% saying these had not had an impact and 4% claiming these trainings had led to income decreases. The trainings on integrated pest management and irrigation techniques were most frequently rated as leading to income increases (86% and 84%, respectively)
- Nearly all respondents (98%) stated that membership in an agricultural cooperative had had at least somewhat of a positive impact on their income (see Figure 7). The value of this indicator, however, cannot be considered outside of the nuances, both positive and negative, brought by the remainder of the qualitative and quantitative data – the fact that they received seeds, for example, would be enough to be considered a positive income impact – regardless of the availability of

⁵⁵ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 17 November 2015

markets, the appropriateness of the seeds to local conditions, etc. The fact that by far most of those reporting a positive impact considered it to be a “somewhat” positive impact (51% of respondents, vs. 26% considering membership in the cooperative has helped their household impact “moderately” and 21% “substantially”) suggests that while the value of agricultural cooperatives is indisputable, their modalities present room for improvement.

- Of those benefits which sufficient beneficiaries reported having access to to judge impact, improved inputs (35%), storage facilities (32%) and better water management (32%) were most likely to correlate with reports that membership in the cooperatives had led to substantial improvements in household income (of beneficiaries with access to these, 35%, 32%, and 32%, respectively, noted a substantial improvement to their income).

Figure 7 - Extend to which respondents feel that membership in an agricultural cooperative has helped their household income



From a **sustainability** perspective, adapting the programming to the local context and local markets will be crucial to making sure beneficiaries both want and can continue the new techniques and products they have learnt about.

3.2. Economic potential of excluded groups

“In Faryab, youth and women still face significant economic exclusion. The FSRDP seeks to ameliorate this situation through a skill development program that includes vocational training for male and female rural youth, and a Self Help Group (SHG) component to empower women entrepreneurs.”⁵⁶

Both the Self-Help Groups and the vocational training programmes received high marks from their beneficiaries, who highlighted the improved economic opportunities these provided for them. Nonetheless, from an execution point of view, some opportunities for progress remain, notably with regards to beneficiary selection and materials provided. Especially given the increasingly difficult security situation in Faryab, there are valid concerns as to whether or not the vocational trainings will prove sustainable for women in particular.

Vocational training

Previous Samuel Hall research has detailed how **“the challenge of access to employment is especially acute for youth [...]** The prospects facing youth are thus of unpaid or vulnerable labour opportunities. [...] Samuel Hall’s 2013 *Participatory Assessment of Afghan Youth* found that approximately 29% of youth were employed, many of these in the service sector, which will most likely be contracting in the next years. At the same time, the number of youth seeking employment will most likely increase, given the “youth bulge” of Afghanistan’s population.”⁵⁷

The relevance of vocational training to youth who have few or no opportunities is clear – and embraced by beneficiaries themselves:

“Before I attend the programme, I did not know tailoring and the biggest problem for me was lack of a profession, so I sometimes went with my father for doing some construction tasks as a day labourer. I was faced with lack of jobs and money before the program; thus, I had decided to go to Iran for labouring before I was advised by the community leader to get admission in the program and earn \$30 every month.”⁵⁸

Despite their approval of the programming, governmental counterparts, as has been previously noted, complained that they had not been consulted in the planning stages.

One key question, as with the Self Help Groups, is around the quality of the material provided to beneficiaries during and after the programming:

“After the programme, we were provided with some tools required for tailoring; for example, one manual sewing machine, one electric sewing machine, one table and chair, one scissor, 10meters cloth, 5 meters curtain and some amount of threads. I received the toolkit, but I did not use it for they had a very poor quality; for example, I exchanged the 1500AFS-sewing-machine given from the programme with a 3500AFS-machine and paid the difference from my own.” – Case study respondent

⁵⁶ ACTED (2015), *Faryab Sustained Rural Development Programme Phase III Annual Report, 2014*, p. 4

⁵⁷ Samuel Hall (2014), *Evaluation of NRC’s Youth Education Pack (YEP) Projects in Faryab, Herat and Nangarhar*, commissioned by the Norwegian Refugee Council, p. 7

⁵⁸ Case study, beneficiary from Qaisar

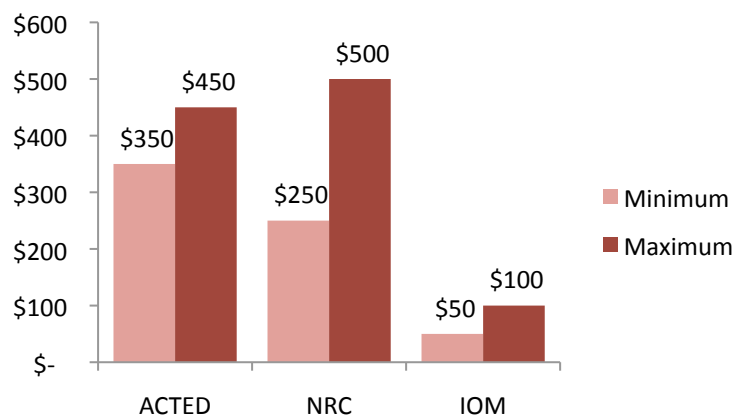


“We were provided with some tools such as one computer for 3 graduates, one printer, one power generator, some amount of blank sheets and cartridge for the printer. One scanner machine was missing. Most of them had poor quality; for instance, the computer was not working, so I needed to exchange it in the market.” – Case study respondent

These complaints are surprising as the cost of each toolkit is comparable to that spent by other organisations for toolkits which were positively received in other Afghan vocational training programmes, as can be seen in Figure 8. While, admittedly, the cost of toolkits varies by livelihoods training type – those given for comparison here included very similar types of training, notably tailoring. The key point here is that ACTED is, on

average, spending as much, if not more, than other organisations, on toolkits, for toolkits which are not being rated favourably by many beneficiaries – suggesting the need to review their contents and quality.

Figure 8 - Reported minimum and maximum spent on vocational training toolkits, organisational comparison⁵⁹



Self Help Groups

The appropriateness of Self Help Groups in the Afghan context has been discussed – and agreed – at length in previous research. Previous Samuel Hall reports have highlighted them as “a proven way to mobilise people from the same community since they understand each other better. It also mitigates the risk of non-repayment through peer pressure. Another advantage of SHGs is that they can be mobilised for group savings as well.”⁶⁰ **Generally, the SHGs appear as one of the more successful components of ACTED’s programming from a non-financial perspective: for limited financial input, women report clear, positive impacts on their self-image and role within the family, fulfilling the primary goal of such projects.** The impact of the programming on secondary goals such as increased income is less clear: although 91% of SHG monitors interviewed report a positive impact on SHG participant income, reports from the fields of average SHG-earned income were significantly lower than those noted by ACTED documentation.

BENEFICIARY SELECTION. Beneficiary selection is conducted in conjunction with key community elders – this has in some instances led to challenges as for example, in one case in Pashtunkot the local leader was introducing candidates who did not fulfil beneficiary criteria, requiring further discussion around the programme requirements.⁶¹ These requirements themselves were somewhat flexible as, although the age range was set as 18-45, the contact lists for SHGs provided by ACTED show a number of women older than

⁵⁹ Based on toolkit prices as reported for IOM’s vocational trainings conducted as part of its return and reintegration programming, and NRC’s YEP programming. These included, amongst others, trainings such as mechanics and tailoring.

Evaluation of NRC’s YEP Projects, p. 29

⁶⁰ Samuel Hall (2013), *Assessing Potential for Micro-finance in Rural Livelihoods*, commissioned by the First Micro Finance Bank of Afghanistan, p. 48

⁶¹ Key informant interview, ACTED, SHG Component Manager, 17 November 2015

this (9 out of the 86 for whom ages are given). The auditing requirement for beneficiary selection is being followed through as beneficiaries reported auditors checking up on the houses of the women selected by the community.⁶²

COMMUNITY SENSITISATION. To address community objections and concerns to women-centred programming, ACTED has conducted community sensitisation exercises.

“Number of people was not happy with the program at the beginning, but late we discussed with the community elders and at the same time we have provided mullahs with gender trainings in order to make them talk with people and especially with the influential people of the community.”⁶³

However, these have not covered all communities where SHGs have been or are being created: 15% of SHG monitors interviewed noted that no men in the community received training around gender, and an additional 21% noted that men in the community had received this training, but not necessarily their relatives. Additionally, due to security concerns, the awareness programmes for insecure areas are being done over the phone.⁶⁴ Given the importance of these – those reporting that men in their community had attended these trainings noted that the trainings meant that “the men who participated now have a different understanding of women working” – this last point is of significant concern. Several beneficiaries reported in a focus group discussion that awareness raising had been responsible for their male relatives allowing them to participate in such a programme:

“My brother was changed after he attended the seminar conducted by a human rights organisation about women’s rights; before that he used to stop me from going to school.”

