Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

Stakeholder Report commissioned by
the Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
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1. Background Information

*Samuel Hall Consulting* was commissioned by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) to conduct 25 stakeholder consultations with organisations involved in the implementation, co-ordination, oversight, funding or management of livelihoods, social protection and service provision in Afghanistan. The consultations are intended to inform the creation as well as the research uptake, capacity building and monitoring and evaluation strategies of a Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC), a Department for International Development (DFID) funded initiative.

**List of Acronyms**

(Stakeholder acronyms are listed in section 1.4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIRD</td>
<td>Afghanistan Institute of Rural Development</td>
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<td>ALN</td>
<td>Afghanistan Livelihoods Network</td>
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<td>ANDMA</td>
<td>Afghanistan National Development Management Authority</td>
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<td>ANDS</td>
<td>Afghanistan National Development Strategy</td>
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<td>AREU</td>
<td>Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit</td>
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<td>BPHS</td>
<td>Basic Package of Health Services</td>
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<td>CAP</td>
<td>Consolidated Appeals</td>
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<td>CDC</td>
<td>Community Development Councils</td>
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<td>CGHN</td>
<td>Consultative Group on Health and Nutrition</td>
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<td>DRR</td>
<td>Disaster Risk and Reduction</td>
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<td>HMIS</td>
<td>Health Management Information System</td>
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<td>IDPs</td>
<td>Internally Displaced People</td>
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<td>ISAF</td>
<td>International Security Assistance Force</td>
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<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>NABDP</td>
<td>National Area Based Development Program</td>
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<td>NPP</td>
<td>National Priority Program</td>
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<td>NRVA</td>
<td>National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment</td>
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<td>PDC</td>
<td>Provincial Development Committees</td>
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<td>PDMC</td>
<td>Provincial Disaster Management Committees</td>
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<td>SLMI</td>
<td>Sustainable Land Management Institute</td>
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<td>SLRC</td>
<td>Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium</td>
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<td>UNAMA</td>
<td>United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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1.1. Executive Summary

Over the last ten years, the international community has allocated billions of dollars in funding for programming in livelihoods, service provision and social protection; however there has been little accompanying investment in research as a sector or as an internal capacity. Beyond the notable exception of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), a non-governmental institution based in Kabul, livelihoods remain discernibly under researched in Afghanistan.

NGOs arguably possess the largest body of information on livelihoods resulting from their local programming, though significant barriers remain to standardise, share and analyse this information to create a provincial, regional or national livelihoods picture. An alternative source of research into livelihoods is derived from counterinsurgency and counter-narcotics actors that have commissioned extensive research on livelihoods to understand how people live in order to effect a behavioural change in local communities in place of ameliorating livelihoods more broadly.

The current drought and impending food insecurity across the north of Afghanistan have underlined the necessity of standardised assessments and in response humanitarian clusters, co-chaired by United Nations departments or agencies and NGOs, are attempting to introduce a level of top down standardisation amongst their members, which has hitherto been absent at the national level. Government ministries, including the Ministries of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) as well as Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), are present in the majority of districts, however their ability to capture a comprehensive livelihoods picture have been curtailed by institutional capacity limitations.

Growing insecurity across the country has both directly and indirectly impacted upon livelihoods programming and research. Directly, the increasing potency of the insurgency, the ‘surge’ in international military forces and the proliferation of militias and criminal groups have created a difficult operating environment for organisations researching or working in livelihoods, primarily due to the risk of exposure to the violence. Indirectly, organisations including the government are faced with serious personnel capacity limitations, difficulties in identifying and accessing beneficiaries as well as ensuring the sustainability of projects. These challenges are further complicated by weak provincial coordination, few formal information sharing platforms and little in the way of standardised information collection tools. More specifically, research into livelihoods is hindered by the absence of reliable baseline data ranging from agricultural production, land use and population statistics to standardised socio-economic data. The situation is further compounded by difficulties in recruiting and retaining academically qualified and experienced international and national staff that are able to produce practical and policy relevant research.

In summary, evidenced based research, broadly speaking, remains peripheral to policy making and has yet to be institutionalised as an effective mechanism in program design and implementation, although ministries involved in livelihoods are currently improving their capacity to incorporate research into policy formation. This phenomenon is partly attributable to an underinvestment in the sector, but also the politicisation of resources and a deference to personal experience over evidence based research.

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1 Rather than referring to ‘livelihoods, social protection and access to services’ throughout the report, the term ‘livelihoods’ will be used in reference to the three areas.
1.2 The Afghanistan Context

Afghanistan is a country inhabited by approximately 30 million people that has been consistently ranked at the lower end of global poverty and socio-economic tables. The country has experienced almost thirty years of conflict commencing with the Saur Revolution in the late 1978, intensifying with the Soviet occupation between 1979 and 1989 and continuing until the government of President Najibullah fell to an alliance of mujahideen factions in April 1992. The mujahideen government was a short-lived affair as personal rivalries and factional competition for power led to increasingly open conflict and a descent into civil war.

In 1994, the Taliban movement emerged from the southern province of Kandahar, promising security in return for support, thereby enabling them to capture large swaths of the south inhabited by a war weary and crime fatigued population. In September 1996, the Taliban seized control of Kabul and began their push north in early 1997. By mid-2001, the Taliban had captured the majority of the north, except the province of Badakhshan, the eastern edges of Takhar province and the Panjshir Valley. Following the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, international, primarily American, military forces allied with a number of opposition factions overthrew the Taliban regime within several weeks and established a transitional government.

In 2002, the Afghan Transitional Authority under Hamid Karzai inherited what could be termed the remnants of a functioning state with a virtually defunct bureaucracy, a very rudimentary health and education service and a decimated national infrastructure. By the middle of the decade, Afghanistan started to receive large-scale international funding for reconstruction in the areas of education, infrastructure, governance, health and rural rehabilitation and most evidently for the security forces.

By the middle of the decade, a resurgent Taliban movement consolidated their power in the south, south-east and east of the country and by 2008, insecurity spread to the north of the country. Rising insecurity across the country led to an increase in international forces that most recently led to the ‘surge’ of combatant forces in 2010 and a commitment to significantly increase the number of domestic security forces in tandem with the establishments of various forms of formal and quasi-formal pro-government militias.

Since 2001, student enrolments have increased eight-fold to eight million; the final 233km of the national 2,700km ring road will commence construction in the near future; government capacity has improved although remains low and uneven; an estimated 64% of Afghans now have access to health facilities - an increase from 9% in the final year of the Taliban regime - and approximately 25,000 villages have benefited from a community development program totalling US$1.5 billion.\(^2\)

Organisations implementing livelihoods programs or undertaking research into livelihoods face significant challenges, which are detailed forthwith.

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1.3. The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC)

The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) aims to provide a stronger evidence base about how people make a living, educate their children, deal with illness and access other basic services in fragile and conflict-affected situations. Providing better access to basic services, social protection and support to livelihoods matters for the human welfare of people affected by conflict, the achievement of development targets such as the MDGs and international efforts at peace and state building. ODI is the lead organisation in the Department for International Development (DFID) funded Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC). Other core partners within SLRC include: the Centre for Poverty Analysis, Feinstein International Centre (Tufts University) and Save the Children UK. This is a 6 year, DFID funded, £8 million programme bringing together leading research organisations from around the world to build on previous DFID research and bridge the gaps in knowledge about:

- **When** it is appropriate to try and build secure livelihoods in fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCAS) in addition to meeting immediate acute needs;
- **What** building blocks (e.g. humanitarian assistance, social protection, agriculture and basic services – including water, health, education and support to market institutions and infrastructure) are required in different contexts;
- **Who** can best deliver building blocks to secure livelihoods in different contexts; and
- **How** key investments can be better and more predictably supported by effective financing mechanisms.

The outcomes of the stakeholder consultation process will then inform the research uptake, capacity building and monitoring and evaluation strategies of the SLRC.
1.4. Overview of Consultations

Prior to conducting the consultations, a series of discussions were held with key informants within the livelihoods, social protection and services sector to identify organisations who would have a vested interest in the SLRC. To complement these discussions, researchers within Samuel Hall, benefiting from several years of in-country experience, also provided advice on potential organisations and individual contacts.

In order to obtain a basic representative sample of opinions and interests, a cross-section of organisations were contacted and subsequently consulted in the following categories:

- **The Government of Afghanistan**
  - Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), Ministry of Economy (MoE), Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)

- **International Donors**
  - *Multilateral* - European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), European Union Delegation (EU), World Bank (WB)
  - *Bi-lateral* - Department for International Development (DFID), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

- **International Organisations**
  - Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), World Food Program (WFP)

- **Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)**
  - *International NGOs* - Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), Care International, Information Management and Mine Action Programs (IMMAP), Mercy Corps, Relief International (RI), Save The Children (StC), Solidarités International
  - *National NGOs* – Afghanistan Civil Society Forum (ACSF), Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR)

- **Private Development Companies**
  - Flag International

The complete list of organisations consulted is available in Annex 1. In addition to the above organisations, discussions with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) as well as ACTED and by extension the newly created Afghanistan Livelihoods Network (ALN) were also held and contributed to this stakeholder report.

Within each organisation, consultations were held with individuals responsible for coordinating, funding, implementing and/or overseeing programming in livelihoods, social protection and basic services. For example, within the international NGO category, interviews were held with two country
directors, three directors of units or programs, one program co-ordinator and one senior
information and management officer.

The consultations were conducted solely in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, as per the instructions
of ODI. The interviews were semi-structured to ensure that all aspects of the initial phase of the
SLRC were covered while allowing the flexibility to explore some areas of the interviewee’s expertise
in-depth. The questions were divided into the following categories: background, knowledge gaps
and research quality, evidenced based research and research uptake. For a complete list of
questions, please see Annex 2.

Due to the relative small sample size, the findings should be viewed as indicative rather than being
fully representative. The sample size and the selection of organisations should also not be viewed as
representative of all livelihoods, social protection and services sectors and therefore omissions may
have occurred in collecting a comprehensive research baseline and articulating a complex
understanding of the key issues.

As illustrated in Figure 1, a total of 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 different
organisations and involving 37 individuals. Consultations involved three bilateral donor agencies,
three multilateral donor agencies, seven international NGOS, two Afghan NGOs, four international
organisations and one private
development company. Attempts
were made to select a cross-
section of livelihoods actors, however it should be noted that
there could be considered to be
an over-representation of
institutions involved in agriculture
and rural development and an
under-representation of actors in
the health and social protection
sectors.

*Figure 1: Consultations by Organisational Type*

In addition to the stakeholder interviews, a brief 10 question online survey was also sent to the 25
organisations. 19 of the 25 stakeholders chose to respond and information pertaining to this survey
appears twice in this report. The online survey can be found here:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/7BPCWBY

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2. Key Findings

2.1. Livelihood Provision by Category

There are several organizing clusters, committees and networks that are involved in livelihoods. Nationally, the government, under the umbrella of the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS), has reorganised ministerial clusters and introduced a greater level of accountability through National Priority Programs (NPPs). Several ministries involved in livelihoods, service delivery and social protection have also established co-ordination mechanisms that include the Consultative Group on Health and Nutrition (CGHN) at the MoPH and the weekly co-ordination meeting at MAIL: both forums include the government, donors, international organisations and NGOs. In 2010, The Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) also established a national disaster risk reduction platform, involving government ministries, UN agencies and NGOs, which is attempting to coordinate Disaster Risk and Reduction (DRR) programs across the country.

At the sub-national level, provincial level co-ordinating mechanisms including the Provincial Development Committees (PDC) and the Provincial Disaster Management Committees (PDMC), chaired by provincial governors or their deputies and incorporating concerned government departments, UN agencies and NGOs.

A brief overview of the primary national livelihoods platforms is listed below and has been grouped into three broad categories of livelihoods interventions: Humanitarian, Recovery and Development.

- Humanitarian

Following the UN Humanitarian reform in 2008, global clusters were established and subsequently mirrored at the country level. There are eight humanitarian clusters operating in Afghanistan (For an organisational overview, please see page 11) that are chaired by UN agencies or co-chaired with NGOs. The Food Security and Agriculture Cluster, the most pertinent to livelihoods, is co-chaired by FAO and WFP and conducts monthly meetings, occurring more frequently in times of emergency response, and includes five UN agencies, five government ministries, nine donors and approximately 70 NGOs.

In addition to the UN clusters, the Afghanistan Humanitarian Forum (AHF), co-chaired by the ACBAR and OCHA, hosts approximately 20 NGOs on a monthly basis. Both the AHF and UN clusters, through the monthly inter-cluster meeting, feed into the UN’s Humanitarian Country Team.

- Recovery

In 2010, the Afghanistan Early Recovery Network (ERN) was created as a forum that ‘sits between humanitarian assistance and long-term development, it links the two stages,’ according to ERN. The network hosts quarterly meetings of the focal points from the humanitarian clusters and concerned NGOs in an attempt to create a greater understanding of recovery, which begins at the humanitarian phase and is completed in the development sphere.
• Development

ANDS is the government framework, first proposed in 2005, approved in 2008 and revised in 2010 at the Kabul Conference. In what became known as the Kabul Process, the international community agreed at the 2010 conference to “support the transition to Afghan leadership and its intention to provide security and economic assistance.” As part of this process, responsibility for security was to be gradually transitioned to the Afghan Government, who would also take ownership of the peace negotiations through the Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation Program (APRP), while also accepting reforms to ANDS in the areas of service delivery, accountability and by the establishment of government clusters that would be responsible for NPPs.

The three development orientated clusters are (1) Agriculture and Rural Development (2) Human Resource Development (3) Economic and Infrastructure Development. The Agriculture and Rural Development Cluster, for example, is responsible for four NPPs: National Water and Natural Resources Development Program; National Comprehensive Agriculture Production and Market Development Program; National Rural Access Program and the National Strengthening of Local Institutions Program. Several government ministries operate specialist committees or sub-sectoral meetings or clusters that concern their area of operations. For example, as previously mentioned, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) facilitates the CGHN involving donors and NGOs, while MAIL organizes regular Wheat Meeting. More recently, MAIL has also established a NGO co-ordination unit, which seeks to not only introduce a greater level of coordination but also to pool information and resources, including best practices.

For the UN, there are three dedicated development committees or clusters that are primarily for UN agencies, although other organizations and institutions are invited. In 2011, the NGO ACTED established the Afghanistan Livelihoods Network (ALN) as a forum for research, training and publications after the organisation found itself ‘conducting relief work, then if we entered into the same area a year or two later then the same people would require assistance – so we began looking at the conditions behind this.’ ALN is designed to operate as a stakeholder-focused organization with ACTED providing the initial support for the first year, including office space and staff. In Bamyan province, several international NGOs also established a national NGO, the Sustainable Land Management Institute (SLMI), to improve the knowledge base and serve as a platform for research into livelihoods.
Humanitarian

**Humanitarian Coordination**

Clusters
- **Education**
  - UNICEF, Save the Children
- Emergency Shelter and NFIs
  - UNHCR, IOM
- Emergency Telecommunications
  - WFP
- Food Security and Agriculture
  - FAO, WFP

Health Cluster
- WHO, Ibn Sina
- Nutrition
  - UNICEF, The Micronutrient Initiative

Protection
- UNHCR, NRC

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
- UNICEF, OXFAM

**Sub-Clusters**
- Child Protection
  - UNICEF

**Forums and Working Groups**
- Afghanistan Humanitarian Forum
  - ACBAR, OCHA
- Humanitarian Country Team
  - UNAMA, OCHA
- Internally Displaced People (IDPs)
  - UNHCR