“My brother attended a seminar of human rights about the rights of men and women, and my sisters and I saw the positive changes in his behaviour afterwards.”

“My only problem [with participating in the SHG] was my father’s prohibition. After a peer of my village talked to him he allowed me to attend the programme. The men in my family are very narrow minded.”

Trainings conducted over the phone, especially given the often poor state of Afghan communications networks – cannot have this same effect – and therefore calls into question the future access of women most in need of these programmes to the SHGs.

QUALITY OF MATERIALS and TRAINING LOCATIONS.

Several beneficiaries reported that the materials provided for the training and to continue the activities afterwards were of limited quantity and insufficient quality, while the locations where trainings were conducted were not always adapted to weather conditions.

“Because this project was self-assistance, so I [lend] my house to ACTED [for the trainings], the rooms are small and the windows don’t have plastic. And we don’t have a stove.”

“The problem of the group is that our place is small, the rooms for tailoring should be big. The needed materials are not enough, the materials are not good quality.”

⁶² FGD with female FGD beneficiaries

⁶³ Key informant interview, ACTED, SHG Component Manager, 17 November 2015

⁶⁴ Key informant interview, ACTED, SHG Component Manager, 17 November 2015

“The problem of Shaadaab groups is this that we don’t have fair place because the weather is cold and the windows don’t have plastics, we can’t work well there. “

“The problem was with our sewing machines, when they broke down, we couldn’t fix them up due to not having money.”

“They should give these materials six months later for practical works as well because the students can’t buy the needed materials for practical work, if practical lessons become more than theoretical lesson that would be great”

The component manager for the SHGs stated that the “allocated amounts of money [for purchasing materials] were not enough”.⁶⁵

As some beneficiaries did report that they were quite satisfied with the materials provided, it would seem that quality varied from one training to another.

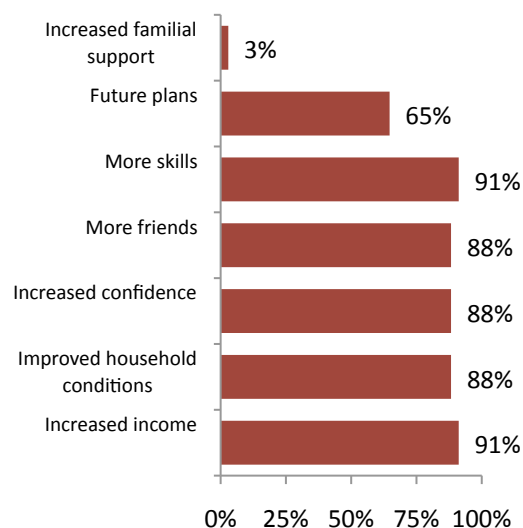
Despite the small sample size, this makes it clear that both ACTED – and the donor – must be able to answer this discrepancy. To do so, they must 1) have clear price indications of each component and 2) as suggested by the Cash Working Group, conduct a benchmarking exercise for each of these. The cost structure for these trainings must be clear and fair compared to other organisations.

FINANCIAL IMPACT.

The project is functioning as designed: of the 34 SHG monitors interviewed, 33 reported that their SHG had a bank account, and beneficiaries have seen positive income changes attributable to their participation in the SHG (see Figure 9). All reported that their SHG had a business plan and a designated bookkeeper.

However, the handling of money coming from ACTED is more obscure, even to the monitors: of the 34 interviewed, 11 did not know if their SHG had received money (with 22 saying yes, and 1, no). The amounts received reportedly ranged from 50 Afghani to 400000 Afghani. 71% reported that their SHG earns no money in a month, with the remainder reporting between 600 and 10000 Afghani earned per month. Although sample size is low, these numbers are significantly lower than those noted in the ACTED’s summary of SHG product flow in January, February and March of 2015, which ranged from approximately 40,000 to 55,000 Afghani average monthly profit per SHG.

Figure 9 - Effects of SHG participation on beneficiaries, according to SHG monitors (n=34)



⁶⁵ Key informant interview, ACTED, SHG Component Manager, 17 November 2015

SOCIAL IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

“Women who couldn’t come out from their homes, now they can earn money and they can offer their products in markets. Now their husbands let them go to bazaar to provide the material they need for their products.”⁶⁶

Figure 9 above highlights the effects of SHG participation on beneficiaries, and was confirmed by the FGD conducted amongst beneficiaries, who noted for example, “There is a big change with me and that is the profession that I learned. [I have learned] from the experience of the elders. I behave well with the people and respect them. Women in Faryab province grew up in an illiterate and poor community, they have many challenges. They don’t know about their rights.”

⁶⁶ Key informant interview, ACTED, SHG Component Manager, 17 November 2015

3.3. Human capital

For this component of the programming, existing health networks and associated programming (established in phases 1 and 2 of the FRSDP) were continued. While the existing health network was continued, given the security situation, various changes were made to the implementation strategy, including conducting trainings within health clinics, offering trainings to both male and female high school students, and chlorination of water sources.

Previous phases of the programme provided adult literacy courses, in particular for women. The planned literacy training component, however, was changed to a Kankor preparation class, to avoid duplication of efforts with other literacy programmes run in the same areas.⁶⁷

There is a clear rationale for both the health programming and the Kankor preparation classes as a path to improving human capital in Faryab province:

- The 2010/11 Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (CSO/UNICEF) calls for the promotion of good hygiene practices, stating “There is considerable potential impact from expanding the adoption of several key basic hygiene practices for the prevention of disease and death. Changing unsafe practices related to water and sanitation access will be imperative for improving health outcomes among the Afghan population. [...] Further, targeted interventions should address regional disparities, as well as disparities much more pronounced in rural areas.”⁶⁸
- The Kankor preparation classes are important not just to prepare youths for the examinations, but also to help them understand the importance of taking it. “By participating in this training program I understood what Kankor is and how to be successful in it.”

In evaluating these programmes, however, questions must be raised about the efficiency and effectiveness of their implementation.

Health trainings

The health trainings aim to provide beneficiaries with information around sanitation and hygiene. These trainings, conducted by community health workers (CHWs) especially target women, female students from the schools, and families with children under the age of 5. 50% of beneficiaries at least are to be women.⁶⁹ Among these community health workers are women, a useful point to emphasize given the sensitive nature of some of the topics under discussion (in particular, sanitation).

The quality of the information provided, as of the 17 community health workers interviewed, the breadth of the topics they covered in the trainings they gave varied significantly, as can be seen in Figure 10.

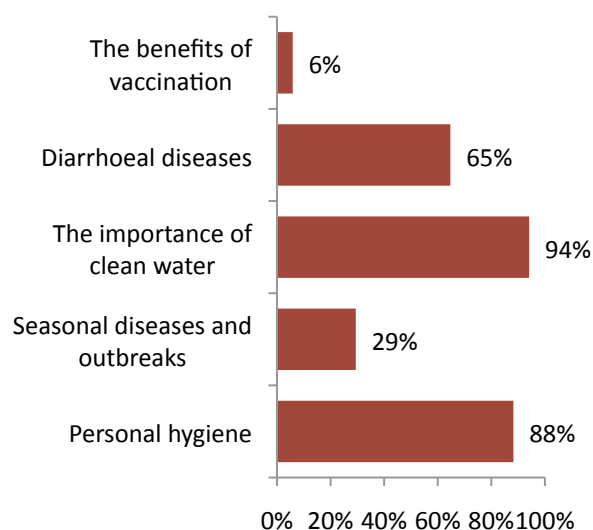
⁶⁷ The Kankor training programme kickoff meeting noted that a number of NGOs, as well as the department of literacy, had begun literacy courses in districts also targeted by ACTED (specifically Almar, Qaisar, Pashtunkot, Kohistan, Khoja Sab Posh, Dawlatabad and Shirin Tagab) in 2014.

⁶⁸ Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) and UNICEF (2012), *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2010-2011*, p. 85

⁶⁹ Key informant interview, ACTED, Wash-Hygiene Component Manager, 16 November 2015

This may be at least partially due to the background of the CHWs – rather than medical professionals, these reported that their background in health came from NGO trainings. This more limited training may cause them to feel less comfortable with more technical issues such as the benefits of vaccination. The fact that more than half of those community workers interviewed (10/17) report not having conducted any trainings in the past year further supports that they may not be comfortable doing so – lack of practice certainly would not help teach topics with which they are not comfortable. This also calls into question assertions by the programme manager that all female CHWs had to be graduated from midwifery training.⁷⁰

Figure 10 - Topics covered in health trainings (n=17)



MEDIA AFFAIRS.