Logistics
- WFP

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**Recovery**

**Early Recovery Network**
- UNDP-led
- Focal points from all humanitarian clusters and concerned NGOs

**Humanitarian and Development**

Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR)
- Membership organisation of 111 NGOs

The Afghan Livelihoods Network
- Established by ACTED
- Newly created membership platform for organisations working in livelihoods

Sustainable Land Management Institute (SLMI)
- Established by Solidarites, CRS and AKF

**Information Providers**
- Famine Early Warning Safety Net (FEWSNET)
- Information Management and Mine Action Programs (IMMAP)
- United Nations Organisation Coordinating Humanitarian Aid (OCHA)

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**Development**

**Afghan National Development Strategy**

Clusters
- Agriculture and Rural Development
  - Ministry of Agriculture
- Human Resource Development
  - Ministry of Education
- Economic and Infrastructure Development
  - Ministry of Mines

**United Nations Committees**

Governance Peace and Stability
- UNDP, UNAMA
- Sustainable Livelihoods
  - FAO, UNEP
- Basic Services
  - UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO

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3 Institutions after the bullet point are those chairing or co-chairing the cluster or committee.
2.2. Platforms and Methods to Improve Access

Livelihoods platforms primarily exist to enhance coordination rather than improve access to insecure areas. Insecurity has increased nationwide in recent years, however this has not been accompanied by initiatives to collectively negotiate access to insecure areas.

NGOs, virtually the only non-militarised development actors working in insecure areas, have individually negotiated access to their implementation areas by ‘engaging local communities and local government right from the very start,’ according to Save the Children. Care International also confirmed a localised approach and the importance of informal governance structures, primarily tribal councils and elders, to create and then maintain access:

‘In Paktya, it is the tribal system and tribal elders that have more power than insurgents or criminals and can negotiate with them and provide the opportunity and pave the road for development activities. But in Wardak, it is completely different. The tribal structure is very weak and the province is completely controlled by anti-government elements. We couldn’t implement NSP in some areas of Wardak, but in Paktya, we are implementing.......... If the tribal system remains strong, then implementing development projects remain easier.”

The National Solidarity Program (NSP), MRRD’s community development program, assurances from the community are also required prior to any implementation, ‘we always keep ourselves engaged with communities. In Helmand and Kandahar – if villagers come to ask us to work with them, then we do it otherwise we stay away. We always try to get assurances from the community and one of our conditions is that we should be able to monitor the programs and projects.’

As the security situation has deteriorated, international organisations as well as some international NGOs have adopted outsourcing as a method to continue programming into the more insecure areas of the country. ICRC livelihoods programs in the north ‘use local NGOs and consultants to access the more insecure areas,’ while since 2007, WFP has relied on a policy of ‘outsourcing monitoring’ as it ‘increases access to the districts as the UN is bound by its security policy. The only way to increase access is to engage partners who are not constrained by the UN’s security rules.’ A similar approach has been adopted by the MoPH, ‘through a contracting out mechanism of the BPHS and EPHS (that) could be considered a strategy to increase access to health services in insecure areas. They have a type of MoU with the communities and it is the communities that protect the health facilities.’

In 2007, MRRD’s National Area Based Development Program (NABDP), a district level development monitoring and implementation body elected by communities, developed the ‘Kandahar Model’ as a method to implement community development projects in insecure areas through the ‘decentralisation of procurement and financial procedures coupled with community contracting.’ At the village level, MRRD’s National Solidarity Program has also formulated a ‘High Risk Area Strategy’ that allows for a greater degree of flexibility in implementation and monitoring. The Ministry of

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4 The BPHS is the Basic Package of Health Services, an internationally funded and NGO implemented program of health clinics, health posts and district hospitals in the provinces. The EPHS is the Essential Package of Hospital Services with facilities primarily located in provincial centres.

Education (MoEd) is also reportedly formulating a policy for ‘promoting education in insecure areas,’ according to the World Bank.

A joint access strategy involving NGOs and the UN was rejected by the members of ACBAR, an NGO coordination body, as according to ACBAR:

“There was a risk to the perception of NGOs as neutral and independent actors if they were to set up this joint strategy with the UN. The rationale behind the decision is that the UN is operating here as an integrated mission with the political mandate being the overarching umbrella. That puts into question the perception of the UN as a neutral and impartial actor.”

ACBAR is now formulating a strategy that will ‘support this individual approach to acceptance of each individual NGO and try to create a collective perception,’ through a revision of the code of conduct for NGOs and the launching of a communication’s campaign that will emphasise three main principles: impartiality, quality of programming and transparency.

While ACBAR’s initiative intends to complement existing acceptance strategies, ‘NGOs are present in all 34 provinces and the reason that they have been able to continue working is the quality of the relationships with the local communities, who somehow act as a shield to protect them. There is the question of whether initiatives at the global or national level can improve access,’ stated ECHO as in many instances NGOs continue to operate through a practice of ‘we know our local bad guys,’ claimed the FAO.

2.3. Challenges to Livelihoods Programming

The challenges to livelihoods programming in Afghanistan are manifold and are primarily, although not solely, concerned with the direct and indirect effects of insecurity. According to MRRD, the ministry with arguably the greatest level of access across Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, ‘security and accessibility are the key problems. The other issue is that when a district is insecure, you cannot find people to go and work there - then security creates so many other constraints and challenges.’

For NGOs who implement the majority of livelihoods programs including, for example, agricultural assistance, rural development, health and vocational training programs, open conflict has a direct impact on their operations due to the risk of exposure to the conflict for their own staff and the inability to access beneficiaries. For The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), ‘insecurity is an issue and we have to occasionally postpone some implementations and if the insecurity is quite severe, we may move the program somewhere else.’ A similar sentiment was echoed by Care International, ‘the big challenges are anti-government elements not allowing development programs. For example, they have burnt down schools and kidnapped program staff. In insecure areas, there are greater limitations to what an organization can do.’

As mentioned in the previous section, NGOs have adopted a localised approach to accessing communities in insecure areas that is predicated upon community acceptance and ownership. For Relief international, there is no ‘difference between insecure and secure areas if sustainability is linked to the quality of your program, the quality of the implementation and ownership by the community, then there is nowhere it won’t be sustainable.’ NGO’s access to insecure areas has therefore been instrumental in ensuring the continued implementation and monitoring of livelihoods programs including the government’s Basic Package of Health Service (BPHS) and the NSP
and in the broader sense, the provision of humanitarian relief.

The indirect effects of insecurity have arguably a greater effect on livelihood programs for a number of reasons. Firstly, capacity restraints were frequently mentioned in interviews in Kabul as a major challenge for implementers. NGOs reportedly find it difficult to attract and retain qualified individuals willing to work at the district level and in insecure areas in particular, as detailed by Care International, ‘finding qualified staff is very difficult. Qualified staff do not exist and people from other areas are not willing to work in insecure areas.’ Flag International, a development contractor working in Ghazni and Kandahar provinces concurred, ‘we can’t send highly trained survey teams into remote and insecure areas, so we use people who are able to access these areas, who may have their own capacity limitations.’ As part of NGOs community acceptance strategies they will often recruit locally in insecure areas in order to present a ‘local face’ to the communities. A side effect of the practice is that ‘it can take months or years just to build the (educational) infrastructure before you can start the large-scale implementations,’ according to Save the Children as ‘a lack of local capacity is normally one of the major problems.’

For the government, capacity limitations have limited the effectiveness of the coordination, programming, implementation and oversight role undertaken by provincial and district departments. DFID described some of the challenges facing the government; ‘linking the district and provincial departments, ensuring that there are work plans and budgets - I’m not sure that it is there yet. Essentially, that they have the tools to carry out the plans that the ministries are devising and we are funding – that is the fundamental issues facing the government in terms of livelihoods.’ For ministries partnering with other organisations to implement government programs, such as the MoPH, their role is further complicated by locating qualified implementing partners as ‘where there is insecurity it is difficult to have a qualified NGO to implement the program. Even if we do find a qualified NGO, then it is a matter for them to find staff to work in the facility.’

Provincial departments, according to the World Bank, also suffer funding shortfalls and delays as earmarked funds, originating from the parent ministry and distributed by the Mustofiat/6 reportedly can take up to six months to arrive, thereby delaying local projects, often indefinitely due to the difficulties of construction in the winter season. At the district level with government salaries often around the US$100 mark, few qualified individuals will be willing to work in insecure districts where opposition groups often view the government as a legitimate target.

Secondly, identifying and accessing beneficiaries in insecure areas remains a distinct challenge, especially in the case of displaced populations. ‘In insecure areas, displacement happens and therefore it makes it difficult to both locate and access beneficiaries,’ stated Care. Undertaking assessments of conflict affected Internally Displaced People (IDPs) requires NGOs to access areas where they may not have a history of community engagement and be further complicated by IDPs being scattered in multiple locations. Accessing women beneficiaries is a further difficulty as cultural traditions and conservative communities often limit the ability of women to access services and participate in income generating activities. Save the Children has ‘engaged in mobilisation just to encourage them (communities) that teaching a girl or accessing health care for a girl is acceptable.’

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6 The Mustofiat is part of the Ministry of Finance and responsible for the collection of revenue and government expenditures.
For Mercy Corps employing local women has increased the access to women beneficiaries:

‘We’ve got about 20% of our IDEA-NEW staff who are women and if they were not employed and able to travel, then we would not be able to reach women beneficiaries at all. In the south it is even harder. It is a matter of us being able to access women beneficiaries, but also the women being able the market afterwards as well’.

For departments including Labour and Social Affairs identifying and providing benefits to the families of martyrs and the disabled, for example, is complicated by poor records and individuals only entering the provincial centre on a yearly basis from the more remote areas.

Thirdly, sustainability is also a concern for livelihoods programs. In the case of NGOs, creating sustainable livelihoods programs is ever more difficult in insecure areas as the possibilities to develop services or improve herd management and horticulture programs are curtailed by insecurity, limited access and low local capacity. One of the main challenges, according to the EU, is ‘building something sustainable in insecure environments ..... (as) is the case for agriculture extensions, such as developing wheat seeds, it is difficult to have people in the field with the appropriate knowledge and have them stay there.’

For government ministries, funding allocations play a significant role in determining the current and future levels of service provision. For services ministries, such as MAIL, ‘we need to have a sustainable implementation, which means we have to be able to provide extension services, our officers in the field must be well equipped and they have to have sufficient budget. At the moment we don’t have the operational budget to fund those extension services.’ Perhaps echoing the government concerns over sustainable implementations, ACBAR, a coordinating body for NGOs, expressed ‘a strong concern that the level of funding in the future will not remain at the current level to allow NGOs to keep on implementing the same level of services,’ especially the ‘type of services (that) are critical to the building of an Afghan state – such as education and health.’

Fourthly, there is a discernible lack of effective coordination of livelihoods programs between government ministries, donor organizations, provincial authorities and implementing bodies. For the MoE, the government ministry mandated to oversee NGO activities and the implementation of ANDS:

“The major challenges are related to the lack of coordination of donors and the government that is enhanced in the provinces. The government is in the provinces and wants to implement programs with the consent or coordination of the provincial governor, however there are also donor programs that are either in just that province or in several provinces, but not national.’

Definitions and priorities have also curtailed a more comprehensive approach to livelihoods as the delineation between food security and livelihoods and more broadly humanitarianism and development have obfuscated a more focused approach. ECHO, the EU’s Humanitarian donor agency further expanded on the subject:

‘The long-term consequences cannot be addressed by humanitarian (short-term) funding as after six months, the whole things collapses and there is a return to the chronic problems of before the intervention. The problem is also exacerbated by development donors perceiving that community needs are being met by your humanitarian funds and therefore they fund
alternative projects. In many cases, there is also a gap in funding between short-term humanitarian funding and mid-to-long term development funding, which leaves vulnerable communities with no support.’

Some donors, according to the FAO, have tended to focus their agricultural priorities on the ‘most viable and most productive,’ based on ‘economic models, which they can justify.’ Furthermore, the UN’s humanitarian Consolidated Appeals (CAP) listed the chronically vulnerable as the second priority for the 2011 CAP, which was downgraded to the third priority by mid-year and may disappear from the top three CAP priorities for 2012, thereby leaving ‘the chronically vulnerable underserved by agriculture policy, humanitarian policy and as such there is no national program that specifically targets livelihoods and/or the chronically vulnerable,’ declared the FAO.

Separately, though closely related, data collecting and sharing was considered by donors, government ministries and international organisations as an obstacle to addressing and understanding livelihoods needs. For the World Bank ‘one of the major challenges is that of donor co-ordination – coordinating programs, lessons learned and information sharing.’ The humanitarian clusters and networks such as the Early Recovery Network (ERN) are attempting to address this issue through joint assessment tools in the case of ERN and closer cooperation and standardization within the Food Security and Agriculture humanitarian cluster, self-described as ‘under one theme, we speak with one voice.’ NGOs possess a large body of localised information on livelihoods through a combination of household surveys, focus groups discussions and more informal approaches that are not always standardized. Save the Children is in a position similar to many other NGOs in stating that ‘we have a wealth of information (on livelihoods) but it is just sitting there in our reports.’

The lack of standardization between NGOs, combined with the varying quality of information was reported by USAID to inhibit a more effective development approach predicated upon a comprehensive regional or national understanding of livelihoods needs, including health and education. Livelihoods information collected by NGOs remains primarily for internal programming and monitoring purposes, possibly as a result of ‘NGOs (being) very project orientated or driven so they don’t have this reflex to share this operational analysis that could make a starting point for research or could be shared with others,’ according to ACBAR. Relief International concurred with ACBAR’s assessment:

“Not many household surveys are published most likely as some NGOs want to keep it secret, it’s a lot of money, a lot of investment, but I think we work for the people, so it should be spread widely. It might be the case that now there will be more competitors in Nimroz, but that is good as there will be more services for the people. I don’t see it as a corporate secret.”

The absence of more standardized data collecting and institutionalized information sharing, not only among NGOs but also with the donors, government and international organizations, can often result in differing interpretations of development and humanitarian needs as is currently occurring in the
response to the drought in the north, northwest and west of the country. For ACBAR, what is missing is ‘just basic data. Nobody knows what are the levels of people’s needs. There are a lot of buzzwords, such as social protection everywhere and I would like to know what the meaning is. Even if you delink the term and talk about health needs, emergency food needs, WATSAN needs, irrigation needs – nobody knows.’

Closely related to data collection and sharing is the ability of organisations to monitor and assess their programs. Withstanding insecurity, measuring the effect of programming has been complicated by the number of development actors that has resulted in the creation of a complex development picture obfuscating attempts to understand local livelihoods needs as explained by Solidarites:

“The aid environment has created an extremely complex situation in terms of livelihoods. To understand livelihoods in a country where there is so much aid assistance is a nightmare … all of these amounts of food that are being distributed are creating a huge bias in terms of what is the actual situation? What is the actual livelihood of the population? When you do an assessment and you notice large discrepancies between household income and expenditure and you don’t see starvation etc. There are huge things that are not transparent and that is a major problem.”

For NGOs, it can be difficult to attract long term funding to monitor the effects of rural development. For example, Relief International declared ‘often the programs are difficult to monitor, not because of insecurity, but due to donor constraints and the absence of funding for long term monitoring and lessons learned.’ Considering that the impact of agricultural projects, such as new seeds or farming methods, may take several years to measure, donors such as the EU are also cognizant of the problem:

‘It is the major concern of all donors – what is the impact of our programs in the country. For agriculture development programs, you will not know results by tomorrow. You expect results on a ten-year perspective. For wheat, for example, ten years would be relatively short and therefore a 15-year timeframe would be acceptable, similar to fruit growing, to properly measure its effectiveness. In such kind of an environment where you are always looking for daily information to cope with daily issues it is difficult to put in place a really long term strategy for data collection on the impact of agriculture.’