The health programming was further supported by Radio *Sehat*. In addition to youth-specific programming, the radio focused on a number of health issues:

- Psychological health (of key relevance given that mental health is a grossly underserved and misunderstood sector in Afghanistan),
- Counter-narcotics,
- Women and health,
- Health and remedy, in which common diseases are introduced with appropriate treatments, and
- Question and answer sessions with a doctor.⁷¹

These programmes are only broadcast from 8am to 4pm.⁷² This corresponds to working hours for many inhabitants of Faryab, out in the fields. The impact of these programmes could then be significantly increased by extending broadcast hours, thereby reaching more listeners.

Kankor preparation classes

Due to the change of plans described above, the Kankor classes have only recently begun, making their implementation and final impact difficult to evaluate. Previous Kankor training reported a 90% success rate in sending students to university.⁷³ Despite this, one can note clear differences in challenges faced from the other component to their common expected outcome (the health trainings).

⁷⁰ Key informant interview, ACTED, Wash-Hygiene Component Manager, 16 November 2015v

⁷¹ Key informant interview, ACTED, Media Affairs Component Manager, 18 November 2015

⁷² Key informant interview, ACTED, Media Affairs Component Manager, 18 November 2015

⁷³ ACTED, Kankor kickoff meeting notes



The qualitative research shows that, to-date, the Kankor preparation classes have been quite successful in motivating youth to take the test and teaching them how to take it, with professional teachers who are well appreciated – but that from a practical perspective, the classes could be improved on several points. These also highlighted difficulties with schooling prior to the Kankor examinations – which must be addressed by the department of education

ON IMPACT:

“This training programme created motivation for us. I learned how to take the Kankor test. My level of knowledge increased and my behaviour got better. I encourage others to [participate in] this training programme.”

“This training programme created a motivation to take Kankor examination. The struggle we do in this programme [will help us] to have a good future. Before this, I was not familiar with Kankor tests, or how to take Kankor examination. My level of awareness increased.”

“In the past I didn’t know how to take Kankor examination but now I know how to take the test. I want to go to university because I want to serve my country.”

ON TEACHERS:

“The teachers were behaving very well and they had good skills.”

“The teachers were professional, they had good behaviour.”

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES:

Materials provided. *“There is [a] shortage of materials of lessons. We don’t have practical lessons they are just theoretical. First there should be a fair place [to learn] and then there should be practical lessons besides theoretical.”*

“I am 50% satisfied with this programme because the books that should be taught in preparing for Kankor are not enough.”

“We received the materials of the lessons late.”

“We couldn’t solve some of our problems for example in laboratory section because this office didn’t make a laboratory because they didn’t have its budget.”

Timing of programme. *“The problem was this that it was at the time of school, school and this programme were at the same time.”*

Implied problems with previous schooling. *“We didn’t know anything in these subjects before participating in this programme. By participating in this programme we learned many subjects like mathematics, physics, chemistry because we have Kankor test in near future.”*

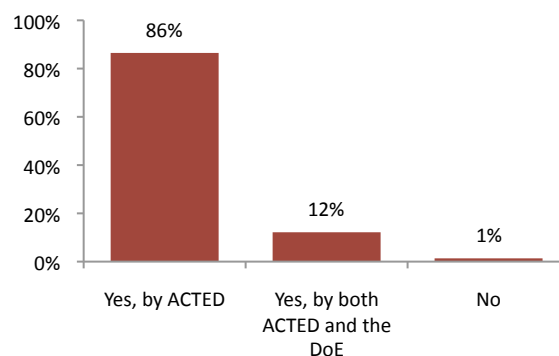
“Before participating in this programme I was weak in some subjects so I needed to participate in this programme.”

The quality of the teachers was confirmed by the interviews with them, which found that 32% had gone to teacher training college and 68% had a bachelor's degree. ACTED has been conducting regular monitoring of classes (confirmed by the teachers) and to date not noted problems. While this monitoring system is joint with the educational department, to date ACTED has conducted the majority of evaluations, as can be noted in the figure below. Care should be taken to involve the DoE further to avoid problems with them later.

The component manager did note a key additional problem in implementation: teacher salaries were originally postponed for two months (no reason was given).⁷⁴ Problems such as this could potentially impact both the effectiveness of the programming – unpaid teachers are not happy teachers – and its sustainability, as the teachers may not wish to continue working in future iterations of the programme if they face difficulties in receiving their salary. This particularly concerning for **female teachers**, of whom there are already not enough (according to 32% of teachers interviewed); given the limited numbers of qualified females in Faryab, it is important to ensure those who are teaching will wish to continue to do so.

Looking forward to the long-term goals of the programme, the component manager states, “considering the primary outcome of this programme, I think it will have an outstanding impact in coming 5 years. The goal followed by this programme is to invest on youths’ education, because this will indirectly lead to improvement in terms of social security and social economics.”⁷⁵ To ensure that this comes to fruition, it is incumbent on both ACTED and the donor to ensure that the next steps are feasible for the youth involved. If they cannot, for example, afford to go pass the Kankor examination and go to university afterwards, are Kankor trainings the best use of their time?

Figure 11 - Have your classes been evaluated



⁷⁴ Key informant interview, ACTED, Kankor Component Manager, 18 November 2015

⁷⁵ Key informant interview, ACTED, Kankor Component Manager, 18 November 2015

3.4. Social capital / integration of young people

This “youth empowerment” component has been created to address the fact that young people have a limited role in their communities, generally remaining excluded from decision making processes and with limited economic opportunities. To address this, ACTED has supported the creation of youth councils as well as youth development centres where literacy and other subjects are taught, and sports activities offered.⁷⁶ The revised Phase III proposal details the goals of this component as follows:

“Faryab SRDP III promotes social cohesion through integration of young people as key drivers of change and provides opportunities for inter-community social interaction. Youth councils engage young people in governance and management and supplementary education enhances young people’s potential to compete for higher/further education opportunities. Sports, cultural and media facilities and events provide opportunities for the people of the districts to come together and build relationships.”⁷⁷

Although the youth participating in the CBOs/youth councils and in the trainings at the youth development centres are generally enthusiastic about them, the focus from their perspective is on the employment side of things. Sports are appreciated as a health / fun activity. The impact on community implication and youth integration, if any, is less clear.

There seems to be confusion between the role of the CBOs themselves, and the opportunities for development which they have provided through youth development centres.

The rationale for creating youth councils & community based organisations was made clear to the community and ACTED staff as follows: “The key people of the community also had a role to start the programs in these districts because they thought that the youth community need to bring some changes in order to motivate them stay in their own locality and work.”⁷⁸

This focus on **work** carried through the programming, as the manager commented for example on the computer and language skills taught in the development centres saying “these skills where highlight necessary [...] to learn because at the end of the project we expected them to have a job, and be able to work in offices and to create revenue.”⁷⁹ Given the current economic situation in Faryab, several questions must be considered:

- *Are these skills applicable to the current job market in Faryab?* The departure of some NGOs and reductions in funds makes the office jobs for which these programmes are training youth few and far between.
- *Are these programmes creating a conflict between employment opportunities and encouraging youth to remain in Faryab?* Part of the rationale for this programming is to encourage youth to stay in Faryab, as noted above. However, the skills the youth are being taught prepare for jobs which are more common in larger cities in Afghanistan (such as Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif).

⁷⁶ ACTED (2015), *Faryab Sustained Rural Development Programme Phase III Annual Report, 2014*, p. 69

⁷⁷ ACTED, *Revised FSRDP Phase 3 Proposal*, p. 7

⁷⁸ Key informant interview, ACTED, Youth (Sports and Culture) Component Manager, 15 November 2015

⁷⁹ Key informant interview, ACTED, Youth (Sports and Culture) Component Manager, 15 November 2015

Youth clusters / CBOs

In terms of the CBOs themselves, a few key points were identified:

FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS.

The frequency of CBO meetings reported by the youth cluster representatives interviewed is generally monthly (4 of the 20 interviewed) or about bi-monthly (9 of the 20 interviewed), rather than the weekly frequency reported by staff.

SIZE OF YOUTH COUNCILS.

The size of the youth councils varies fairly significantly, based on interviewee responses, who noted clusters ranging from 16 to 400 male participants and 0 to 50 female participants.

KEY CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH COUNCILS.

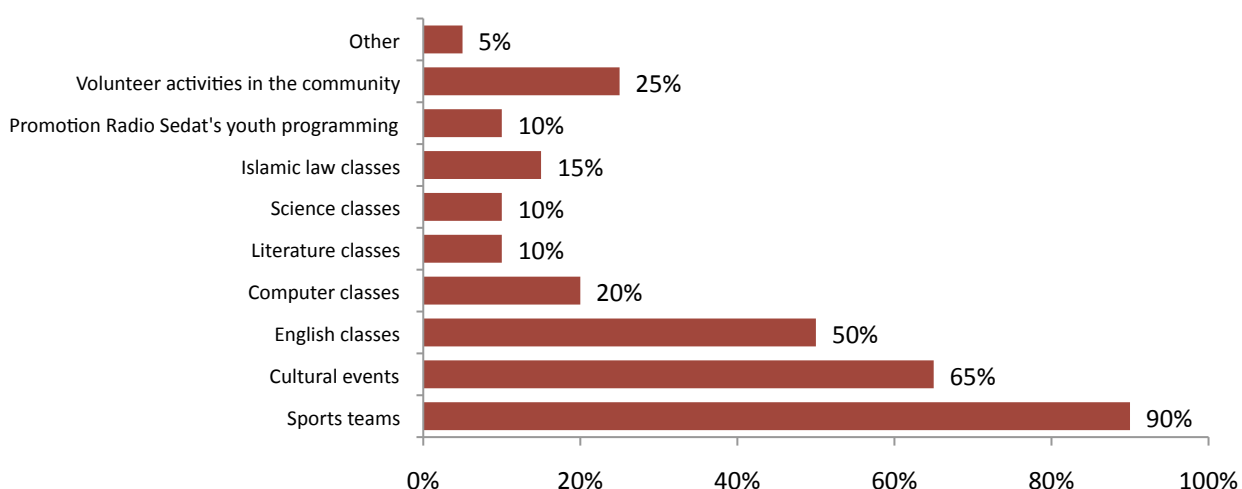
The primary problem noted by representatives is lack of funds for activities – which 85% of respondents highlighted. More worrisome are the 95% reporting that they could not conduct some of their activities because of insecurity – and the 30% reporting that the local authorities do not support the council. These points all pose clear challenges to the sustainability of the youth councils, whose positive impacts do not seem to have become integrated into the fabric of local society.

IMPACT.

As can be seen in the figure below, there is one aspect of the youth councils where there exists a clear disconnect between the desired impact as defined in the logframe, and the activities conducted. One of the key indicators designated in the logframe is “4.a) increase in # of youth involved in civil engagement or volunteering”. Only 5 of the 20 youth cluster representatives interviewed noted that volunteer activities have been conducted by their group.

The youth councils did much better on other desired outcomes of increased participation in cultural events and sports, as nearly all representatives reported sports activities as being organised.

Figure 12 - Which of the following, if any, have been organised as part of your youth council's activities?



Youth development centres

ACTED staff interviewed about the youth development centres were very positive in their evaluations of the impact of the courses followed on the youth involved.

“About 70% of [the youth who have followed courses] now are working in schools as teacher. Numbers of them are working in governmental and non-governmental offices and even they have appropriate activities in capacity building programs too. ACTED program is as good as all people of the community are talking about it. Previously our youngsters were travelling to Iran in order to find a job and when they returned were drug addicted, therefore the program is providing our people with the opportunity to stay.”⁸⁰

Although these numbers are most likely somewhat optimistic, given overall unemployment rates in Afghanistan and among youth in particular, the importance of the last point – giving youth opportunities to stay is particularly relevant as it emphasizes reasons to stay, rather than reasons not to go.

Interviewed beneficiaries did note several problems with the effectiveness and efficiency of the actual courses followed:

“We are not satisfied from this programme because when we participate in this programme we did not have needed training materials. This program is about 9 months it should be more. It was for those who did not have relations. The teacher also did not have a special profession and they enroll in program by relations.”

“We participated in different programs but we did not learn any special things because the teachers were not professional. The area [where we studied] was not secure. There should be a pacific and secure area and a good building and complete materials.”

“There were some challenges because of participating in this program like security issues, [centre distance] and shortage of transportation.”

Some of these challenges – notably the security challenges – have already been addressed by ACTED, who are well aware of them. The quality of the teaching must be resolved before future iterations of the programming are conducted. This quality varies by subject as one government observer noted the high quality of the teachings around electricity:

“I remember that one day I went to one of their training centres where the student receive training on electricity, since I have degree in electricity, I asked a few student some question and I impressed with the answers they gave me. One of students of literacy programme told me that he was illiterate and now he is literate and he can write and read all kinds of letters.”⁸¹

The quality of the infrastructure will be further addressed in the last section.

⁸⁰ Key informant interview, Directorate of Youth, Coordination and Programmes Manager, 16 November 2015

⁸¹ Key informant interview, North Water Management Zone, Director, 18 November 2015

3.5. Governance and political capacity

“An overarching objective of the FSRDP is to help build a representative government, alongside an effective and engaged civil society that can hold the government accountable. This approach has involved increasing the internal capacities of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and linking them directly with the government.”

CBO trainings

Members of the community based organisations supported by ACTED were offered trainings to enable them to contribute to civil society. These included trainings around good governance as well as business trainings (including bookkeeping and accounting). The overwhelming response of beneficiaries to these was positive.

From an implementation perspective, these trainings were quite effective. According to beneficiaries (30 were interviewed), these trainings followed a high intensity formats – the majority described one month trainings with an average of 19 hours of class per week. Trainers were very responsible – 90% of respondents stated that they did not miss any classes. 80% received manuals for these trainings at the start of the course, and only 4% never received any. All beneficiaries rated these trainings as either very helpful or helpful. These trainings ranged from “participation in the decision making process” (87%) to “conflict resolution” (97%) and accounting (60%), to name the most frequent.

The impact of these trainings on the lives of beneficiaries and government around them is not as clear. The vast majority rated their impact on person income and corruption levels in the businesses and government around them as *slightly* positive (77% and 70%), respectively.

3.6. Improved physical assets

The improved physical assets component of ACTED's programming consists of the construction of infrastructure and the vaccination of animals. The 2014 annual report noted the planned construction of six types of physical assets:

- Water infrastructure projects
- Portable water systems
- New model poultry farms and feeder banks
- Greenhouses
- Youth component: volleyball and semi-football playgrounds, and youth development centres
- Vocational training centre in Andkhoy

For the livestock component, in addition to vaccination campaigns, and trainings for basic veterinary workers, the other key reported output was the insemination of farmers' cows.

Security conditions and time constraint did not allow for a full evaluation of all infrastructure built. However, relevant governmental and staff representatives were interviewed, as well as basic veterinary workers. The relevance of these projects was agreed on by all – the modalities of their implementation proved more controversial, as while the general response was positive, several concerning allegations were made around costs and quality, and will be discussed below:

Construction of infrastructure

The **quality** of the water-related infrastructure varied by project. A clear improvement was noted with regards to previous construction:

Their projects 'activities are improved compared to the past, in the past they damaged one area in order to build another and it was their mistake due to lack of knowledge; the example is the river's gravelling /soil, they used to use the river's gravelling/ sand/soil to build roads and other places and they destroyed and imbalance the level of river, some area of the river became [increasing the changes of] flood destroying their protection walls due to imbalance level of river path. It's been two years that they do not have this problem.⁸²

The positive **health** impact of these constructions should also be noted:

"Only ACTED works in the field of water management and also DACAAR built wells for people, before we used to use water from river & streams and now we use from wells and this project improved the health of people."⁸³

The establishment of a laboratory for disease testing was also quite significant on the health front:

"In the past if a new disease was discovered, a sampling would have been done and the sample would be sent to Kabul, this was a very lengthy process and would take a long time to get a response. The response from Kabul would take 20-30 days and the disease would spread more in this course of time and would

⁸² Key informant interview, North Water Management Zone, Director, 18 November 2015

⁸³ Key informant interview, Shirin Tagaab River Zone Water Management Office, 18 November 2015



cause more fatalities. This was the reason for building a Laboratory in Faryab. At the current time, this laboratory has solved most of the problems of the people.”⁸⁴