Finally, the ‘under funding and underinvestment’ of the livelihoods sector is considered as a major challenge by all categories of stakeholders – donors, government, international organisations and NGOs alike. The current drought and the impending food insecurity in the north of the country have

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highlighted the underinvestment in livelihoods as detailed by the FAO: ‘Yes it is a bad year, but it is not a humanitarian crisis. So our donors went out to these areas as well and the problems that they see are issues of chronic underinvestment, especially in the Central Highlands and Badakhshan – chronic underinvestment, chronic under-engagement.’

The World Bank expressed a similar sentiment: ‘the needs are so great – even a road or irrigation project – both are essentially a drop in the bucket compared to the numerous livelihoods demands in the country. There are simply not enough development funds to meet the challenges.’

A further multi-lateral donor, the EU, highlighted the difficulties in catering to livelihoods needs:

‘Capacity restraints are a major concern. There is much more demand that can be met. Therefore there is a whole group of people who, by definition, are not served. For example, we are working with 4,000 working children in Kabul, but we know that there are 60,000 out there, so that is 56,000 kids that do not get access, at least to our services.’

Donor priorities, in some instances, have also reportedly resulted in a preference for tangible project implementations, or bricks and mortar, over livelihoods programming that focus on income generation or agricultural extension services, for example. This prioritization has resulted in ‘most of the larger donors want[ing] infrastructure – roads, bridges and dams etc – and rural development is often perceived as being that, rather than livelihoods,’ according to Solidarities International.

Photo 1: Farming in the hills of Maymana, Faryab
2.3. Existing Research into Livelihoods

Research into livelihoods remains particularly understudied in Afghanistan according to the majority of stakeholders consulted for this report. Although there is a very limited availability of formal research, there are numerous providers of national data on livelihoods, social protection and services that include government ministries, the UN and dedicated information providers, such as FEWSNET and IMMAP. A further body of information resides within implementing organizations, primarily NGOs, however this information is primarily used for internal purposes and fails to receive a wider audience.8

A brief follow-up online stakeholders survey tended to confirm the scarcity of research into livelihoods. Stakeholders were asked to describe the current state of research into key livelihoods areas. Results can only be considered indicative, however they do suggest a distinct trend of very limited research in the livelihoods sector, supporting the consensus of stakeholders. IMMAP, a provider of information on livelihoods, stated ‘I am not aware of any research providers – there are plenty of data providers, but not research.’ What information or research that is currently available, for Solidarites, ‘is not enough’ in order to ‘provide you with information to implement effective livelihoods programs.’

![Graph: Current State of Livelihoods Research](image)

**Figure 2: Current State of Livelihoods Research**

The nascent formal research sector in Afghanistan, beyond AREU, produces little public research into livelihoods. AREU was cited by 18 of the 25 stakeholders interviewed as a source of research into livelihoods. In many cases, AREU was perceived as the only source of formal research publicly available. The reports are also published in Pashto and Dari, the two primary local languages, thereby expanding their readership to policy units within government ministries, such as MoLSA.

Other research organisations, such as The Liaison Office (TLO) and the Peace Training and Research Organisation (PTRO), undertake research more associated with governance, politics and security, rather than placing an emphasis on livelihoods research as detailed by ACBAR, ‘there is a lot of political research, but when it comes to the needs of people, there is almost nothing available beyond AREU,’ a position that was affirmed by the EU; ‘You have all kinds of research, but very little specifically on livelihoods.’

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8 Annex 2 provides a list of organisations that are involved in the research of or distribution of information pertaining to livelihoods as mentioned by stakeholders.

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SLRC –ODI Stakeholder Report
Data and information on livelihoods is derived from several sectors: the government, United Nations, specialist information providers, NGOs and organisation wishing to understand livelihoods to effectuate a change in behaviour, primarily international counter narcotics and counterinsurgency agencies.

The government’s National Vulnerability and Risk Assessment (NRVA), produced every three years, was viewed by ten nationally focused organisations consulted as a major source of data on livelihoods. Originally a WFP program and now housed within the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the NRVA, according to the ICRC, ‘is a good source for us as we use it as baseline data, although you have to go into villages and discuss with communities, but the NRVA does give you some indication.’ For MRRD, the NRVA is ‘the only source that has given some relative picture in terms of rural poverty, accessibility to services and infrastructure ...... (it is) the only source that can give you some data on livelihoods.’

The NRVA, however, often does not provide the required detail down to the district and sub-district level for implementing organisations, such as AKF, ‘we tend to be fairly self-reliant. What we are interested in is data at the district level and we can’t get good data from the NRVA at that level and that tends to be true for most of the data sources at the district level.’

Government ministries are also providers of data on livelihoods. MAIL, MRRD and MoPH were frequently mentioned as providers of more specialised data. For example, the MoPH administers the Health Management Information System (HMIS), which is a ‘quarterly quantitative reports from all of our facilities that we consult on a regular bases. It includes patient numbers, types of illnesses and disease as well as the use of medicines.’ The database is accessed by organisations such as the WFP for ‘more detailed district level information.’ In a similar manner, the EU-funded Perennial Horticulture Development Program (PHDP), regarded by MAIL as ‘one of our more successful programs,’ involves a ‘database of all different types of fruits and nuts,’ that incorporates ‘what is used in production and where it is grown.’ The program will be fully integrated into MAIL in the near future.

The ministries, while providers of data, have little internal capacity to produce formal research on livelihoods as expounded by MoLSA:

“Unfortunately, we have (an internal research capacity) by name only, there is no capacity. We have the General Directorate for Policy, Planning and External Relations and under that we are meant to have a policy unit, we should do some research, which is then integrated into policy. The people that were hired, however, do not have the capacity to do that. They don’t have the English ability either – especially for seeing what is happening in other countries. In the social affairs department, there is no research or policy unit.”

Internal capacity is also an obstacle to the research designs of MRRD. A ‘stand-alone institute called the Afghan Institute of Rural Development (AIRD),’ has been established although ‘for the time being – the training component is very active, the research component – we have a long way to go.’ Within MAIL, currently going through a process of bureaucratic restructuring, the FAO ‘is working on a handover of (research) capacity and ensure that the ministry can perform its job. The US has funded a large research and extension project that has been built on MAIL’s design -it will take a few years,’ according to MAIL. The agricultural ministry is also intending to consolidate its current 15
repositories of information by employing an advisor with responsibilities to ‘compile all of the value chain analysis work that has been done by all of the organizations and put it into a repository that we will made available to the NGOs who would like to work in a particular sector or district.’ This will be assisted by the recent creation of an NGO coordination bureau within the ministry.

The United Nations provides an array of data and information on livelihoods, in contrast to that of research provision. OCHA, UNICEF, FAO and WFP were cited as suppliers of data on humanitarian indicators, children and education, and food security, respectively, in the case of both FAO and WFP. OHCA, in particular, was singled out by ERN as being able to ‘both coordinate and act as a repository or database for information.’ The UN does undertake thematic research into livelihoods areas, however this can be for existing or proposed programming or global thematic papers, as explained by WFP; ‘Some research is thematic for all of the offices, but some is tailored to Afghanistan. For example, we have a new voucher project and we had some people from headquarters here who under took the research and then send their report.’ The FAO reported a similar research strategy through ‘a technical cooperation approach that is our strength - we bring specialists in to the country, which is complemented by technical papers and research from headquarters.’