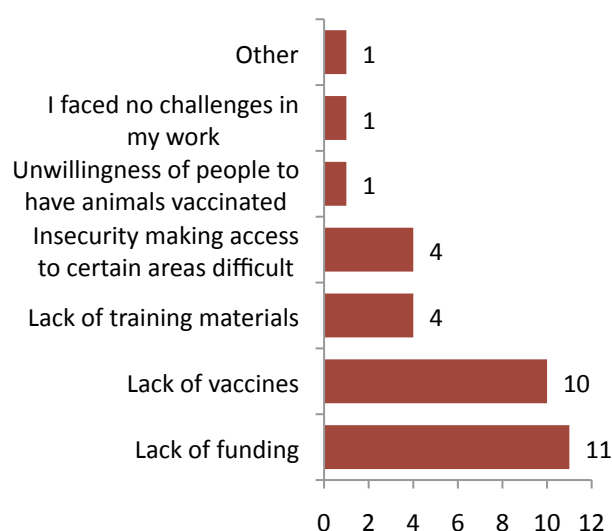
However, one instance was noted by a governmental counterpart – and corroborated by the local community leader, also interviewed – of a protection wall being rebuilt over an older wall in Joqha village, rather than built anew, meaning that it has already cracked. The governmental engineer for the project as well as the local supervisor were not informed until the day of completion. This was attributed to lack of budget.⁸⁵ Beyond these instances of “forced” approval of inadequate construction, **security** proved to be a challenge to the successful completion of ACTED’s work:

“ACTED work is very efficient and we do not have problem with them. Sometimes they face with problem due to security issue and I appreciate their work, they did their job even in the bad situation of security.”⁸⁶

In addition to the aforementioned instance of insufficient budget leading to the strengthening of an old protection wall rather than building a new one, several other contentious financial matters were mentioned by governmental counterparts:

- With regards to **greenhouses**, one respondent compared ACTED greenhouses to DACAAR-built greenhouses, claiming that the cost for ACTED greenhouses is approximately 33% higher for worse quality. **This claim must be further investigated by local ACTED staff to ensure they are not receiving worse prices.**⁸⁷

Figure 13 - Challenges faced by BVWs in conducting work (n=13)



Vaccination campaign

From a training perspective, the basic veterinary workers went through several training courses, including information on vaccination, livestock nutrition management, aviculture, serious infectious diseases, and livestock physiology.⁸⁸ They subsequently conducted trainings as well as vaccination campaigns. When asked about the challenges they face, the majority of these are easily solved problems as can be seen in the above figure, providing a clear path of action for ACTED. The key difficulties are material – lack of funding, lack of vaccines, and lack of training materials.

From a security perspective, all key players – including the Taliban – appear to support these campaigns:

⁸⁴ Key informant interview, ACTED, Veterinary Component Manager, 16 November 2015

⁸⁵ Both the governmental staff and community leader interviewed about this wall requested not to be directly cited due to fears of retribution.

⁸⁶ Key informant interview, North Water Management Zone, Director, 18 November 2015

⁸⁷ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 16 November 2015

⁸⁸ Key informant interview, ACTED, Veterinary Component Manager, 16 November 2015



“We have a very good relationship with the people. Whereas, this project is a project for people, even Taliban have agreed with the activities of ACTED and are consent with the activities of ACTED. We have gone to very far-off areas of Faryab province for vaccination where security was very bad.”⁸⁹

One further instances of potential financial misconduct was identified with regards to vaccination by a governmental counterpart:

“For vaccination of cows, they use to charge farmers/ ranchers 40 Afs per cows for cows, when I asked them why do you charge this money, they could not give a reasonable answer. If you ask [the beneficiaries] as well, they will tell you that we give this money to the vaccinators while these vaccinations are conducted by ACTED staff members.”⁹⁰

Livestock insemination

Four of the thirteen basic veterinary workers (BVWs) reported having inseminated cows as part of ACTED’s programming. However, it would seem that not all planned inseminations have been carried out:

“They promised people (ranchers) that they [would] bring two Baqa cows for insemination, but they did not bring them.”⁹¹

Conclusions

Historically, there is no doubt that ACTED’s activities in the course of the FSRDP have had a net positive impact on the lives of those involved.

However, in a worsening socio-economic context and an extremely volatile security environment, the sustainability of NMFA-funded activities is *de facto* more questionable. One key informant identified stated that no districts in Faryab are completely accessible to programming. Gurziwan, estimated at only 70% accessible, is actually one of the most open districts at this time.⁹²

Moreover, to date, it is almost impossible to adequately monitor and evaluate ACTED’s activities in a growing number of targeted areas: it raises obvious accountability and transparency concerns – for both ACTED and the NMFA.

Future activities will need to be more efficiently tracked, which may entail revision of structures and planned programming to allow for activities that remain relevant but can be more easily monitored.

⁸⁹ Key informant interview, ACTED, Veterinary Component Manager, 16 November 2015

⁹⁰ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 16 November 2015

⁹¹ Key informant interview, Directorate of Agriculture, Faryab, Afghanistan, 15 November 2015

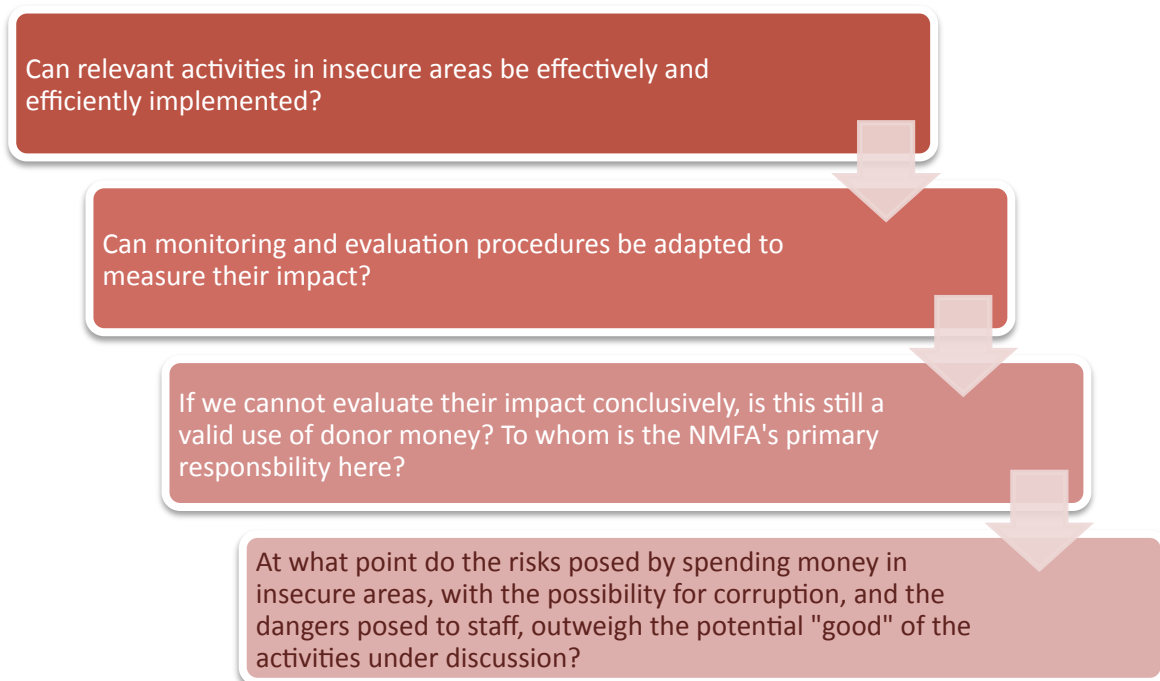
⁹² Key informant interview, former ACTED staff, Kabul, Afghanistan, 7 January 2016

Recommendations and conclusions

Respondent and staff feedback on the activities conducted by ACTED were generally quite positive; even government staff were appreciative of the programming being undertaken. ACTED's programming has resulted in strengthened livelihoods capacities and the creation of a number of community based organisations laying the groundwork for long-term community development. Several key factors, however, threaten the future of these activities, supreme among them the current security situation in Faryab province.

However, the range of operations of both ACTED, and the government, has been shrinking consistently. Formerly safe roads – for example, the highway between Maimana and Ankhoy – now require a gamble on safety every time they are employed. This in turn leads to a sequence of questions for both ACTED and the NMFA which must be carefully considered as the future of ACTED and the NMFA's operations in Faryab is debated.

Figure 14 - Key questions for ACTED and the NMFA



This research cannot provide the direct answers to these questions. However, the findings presented in the previous chapters provide key elements for both ACTED and the NMFA in this decision-making process.

The recommendations provided below are structured to a) enable the successful continuation of existing FSRDP-III activities as possible and b) provide suggestions to the NMFA and ACTED moving forwards, in how they might best approach programming in this difficult context.

Kick-off recommendation to ACTED and the NMFA

Based on the findings from this evaluation, the following recommendations are designed to address the current context in Faryab and ensure accountability on all parts.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Concentrating activities in (relatively) secure areas.