The USAID funded FEWSNET, the early warning system for food insecurity, was referred to by nationally focused organisations, including WFP, FAO, USAID, DfID and Save the Children as an important source of regular updates on projected food insecurity throughout the country. The data for FEWSNET is derived from government ministries, such as MAIL, NGO household assessments, UN agencies and regional workshops. IMMAP, an international NGO, is a further organisation involved in the provision of livelihoods information with a specific mandate to map humanitarian and development data as well as security incidents, primarily for an NGO and UN audience:

‘We were asked to go to the clusters and ask if we could develop something useful for them. It started very informally. They wanted to know for example, where are there going to be floods? And who is going to be affected? So we incorporated settlement data with flood risk data that we have from a variety of sources and overlaid the two. Through this then we could provide weekly risk maps – this then allowed the NGOs to preposition or at least be prepared to intervene. We also have data on NGOs stocks or supplies so that we can locate the supplies closest to the affected areas. It is a real time gap analysis. It was created for a specific cluster, but now the idea is to provide the platform to everybody.’

As NGOs and implementing agencies often require more localised information at the district or sub-district level, which is largely absent from the current data sets, then there is a greater degree of self-reliance on data collection. Save the Children, for example, articulated the shortfalls of current data sets: ‘A lot of the data is either inaccurate or non-existent and therefore we have to do a lot of the research ourselves.........There are gaps in many places – for DRR, though, there are less gaps as we get a lot of information from the UN and other NGOs.’
NGOs, more broadly, possess a comparatively greater level of access and body of information on livelihoods. This information, however, remains largely internalised for programmatic, advocacy or proposal purposes as articulated by AKF:

‘The work being done by NGOs and other agencies is often done for their own needs and sometimes it is distributed and sometimes it is not and it is kept internal. I think that a consortium to act as a repository for all this information would be a fantastic idea. We’re trying to make up for it by conducting our own baseline surveys. Like other NGOs, we are doing our own research based on the kinds of data that we feel we need.’

Separately, Relief International has recently completed a 1,400 household survey of Nimroz in the far southwest of the country incorporating questions on health, education, food security and nutrition. The findings of the survey will be incorporated into future programming with the additional ‘hope that it will raise interest about Nimroz amongst donors, even the government and the UN to allocate more means to the province,’ thereby serving the dual purposes of informing programming and raising awareness of the population’s needs in a remote area of Afghanistan.

NGOs have also been responsible for the establishment of two new initiatives in 2011 that intend on increasing the amount of information available on livelihoods, while also focusing on capacity building or training. ACTED established the Afghanistan Livelihoods Network (ALN) and a consortium including Solidarites International, CRS and the Aga Khan Development Network established the Sustainable Land Management Initiative (SLMI). In the words of ACTED:

“We started thinking about livelihoods in 2009 and this started as when we were conducting relief work, then if we entered into the same area a year or two later then the same people would require assistance – so we were looking at the conditions behind this. In thinking about this we wanted to inform other NGOs and actors about livelihoods so we decided to set up a stand alone entity, called the Afghan Livelihoods Network (ALN).”

SLMI has been established as a national NGO in Bamyan complete with new offices inside the university and according to Solidarites, ‘one of its mandates is to train and research on natural resource management and agriculture.’

For organizations with a particular focus on advocacy, such as the Afghanistan Civil Society Forum (ACSF), research is for their ‘own advocacy purposes. We have six thematic areas and a stand along research department, which is part of our advocacy strategy.’

In addition to research and data providers by institutes, the government, international organisations and NGOs, there is a large body of research conducted or funded by international counter narcotics and counterinsurgency agencies, as explained by the FAO:

“If you look at the livelihoods literature, then the majority is related to narcotics and alternative livelihoods. They are the only ones who are saying that we have to change the livelihoods basis and as such then we need to understand what livelihoods they have now and what potential livelihoods they could have. And they are the only ones who are really engaged in it. I don’t see that kind of investment from the development world – I don’t see the write up or the research. Alternative livelihoods research – it is livelihoods work, but it is for an effect.”
Finally, donors primarily conduct assessments rather than research into livelihoods and do not possess an internal in-country research capability as described by JICA, ‘Part of it is contracted out and part of it is performed by people coming from headquarters. JICA staff from Japan will normally come here to undertake research with consultants.’ The EU concurred, stating ‘there is no internal research capacity, yes we can look up things and prepare things, but we tend to contract out our research either to locally to research organisations or if we are developing a new program we will hire consultants to do research for us. We are a bureaucracy and a donor, so we do not have a research capacity.’

ECHO, the EU’s humanitarian donor agency, described a methodology incorporating local partners and research providers:

“In Kabul, there is no internal research capacity. But we do work with partners who have the capacity to properly assess the situation before coming and asking for funding. We also support an initiative with IRC and AREU that proposes to research on the impact on what we do and what needs to change, for example, food assistance, to make sure that we are not doing more harm than good. It is a formalized structure with an agreed upon methodology.”
2.4. Challenges to Researching Livelihoods

Organizations researching livelihoods face similar challenges to organisations implementing livelihoods programs, but are also subject to particular challenges that are unique to the research sector. Studying livelihoods is a difficult task that is complicated by a very basic level of infrastructure, virtually no baseline data, an ongoing insurgency, a weak bureaucratic capacity and a paucity of organizations actually researching livelihoods. A number of challenges to researching livelihoods were described by stakeholders.

Attempting to recruit experienced and academically qualified international and national staff is a concern for many organizations. The EU has found that:

‘The internationals tend to have a solid academic background, but very often ... it is pretty obvious that they tend to be pretty inexperienced as researchers and they are entering into an extremely complex context, and they do not always get the proper handle on it. On the Afghan side, I would say, there are a lack of qualified graduates and those graduates that are available very often need further training to be effective researchers, so they will have the advantage of local knowledge but will lack, for example, the methodological aptitude.’

High turnover of international staff and programmatic staff more broadly also affect the institutional knowledge base as well as the integrity of long-term research projects or assessments. Again, according to the EU, ‘this turnover affects how we collect information. In the long term, multiple people ‘improving’ data collection actually affects the data collection itself in the long run. There needs to be a continuous, permanent and homogeneous way of collecting the information.’

Within government ministries a similar phenomenon exists, where a research department may exist, however capacity remains low thereby limiting the ability to produce practical and policy relevant research. Efforts are underway to expand the research capacity within several ministries including MAIL, MoLSA MoPH and MRRD. According to MRRD, the Afghanistan Institute of Rural Development (AIRD) ‘does not have an effective research capacity,’ however the training element of the institute has made significant progress. Attempts to build the capacity of government research departments face numerous challenges, according to MoLSA:

‘Within the ministries in government there are major problems of capacity when it comes to researchers. To implement a research strategy effectively, you have to have capable people placed in the ministry and in order to do that you have to pay high salaries. You will not find strong researchers for $500 to $600 a month. You need people with a masters degree or PhD in research and there is a very small pool of such people and they are earning $3000 to $4000 a month. The government is not able to do this as the Director General is only earning $650 a month.’
Stakeholders also reported an **underinvestment in livelihoods research**. Organisations were asked in the post-interview online survey, ‘what research currently informs the debate in Afghanistan?’ and secondly, ‘what kinds of research are professionally relevant?’ Conflict and security, aid and development in the broad sense and the drug economy were viewed as being the most informative, while food security, livelihoods, chronic poverty, humanitarianism and migration were professionally relevant for many of the 19 respondents but were not considered as necessarily contributing to or influencing the current narrative within the country.