The relevance of ACTED's programming across Faryab cannot be denied. However, organisations have responsibilities to their staff and to their donors, to make sure that staff are not facing unnecessary risks and funding is being used responsibly. Where ACTED cannot safely implement activities, nor monitor them, these responsibilities will not be met. In the current security context in Faryab, this means privileging activities in the provincial capital and surrounding districts. It might lead to the following practical consequences:

- A much stronger emphasis of the Norwegian MFA on monitoring the activities of ACTED, with clearer and standard transparency and accountability requirements. Considering the investment made by the Norwegian government in the FSRDP, it is its responsibility to ensure a more thorough monitoring, in a worsening security and operational context for all NGOs in Afghanistan – and especially in Faryab.
- A potential (likely) reduction of the scope of ACTED's activities funded by the NMFA under FSRDP, as some – most – activities cannot be monitored and as their implementation often cannot be verified on the ground. The risk of corruption and aid diversion (by local communities, governmental authorities or anti-governmental groups) is higher than ever in Afghanistan, which does raise some ethical and practical concerns for NGOs, like ACTED, which implement projects with no real oversight on the day-to-day activities.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Improving accountability on all parts

The question of accountability – from an implementation and financial perspective – has been raised at several points with regards to ACTED. ACTED, however, is not the only actor here. The NMFA itself can take several steps to improve accountability, and minimise the potential for corruption and misuse of funds:

Firstly, the TORs for programming, and requested documents from partner organisations require more detail. The NMFA must be more clear in how exactly it wishes to achieve its desired outcomes, and must require further specifics from organisations prior to signing funds. Clear theories of change, more specific and measurable indicators, monitoring and evaluation structures: these were either briefly or not at all evoked in the documentation used by ACTED to secure funding. The responsibility for this lies on the NMFA as a donor organisation.

Secondly, the NMFA should, as standard practice, require benchmarking for budgets. This was given as a project-level recommendation above for ACTED, but truly should be standard in all programming. Eventually, a database can be created by the NMFA recording costs of typical activities in different regions. Budgets should not be approved without a way to evaluate the accuracy of projected field costs. Past evaluations of other organisations in Afghanistan have noted high discrepancies between what differing



organisations pay for say, beehives – which in turns leads to high discrepancies in the numbers of people being helped.

Lastly, a triangulated monitoring system should be developed in all the areas of operations. The triangulated approach would mutualize the efforts and expertise of ACTED M&E staff, communities (through community based monitoring approaches⁹³) and focus exclusively on accessible areas. Through a reduced number of indicators, a coherent monitoring approach would: 1) provide ACTED with some relevant operational decision-making information to measure the relevance and impact of its work and better adapt it to a fast-changing local context; 2) give NMFA more substantial evidence on the success and failures of the programme.

The review team considers that these 2 knock-out recommendations are absolute prerequisites. Should not they be filled, neither ACTED nor the Norwegian MFA would have: 1) any reason to think that activities are actually implemented on the ground; 2) any way to monitor that the funds have been disbursed and allocated in an effective and impactful. Despite ACTED's efforts, this is clearly not the case yet.

➔ Suspend all the activities where RECOMMENDATIONS 1 & 2 cannot be implemented.

⁹³ The NGO Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) has developed innovative tools that could easily be replicated and tailored to the Faryabi context: <http://communitymonitoring.org>.

Other complementary recommendations

Assuming that ACTED and the NMFA are in the position to implement recommendations 1 and 2, the following recommendations are provided to:

- Strengthen the remainder of the FSRDP-III programming, and
- Support the NMFA and ACTED in future collaborations

9 point recommendation plan for ACTED for remainder of FSRDP-III

The following recommendations are structured along the five OECD-DAC evaluation criteria - relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

Figure 15 - Recommendations for improvement of ACTED's programming for the remainder of FSRDP-III

Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Adapt selection of agricultural programmes (i.e. vegetable seeds) to local climate and market
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Create a centralised, standardised beneficiary database •Conduct comparative cost assessment with other NGOs
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Improve accountability around communication procedures with provincial government •Continue to recruit staff from Faryab and specifically the targeted districts, as well as more female staff
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Support mechanisms to bring together beneficiaries and employment opportunities •Link beneficiaries and individuals / organisations which can provide loans for business development
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Set up partnerships strategy with other NGOs in Faryab •Support direct capacity building of the local government

RECOMMENDATION 3: Adapting the selection of agricultural activities to the local context.

Several key interviewees noted the promotion of vegetable and fruit cultivation poorly adapted to a) the local climate and b) the local markets. Prior to the continuation of fruit and vegetable seed distribution, a brief market evaluation and beneficiary survey should be conducted, to ensure that ACTED is supporting the highest-impact agricultural produce.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Creating a centralised, standardised beneficiary database.

Monitoring and evaluation of the various components have, to date, generally been conducted within the components, which are then responsible for sharing information around output and impact with other staff. A clear, standardised procedure should be installed, across components, with information feeding into one

database, from each component. We recommend the development of standardised beneficiary information collection forms – adapted to the different types of activities. For example, more information should be gathered around beneficiaries of vocational trainings than beneficiaries of hygiene programming.

In the longer term, these forms could be adapted to not just gather information about beneficiaries, but also to measure the impact of the programming, that is to say, to go past measurement of **outputs** to measure of **outcomes**.

This information must be centralised in one database to allow ACTED and NMFA to more easily understand the overall impact of programming – and, in particular, to be able to more easily evaluate if the focus on gender and youth is being achieved.

To address the fact that ACTED staff are limited in their movements, one could imagine a system for electronic data collection for all this information. If fitted out with a touchphone, it would be simple enough for trainers for the various activities to enter information which could then easily be consulted from Maimana and Kabul – with the added advantage of minimising errors from data entry.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Conducting a comparative cost assessment with other NGOs

The research revealed several instances where ACTED's spend on materials, be it for greenhouses or for vocational training toolkits, was questioned, as it appeared excessive compared to the quality of that which was purchased. A number of the organisations still working in Faryab – for example, DACAAR – conduct similar programming to ACTED. Prior to purchasing more materials, ACTED staff should conduct an informal survey with staff from other organisations and share these figures with upper management, to confirm where, if anywhere, they could be getting more value for money.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Improving accountability around communications guidelines with provincial and district level government officials

ACTED has already created communications guidelines governing communication to provincial level government officials. These even include sample monthly reporting documents for the relevant departments. In practice, however, a number of government officials complained that they were either a) not being consulted at all or b) being consulted too late to be able to impact the design of the projects, leaving them with a role consisting of rubber-stamping activities. This poses serious questions around both the successful continued implementation of programming (experience has shown that the government can and has stopped activities from moving forward when necessary) and the sustainability of the programming. Several of these activities call for turnover to relevant governmental authorities after several years (for example, the planned turning over of the Maimana vocational training centre to DoLSA). For this to be possible, the government must have been interested and involved throughout.

What is missing, then, is staff accountability around the procedures and guidelines developed. This must be monitored at the Kabul level to ensure a more “unbiased” observer. A clear checklist should be created for each activity of what needs to be communicated to whom, and when. The Kabul-level observer can then confirm, over the phone, with the relevant government authorities, that this is in fact happening.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Continue to recruit staff from Faryab, and, specifically, the targeted districts, as well as additional female staff

ACTED currently employs a clear majority of staff in Faryab who are from Faryab (97%). However, several key informant interviews highlighted non-local staff as a problem. This may stem from perceptions held over from now-revised staff hiring procedures (ACTED used to employ more staff from Mazar-e-Sharif in Faryab). One key informant noted that staff should be from the district under concerns.

This recommendation comes with the caveat that the background of each staff hired must be checked to avoid employing people who might potentially be biased against parts of the local population due to their background. However, at this point, we believe that the benefits of continuing to hiring local staff – community acceptance, lowered security risks for staff travel, increased local investment in the programming, capacity building at the local level promoting the sustainability of activities – outweigh the potential bias concerns.

Past experience has shown that the use of staff from Mazar-e-Sharif in Faryab province has contributed to anti-ACTED feelings there as these were in some cases viewed as pretentious and seemed to look down upon the very people they were to help.

Currently, 16% of ACTED staff in Faryab province are female. Recruiting additional female staff serves two purposes. Firstly, it can offer employment opportunities to previous graduates of ACTED (and other) programming, thereby supporting the argument that training for women can lead to employment activities, and is therefore useful. Secondly, female staff are necessary to be able to include a gender component in programming. The lack of them limits the number of women who can participate in trainings.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Reinforcing mechanisms to bring together beneficiaries and employment opportunities

A number of past vocational training evaluations have highlighted that it is not enough to train people with skills, even if these include not just vocational trainings but also business trainings. Opportunities to support beneficiaries of SHGs with reaching markets have been created, with products being sold as far away as India. However, little has been done to ensure that beneficiaries of vocational trainings and trainings in the youth development centres are able to use these trainings after training.