The underinvestment in research was highlighted by both AKF and Solidarities. For AKF, the logistical challenges of Afghanistan increase the expense of undertaking research; *‘it is very expensive to do research in Afghanistan. I bought a pack of horses a while ago so we could send enumerators to places that are inaccessible.’* Solidarites stated that the underinvestment in livelihoods research has limited the availability of practically relevant research, as *‘there is not enough investment in the analysis of the livelihoods programs that would provide you with information to implement effect livelihoods programs.’*

For NGOs and other implementing agencies it can be very difficult to attract **donor funding** ‘even to do assessments,’ according to ACBAR, let alone conducting extensive livelihood vulnerability surveys that can last several months. In many instances, NGOs delve into their own funds in order to conduct assessments to substantiate proposals to donors. Relief International also underlined the funding challenges, claiming that *‘very few organisation have the capacity and the budget .......It costs quite a lot of money to do.’*

In contrast to the reported difficulties in obtaining donor funds, ECHO adopted a novel approach to funding the NGO Solidarites’ research into livelihoods and vulnerability in two districts in Bamyan and Samangan provinces. *‘Part of the deal,’* stated Solidarites, *‘was that we train NGOs on the program and how we did it.’* The NGO mapped livelihood zones and socio-economic categories as defined in consultations with local communities and then created household surveys and led focus group discussions designed in consultation with Groupe URD, a French training organisation, in order to build a livelihoods and vulnerability map of the two districts. The model is updated by selecting sentinel households, representing the different socio-economic groups, which are re-interviewed on a quarterly basis. As described by Solidarites:
“We design a large number of indicators with sentinel households as we do not have the capacity to undertake regular district wide surveys. We define, for each livelihoods category, one or two or three households and these people we will follow – it is these families who will provide us with an idea of what happens to all the families that correspond to them.”

MoLSA is perhaps representative of the underfunding of a research capacity within government ministries, stating ‘it needs donor support to create a research base within the ministries.’

Impartial research was also claimed by at least one organisation from each category of stakeholder as affecting the quality and indeed presence of research in certain livelihoods sectors. One NGO stated that conducting impartial assessments or research might disadvantage them in future funding applications with donors pursuing a politicized development agenda.

“It can be sensitive in terms of future funding projects with donor agencies – because if you tell them information they really don’t like to hear or there if the perception that you are allied to a faction, which is against the donor organisations, then you can see your funding dry up. Either the information will be rejected or you will be blacklisted.”

The aforementioned capacity of researchers can also contribute to perceptions of partiality of research as described by the WFP: ‘The capacity of the researchers is also important – if the researcher is qualified and experienced, then the quality of the information is improved and is less likely to be manipulated politically.’

Funding priorities and allocations are also susceptible to geographical or political considerations rather than being predicated on impartial assessments of needs, according to MRRD:

“In terms of investments you need to strike a balance between the different geographical regions of the country – so sometimes your planning is very much affected by political considerations. For example, Ghor has been underserved for many many years and you need to channel more resources towards the province, but people don’t see it from that angle. They say ‘I know Ghor is there are suffering and the people haven’t received much in terms of development assistance, but what about my people in Bamyan? Or Nuristan or wherever?’”

The issue of partiality in current research in Afghanistan, more broadly, was also noted as a concern for ACSF:

“We are both a post-war and in-war country and there are a lot of issues which are very very sensitive that may actually be harmful. One of the issues that we are lacking is what is harming and what is not harming. The majority of the research that is coming out, especially by Afghans, could be harmful – it is either politically biased or ethnically biased or religiously biased. There are inherent biases in the research.”
2.5. Livelihoods Knowledge Gaps

In addition to the limited research into livelihoods, stakeholders also identified numerous knowledge gaps in the existing research and data sets. The scarcity of livelihoods research itself led the FAO to claim ‘when it comes to gaps, you could say livelihoods as a whole is an information gap,’ a view which was echoed by MAIL in that ‘information as it stands is a gap.’ More specifically, stakeholders detailed the lack of baseline data, the absence of evidenced based research on coping mechanisms and resilience as well as informal social protection and traditional village structures.

The primary knowledge gap identified by interviewees was the absence of baseline data and more generally statistics concerning livelihoods. The last full census was reportedly conducted in 1951, a partial census was then conducted in 1979, however insecurity limited its coverage and in the late 1980s a further partial census was conducted which the current government has not accepted. The current population statistics are an extrapolation from the partial 1979 census. The national land use data statistics purportedly date from 1993.10

The reported absence of baseline data was consistently raised by all categories of stakeholders as affecting the ability to monitor and assess programming and national development goals. For government ministries, such as MRRD, one of the main challenges ‘is the baseline; there is no baseline in this country. Whatever initiatives you undertake, sooner or later you will need a baseline and it is just not there.’ MoLSA, responsible for social affairs and providing benefits and pensions to vulnerable groups, claimed ‘the problem ..... is statistics. With the insecurity we have not been able to conduct a census in the last ten years. There is no data on different categories of people, vulnerable groups in society, women at risk, old age pensioners, beggars and street kids.’ A similar sentiment was expressed by AKF: ‘Baseline data is a huge gap in Afghanistan. The existing baseline data – even on standard indicators – I find often unreliable or it doesn’t answer the question or there is conflicting information between two different data sources.’

National level development goals, institutionalized in the form of ANDS, also suffer from the absence of baseline data according to ACSF:

“ANDS is also a problem. For example they detail how child mortality will decrease by 10% by 2014, but we don't know from what level – we have no baseline, therefore this 10% becomes a guess or assumption. We don't have credible information on the population or the needs of the people. We still don’t know the level of poverty – despite all of the planning and spending. The total amount of money that has been given to Afghanistan in the last years in aid and assistance totals $56 billion.”

For the more nationally focused stakeholders, as previously mentioned, the NRVA is considered as a default baseline, although for organisations working at the provincial and district level, such as

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"Considering how much funding has been available over the last ten years, it is quite remarkable that the gaps are so persistent."

European Union

9 According to the Afghanistan Civil Society Forum.
10 Information from IMMAP
Mercy Corps, there is a need for ‘government research – unemployment, growth, literacy rates, access to health – down to the provincial level and more frequently than the NRVA. It could be a good independent baseline to use to gauge the effectiveness of our work.’

Community coping mechanisms and resilience were also reported as an area in need of more extensive research. Perhaps not surprisingly, NGOs, present throughout the majority of districts in Afghanistan, reported a good understanding of coping mechanisms resulting from a large body of evidenced based research in the form of household surveys and other proprietary research methodologies. In answer to a specific question on whether stakeholders possessed evidenced-based knowledge on coping mechanisms, Solidarites declared ‘I would say absolutely yes in the areas where we work, with the slight exception that we do not have a complete picture of remittances. This is from the evidenced base that we have created.’ AKF, Care, Flag International, RI and Save the Children reported a similar level of knowledge on coping mechanisms resulting from surveys and assessments undertaken by programmatic staff.

There is a personal understanding of coping mechanisms by Afghan citizens, though this is generally not matched by published evidenced based research. For example, an individual working for ERN recounted how he ‘worked in Paktya for a while and during the floods people moved into the school and the overflow moved into the mosque. The community raised money to support them while they were there. But again, I haven’t seen a report on what I have experienced though.’ At MRRD, a senior official on formal research into coping mechanisms claimed ‘I haven’t seen any, no. But as a citizen of this country, then I do have that basic understanding of how people in insecure areas learn to survive.’

For donors, such as ECHO, current assessments and research often do not capture a complete livelihoods picture:

“Over time, people have developed coping mechanisms that are no longer coping mechanisms but livelihoods strategies and how they live, which makes the livelihood scheme very complex.”

Solidarites International

“they fail to look at other sources of income, perhaps other family members are working overseas or in another province, maybe they are fighters or alternative sources of income. I think Afghans have developed an amazing coping mechanism, with a high resilience capacity; often producing varied sources of income. Unfortunately, we capture too little of it – so we just look at one part of their income. Because we intervene, we have the potential to undermine their traditional coping mechanisms by providing short term solutions, which may produce dysfunctional systems while in fact if you had not intervened, then people would have made it though – it may have been tough, but people would have made it through.”

The EU also expressed a desire for more empirical research into food insecurity, more broadly: ‘For food security it is related to food production, but that is only part of the question and it is difficult to get the overall picture. A lot of actors lack a lot of points in terms of food access, coping mechanisms, and resilience – it is difficult to get all this information.’

For stakeholders more removed from the community level, there is often a reliance on NGOs to understand livelihoods and coping mechanisms in particular. For USAID ‘there is the intention to gain
further information from communities and districts once there is more funding, but the quality of information coming from NGOs and (accompanying) insecurity may introduce limits to what information we collect.’