- A labour market analysis should be conducted in Maimana and Andkhoy with potential employers to identify opportunities for apprenticeships / internships during trainings as well as to create networks for beneficiaries who might lack these, and therefore support them in finding jobs.
- ACTED / the NMFA should consider allocating a portion of remaining funds to employers to co-fund salaries of beneficiaries during a trial period, in the hopes that having seen the potential “value-add” of these, the businesses would continue to employ them afterward.
- Job placement should be included in the TOR of field staff for the SHG, vocational training and youth development components, to ensure their commitment to supporting beneficiaries “post-project”

RECOMMENDATION 9: Link beneficiaries and individuals / organisations which can provide loans for business development

ACTED has taken a strong first step on this front by providing beneficiaries of vocational training programmes and youth development programmes with toolkits, and SHGs with loans. Previous research on vocational training programmes has noted that crucial to the success of trainings [in enabling employment of beneficiaries afterwards] is “the provision of financial and material support at the end of training, without which it is difficult, if not impossible, to ensure that people obtain work, and, above all, keep it.”⁹⁴

Rather than continue to shoulder this cost alone, Samuel Hall recommends that ACTED / the NMFA link with other organisations wishing to support individuals in small business development. These can range from local institutions such as the First Microfinance Bank of Afghanistan (FMFB) to potential arrangements with international companies such as Kiva. Of course, the conditions under which these organisations are willing to lend the money must be first examined by ACTED staff, to avoid beneficiaries becoming victims of exploitative loan conditions.

RECOMMENDATION 10: Setting up partnerships strategies with other NGOs, especially local ones

A number of interviewees noted that international organisations and NGOs operating in Faryab province are becoming fewer and fewer. Informal cooperation has already been occurring as interviewees reported consulting on districts of implementation, and ACTED for example modified planned literacy trainings to Kankor preparation to avoid duplicating work by other organisations.

Moving forward, ACTED should consider developing partnerships strategies with other NGOs, especially local ones. This will serve several purposes:

Firstly, this will build capacity at the local level, as ACTED staff can support less-experienced NGOs

Secondly, this will address some of the security concerns caused by operating as a well-known international NGO in Faryab. While ACTED staff highlighted the positive aspects of their name recognition – as people appreciate ACTED’s work – ACTED staff have previously been directly targeted by insurgents. Even while conducting this research, two enumerators used by Samuel Hall in the past refused to work with us, citing threats against their working for any of the international NGOs present in the area.

Finally, coordination will allow to do more with less – ensuring that all activities are coordinated from the start, rather than on a component-by-component fashion – can maximise the utility derived from the funds provided by the NMFA and other donors.

RECOMMENDATION 11: Supporting direct capacity building of the local government.

The current security situation in Faryab renders the long-term involvement of ACTED in the province unclear. Additionally, the ultimate goal of the development aid being provided is not for ACTED and other organisations to continue supporting activities forever – but rather, for the government to have the capacity to do so itself.

⁹⁴ AFD evaluation, as cited in Samuel Hall / Solidarités International (2012), *Sustaining the Working Poor*, p. 56



An appropriate first step to further inclusion of the local government will be the improved communications described in earlier recommendations. Further steps can include training courses for relevant departments but also enhanced coordination between governmental and ACTED officials, with say, governmental officials shadowing ACTED staff to fully understand their responsibilities, if this can be done in a fashion which does not negatively impact the activities being conducted (as government officials, like NGO staff, may also find themselves targets of insurgent activity).

Annexes

Samuel Hall comments on ACTED's response to report

General comments

Samuel Hall acknowledges receipt of ACTED's comments on the report (see pp. 57-59 below), and the support of ACTED in the conducting of the research is well-appreciated.

Samuel Hall would like to highlight that by definition, an evaluation must be independent from those being evaluated. ACTED was therefore not invited to comment on the initial draft of the evaluation. That being said, ACTED staff were interviewed at each step of the evaluation and involved in supporting Samuel Hall in accessing beneficiaries.

With regards to the methodology, Samuel Hall would also support a stronger baseline/endline M&E procedure for future projects, but notes that the current methodology was developed in conjunction with the NMFA, following standard OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. Challenges in reaching beneficiaries primarily stemmed from a) the insecurity in the area preventing even local Samuel Hall enumerators from visiting certain sites (calling into question the feasibility of ACTED's own M&E procedures) and b) incorrect beneficiary information provided by ACTED.

The points highlighted by ACTED do not provide new factual information which could challenge the conclusions reached by Samuel Hall – they are merely conflicting conclusions based on the same set of observations. Samuel Hall therefore stands by the key recommendations made in the report, namely that: 1) ACTED concentrate its activities in relatively secure areas, and 2) that accountability be improved on all parts.

Responses to specific points made

Numbered and italicised text below comes from ACTED's response to this report.

1) "involvement of the local government: the report included references from local government officials that they were not involved enough in project implementation."

The report recognises that, in theory, government officials are to be closely associated with programming. It simply notes that in several instances, key departments were not involved - which poses questions as to whether or not this theory is actually being implemented.

Additionally, Samuel Hall would note that areas where it is not safe for government officials to go are likely to be areas that are unsafe for ACTED staff; this returns one to the broader questions of accountability and transparency when operating in inaccessible contexts. Samuel Hall maintains that the policy of funding programming in inaccessible areas should be called into question.

2) "Local hiring: the report referenced individuals who criticised a lack of local hiring"

ACTED notes that 97% of their staff in Faryab are locals. This does not contradict the fact that several key informants identified limited local staff as a key problem. The report recognises that ACTED has made a number of efforts to ensure the presence of local staff. The problem raised is therefore on two levels:



Firstly, a common perception remains that staff are not from Faryab, with a number of KIIs referring to staff from other areas (posing security challenges to ACTED and making it more difficult to operate in remote areas where non-locals are not trusted), and

Secondly, being from Faryab may not be enough. A person from the provincial centre may, in the more remote parts of the province, be just as foreign as someone from Mazar-e-Sharif or Kabul. Thus, the argument that 97% of the staff are from Faryab does not actually resolve the problems raised.

3) “Security issues”

Samuel Hall disagrees with ACTED's assessment that current security measures and flexibility are enough to justify continued operation in remote areas with limited access on several fronts:

Firstly, previous actions against ACTED staff in Faryab province have shown that even extensive security measures have limited success in this context.

Secondly, the NMFA bears a responsibility towards the taxpayers of Norway, and has to be able to report where the money they are spending is going and what impact it is having. The monitoring systems described in the report and alluded in the letter from ACTED are not enough to provide this information credibly.

Finally, the argument that no one else is operating in these areas, while certainly highlighting the need of the local populations, also highlights that the clear security and accountability challenges described by Samuel Hall have been taken into account by other organisations.

4) “Monitoring and evaluation difficulties due to security”

Samuel Hall disagrees that the long-term presence of ACTED in the province mitigates the M&E concerns. If anything, the reliance on local staff - who have a vested interest in ensuring that ACTED money continues to come to Faryab – poses questions of bias in the M&E. Additionally, the research conducted by Samuel Hall noted that the collection of beneficiary lists (highlighted by ACTED as supporting strong M&E) is not actually happening – high number of the phone numbers provided were out of order or did not refer to the correct beneficiaries.

5/6) Concerns around costs and procurement

Samuel Hall does not call into question the fact that ACTED has defined procedures around both of these. However, the information gathered in the field questions whether or not they are being put into effect.



Kabul, March 17th 2016

O/Ref.

KBO-20160317- 1000
02 BMN

Y/Ref.

AFG 2818 13/0003

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Subject: Response to Samuel Hall report on ACTED-NMFA's Sustained Rural Development Program, Phase III – Faryab.

In late 2015 – early 2016, an external evaluation was conducted by Samuel Hall on ACTED's implementation of the Faryab Sustained Rural Development Programme – Phase III. The report referenced the importance and relevancy of ACTED's programming in Faryab which, due to Faryab's security challenges, is currently serviced by far fewer NGOs than safer provinces.

The report also alluded to some challenges that ACTED is currently facing in their programming, with particular attention to issues regarding security and oversight.

This document will take the opportunity to provide a brief response and contextualization of some of Samuel Hall's comments from a programme perspective.

ACTED and NMFA met on 17th February 2016 during which the report's findings were discussed. NMFA highlighted six specific concerns raised by the report. ACTED addresses these below:

- 1) Involvement of local government: the report included references from local government officials that they were not involved enough in project implementation

ACTED currently has Memoranda of Understanding with seven local government ministries. As the report states:

"[ACTED] committed to submitting a copy of the MoU, project executive summary, budget and the entire project action plan as well as systematically involving local governance actors in all program events and to organizing regular field visits."

Despite the majority of Departments reporting satisfactory relations and involvement with ACTED programming, some government officials from a minority of departments who were interviewed complained that ACTED did not involve them in the implementation or design of the project.

ACTED always seeks advice and input from government departments when carrying out a needs assessment on the design of any project. ACTED also recognises the importance and necessity of informing government officials of its programming activities, however, it is both impractical and unfeasible to involve the government as a partner as such due to the need of impartiality and security during implementation.

Government officials are often actively involved in the monitoring of ACTED projects. However in some instances, it is not safe for government officials to move around areas in which ACTED carries out programming. Therefore, it is occasionally the case that ACTED is unable to facilitate government monitoring trips for security reasons. However, in these circumstances, ACTED openly reports back to government authorities and the NMFA and shares relevant project documentation when necessary and safe. Due to issues with corruption, it is not common policy for ACTED to share full budgets with government ministries, however some general programming cost information can be shared under certain circumstances.

- 2) Local hiring: the report referenced individuals who criticised a lack of local hiring.

Due to ACTED's decade-long programming presence in Faryab, of which a core component has been the building of local capacity, SRDP benefits from 97% of project staff who come from Faryab. The remaining 3% are usually staff with particular technical expertise which cannot be found locally or project staff such as monitors for which it is beneficial to bring from other provinces for reasons of



impartial oversight. ACTED feels that this has ensured a high level of community acceptance, which explains its ability to continuously implement in highly insecure areas. Additionally, ACTED feels that an increased level of hiring at the community level has the potential to increase the risk of corruption during programming.

ACTED will continue to ensure local staff are used and will increase the technical expertise of local staff when possible.

3) Security issues

ACTED recognises that there are security issues when working in regions such as Faryab. Due to the large percentage of local staff who work in ACTED's programming, local community buy-in and ownership of projects is high. This ensures a much safer environment for both beneficiaries and ACTED employees as Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) such as the Taliban rely on community support in order to make territorial gains.

Security concerns also necessitate flexibility on activity and administrative deadlines, as an area and/or access road may be out of bounds for civilians due to fighting for quite some time. In this case, ACTED analyses data from numerous sources, and coordinates the re-evaluation of work plans and activities in line with its findings.

Although the report recommends pulling out of areas which are insecure, ACTED feels in fact it is essential to continue programming in these areas in order to support the local population, and (therefore) prevent the advance of the Taliban. Additionally, pulling out of areas which are otherwise devoid of NGO support will likely mean a loss of some of the project's achievements to date, and the denial of essential development support to highly marginalized communities. ACTED's Capital Security team and field security officers closely monitor the changing security situation in the field. If direct threats are made against ACTED staff or beneficiaries, ACTED halt projects activities and moves its staff out of the area. Capital, HQ and donor offices are informed and the situation is closely monitored. Government, local communities and other stakeholders are included in security discussions and assessments. Activities are only resumed when there is safety clearance from ACTED Security office after the threat has passed. Work plans and other relevant project documentation are amended and shared with ACTED offices and the donor.

4) Monitoring and Evaluation difficulties due to security.

ACTED recognises that it cannot practice as stringent M&E systems in areas such as Faryab due to security concerns. This is mostly due to: a lack of expatriate field access, and the fact that GPS android phones, and official documentation put individuals in significantly increased danger from the Taliban and criminal groups.

As mentioned above, ACTED's long-term and continued presence in Faryab helps to mitigate many of the stated M&E concerns, as local staff have been trained and have come up through ACTED for many years and therefore know its systems and processes well, and are also very loyal to the organisation. Project staff in the field communicate regularly by phone and email with the Base and Capital offices and are required to send documentation such as beneficiary lists and photographs where possible. Another factor greatly facilitating ACTED's ability to monitor the project is through high levels of community acceptance, which has been consistent and is ongoing. This allows ACTED staff to stay overnight with locals, thereby negating need to travel at night which increases security and enables in-depth monitoring. ACTED recognises that should projects not be implemented to a high quality, communities would withdraw their support; which would become immediately apparent. ACTED field monitors also visit project sites on a regular basis. As the AME Department is an independent department inside ACTED, these M&E missions are not answerable to project or program staff, thereby enhancing the impartiality and reliability of these assessments.

5) Costs: report asserted ACTED costs were higher than some other NGOs in the field doing the same programming

ACTED ensures NMFA that it will look into specific incidents highlighted in report. In some instances, the cheapest offers of services or goods are not chosen by the procurement committee due to considerations of quality or the locality of the supplier, or the necessity of selecting local suppliers who have previously proven the ability to deliver in insecure areas of Faryab.

6) Transparency and Procurement



ACTED

ACTED's Procurement processes are open, transparent and available for analysis. ACTED's procurement committee is made up of two-thirds expatriate staff. All tender openings are witnessed by, and signed off on, by the Finance, Program and Coordination departments. The corresponding documentation is filed and available for analysis.

Additional points:

ACTED is concerned that the same source is often quoted (two informants from Directorate of Agriculture) with whom relations on the ground have been strained. Ex-employees are also quoted, the partiality of whom are questionable.

ACTED is also concerned that it was not sent a draft of the report for comment.

Conclusion

Overall, ACTED is highly concerned with the suggestion that programming should be suspended in its entirety should Samuel Hall's recommendation on concentrating activities in secure areas be followed. This would likely involve ceasing to provide assistance to the most highly vulnerable beneficiaries under current programming. Although operating in highly insecure areas has posed challenges to monitoring and evaluation, suspending activities in these areas would be a direct attack against the sustainability of gains made thus far, and a disservice to the investment in Faryab's most vulnerable communities which has already been made by the NMFA.

Additionally, ACTED has put in place a multitude of measures to ensure that programme funds are being used for their intended purposes. It is the opinion of ACTED that it would be far more beneficial to work in close cooperation with the NMFA to improve monitoring and programming strategy in insecure areas, than to suspend programming in areas that lack any type of development support aside from ACTED's interventions.

ACTED would like the opportunity to formally respond to Samuel Hall's evaluation, and address what are felt to be issues with methodology and misinformation.

Yours sincerely,

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List of key informants

Faryab Governmental Staff	
Position	Department
Agriculture and Promotion Manager, Qaisar	Faryab Agriculture Directorate
Agriculture and Promotion Manager, Pashtun Kot	Faryab Agriculture Directorate
Deputy Literacy Department	Faryab Education Directorate
DoLSAMD Director	Faryab DoLSAMD
Director	Faryab Education Directorate
Development Project Coordination Manager	Faryab Directorate of Women Affair
Water Manager, Shirin Tagaab	Faryab water office
Director	North Water Management Zone, Faryab
Coordination and Programmes Manager	Youth Department, Faryab
Director of Agriculture, Faryab	Faryab Agriculture Directorate
Agriculture and Promotion Manager, Dolatabad	Faryab Agriculture Directorate
Water Management Manager, Shirin Tagaab	North Water Management Zone, Faryab
Agriculture and Promotion Manager, Khaja Sabz Posh	Faryab Agriculture Directorate
Agriculture and Promotion Manager, Shirin Tagab	Faryab Agriculture Directorate
ACTED Staff in Faryab	
Position	Component
Component manager	Agriculture
Component manager	Wash-Hygiene
Component manager	Vet
Component manager	Youth - Sport & Culture
Component manager	Business and Marketing
Component manager	SHGs
Component manager	Vocational Training
Component manager	Kancor
Component manager	Radio Sehat
OTHER	
Position	Organisation
Chief of Projects	DACAAR
Community development Program manager	CHA
National Directorate of Security Representative	NDS
Project Development Manager	ACTED
Country Director	ACTED
Former ACTED STAFF – Now UN	ACTED
Former ACTED STAFF – Now UN	ACTED
Former ACTED STAFF – Now other NGO	ACTED

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Samuel Hall is a research and consulting company based in Central Asia (Kabul, Afghanistan) and East Africa (Nairobi, Kenya). We specialise in socio-economic surveys, private and public sector studies, and impact assessments for non-governmental and international organisations. Our teams of field practitioners, academic experts and local interviewers have years of experience leading research in Central Asia and East Africa. This has enabled us to acquire a firm grasp of the political and socio-cultural context in the country; design data collection methods and statistical analyses for monitoring, evaluating, and planning sustainable programmes; and to apply cross-disciplinary knowledge in providing integrated solutions for efficient and effective interventions. To find out more, visit samuelhall.org.

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