Furthermore, there is seen to be a scarcity of documented evidence of the informal social protection networks that exist in communities to support the most vulnerable segments of the population. The importance of informal social protection should not be underestimated in a country where traditionally there has few services provided by the state. According to Flag International and opinion that was shared by several other stakeholders, ‘the international community keeps on saying that the Afghan government needs to provide services, but there is no history of this in many ways. The government never did provide extensive or even basic services in many districts.’ This traditional self-reliance, according to the MoE, continues in many parts of the country:

“There are even some villages that 100% depend on themselves, primarily relying on subsistence agriculture and other methods and even the government is not doing that much for them. In areas where there are natural disasters and the news reaches the television, then the government focuses on those areas. But in most of the villages, they are not dependent on the central government and they survive by their own means.”

Considering the prevalence of informal social protection, the area remains under researched, although those organisations that operate closest to the communities are again able to contribute to a greater understanding of the phenomenon. For MAIL:

“The NGO facilitating partners have a lot of information from the CDCs on social protection, which is used in the cluster meetings. And now that we have launched and completed the investigations on credit, we know for example why micro-credit with its biweekly payments does not work in the rural areas, but as we’ve started to investigate, we’ve been able to come to terms with what is going on out there. I think the knowledge is known, but not broadly known.”

A greater articulation of the definition of ‘social protection,’ or at least a breakdown of its composite parts may be needed at the policy level if evidenced based research is incorporated into policy making. MoLSA described the current predicament:

“This word social protection is a new word in Afghanistan – even if you ask an educated person, they wouldn’t know what to think. Within our ministry, only a limited number of people know what it means and what activities would fall under that. Outside the ministry knowledge on what social protection is very limited. It will take time for Afghanistan to understand the concept of social protection.”

There is a similarly seen to be a dearth of information on traditional structures of villages and communities, which would significantly enhance interventions from water management to introducing new seed varieties. Although there has been a significant investment in how to improve agricultural production, this has not been accompanied by a comparative investment in understanding the social networks and traditional roles in society as elucidated by the EU: “The adoption of new techniques is a social business and there is little done to try to understand on how to approach the local community so that they can adopt new techniques. ..... For the farmers, it is a fight for survival and it is too insecure – if it does not work, then what will happen?”
2.6. Incorporating Research into Policy Making

Although there were indications from government stakeholders that research may assume a greater role in policy-making, currently a broad cross-section of stakeholders declared that little, if any, livelihoods research is incorporated into the decisions of policy makers. The current environment of research is borne out of several factors.

**Insecurity**, as mentioned in previous sections, has limited the ability of the government to directly access many parts of the country and reporting mechanisms between the district and Kabul are often weak. The distance between communities in insecure areas and the government was described by Care, ‘in insecure areas it is like there is a curtain covering the communities from decision makers and policy people.’

Considering that there is only a limited amount of formal **research available** on livelihoods, the question of availability and access to published reports is also an issue as described by Mercy Corps; ‘We talk about research as practitioners. I very much doubt it that policy makers would even see the research let alone integrate it into policy decisions.’ For donors, and arguably government policy makers, **time** is also a constraint. At the EU, ‘there are simple time constraints and work commitments that precludes us from spending a huge amount of time reading.’

Incorporating research into livelihoods is a **shared responsibility** between research and practitioners and policy makers, according to ECHO, that too often fails to incorporate government interlocutors:

> “Policy makers do not use research enough. It is a responsibility of NGOs and donors, but often they fail to interact with policy makers in the Afghan government. In human rights, gender, agriculture and health, then the concentration of civil society actors have helped to influence the debate, but much more needs to be done......We walk half the way - we do the survey, we write the reports, we publish, we sometimes organise communications campaigns, but when it comes to sitting down with senior politicians and decision makers and entering into a dialogue, there are very few groups that are doing that.”

Flag International

MoLSA confirmed a discernible division between researchers, practitioners and government policy makers:

> “The problem is that I see in my experience is that there is no link between researchers and policy makers. There are a number of foreigners who come here, do the research, present that in a press conference and then leave – there is no follow up. There is no engagement with the policymakers (so) that the research can be explained and the recommendations presented. Perhaps, because of weak capacity within the ministry and a lack of coordination with researchers and NGOs, then this is not explored further.”

Integrating livelihoods research into policy also suffers from pre-existing biases or the perception that the policy maker knows best despite research, which may present an argument to the contrary,
declared several government, NGO and donor stakeholders. The World Bank stated that ‘often, donors and other feel that they know best and have little time or desire to read or attempt to understand alternative approaches. The sense of groupthink provides little room for independent and objective research in the country.’

ACBAR, the coordination body for NGOs, supported the view but also claimed that ideology is an important aspect of policy-making, especially amongst the international community:

“I think there are a lot of pre-conceived ideas about development in this country, especially among policy makers and what we are seeing is a lot of ideologically driven development …….. Those policies that are being designed are not being made to answer the needs or fit with the reality of this country.”

Research and assessments, however, did play a significant part in the introduction and expansion of some of the government’s larger development programs. In acknowledging the limited level of research incorporated into projects, the World Bank stated, ‘very rarely have I seen people and their research driving projects. Although for example, NEEP (now renamed the National Rural Access Program (NRAP)) was imported from Yemen and Peru and they contextualized that. NSP was brought in from Indonesia – both these projects were flagship projects.’

Government ministries including MRRD, MAIL and MoPH reported initiatives to improve the level of evidenced-based policy decisions. The MoE, responsible for the monitoring of ANDS, views the presentation of the annual reports on progress as a ‘very important (document) for the government and when the highlights are presented to the cabinet, decisions are then made for the following year.’ Policy departments, established only recently in many ministries, suffer from capacity limitations as well as the need to assess and develop a backlog of existing and proposed policies that complement rather than contradict one another, a complex task that is articulated by MAIL:

“We established a policy and legal advisory department in September 2010 and their task is to make sure that policy is based on world’s best practices, that it is contextualized for the country and that policies don’t conflict with one another. They have a mammoth task as each policy is created in isolation without regard for existing policies or programs. We currently have 111 outstanding policies in development and that department has to review everything.”

For MoPH, benefiting from the national coverage of the HMIS, integrating research or data into policy is a practice that is becoming more prevalent; ‘we are working on this. We would like to expand the culture of data use in MoPH. I believe for policy formulation and strategic documents that we have developed then most of the time we are relying on the results of our findings and research from program implementation assessments.’
## Annex 1: Stakeholder Organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>Bi-lateral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
<td>DfID</td>
<td>Bi-lateral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan International Cooperation Agency</td>
<td>JICA</td>
<td>Bi-lateral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development</td>
<td>MRRD</td>
<td>GoA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministry of Economy</td>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>GoA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministry of Public Health</td>
<td>MoPH</td>
<td>GoA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock</td>
<td>MAIL</td>
<td>GoA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs</td>
<td>MOLSA</td>
<td>GoA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Save The Children</td>
<td>StC</td>
<td>INGO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aga Khan Foundation</td>
<td>AKF</td>
<td>INGO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Care International</td>
<td>CARE</td>
<td>INGO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relief International</td>
<td>RI</td>
<td>INGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercy Corp</td>
<td>Mercy</td>
<td>INGO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solidarités International</td>
<td>Sol</td>
<td>INGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Management and Mine Action Programs</td>
<td>IMMAP</td>
<td>INGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Committee of the Red Cross</td>
<td>ICRC</td>
<td>IO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Food Program</td>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>IO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organisation</td>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>IO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP Early Recovery Network</td>
<td>ECN</td>
<td>IO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank</td>
<td>WB</td>
<td>Multi-lateral</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection</td>
<td>ECHO</td>
<td>Multi-lateral</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Union Delegation</td>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Multi-lateral</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Bank</td>
<td>WB</td>
<td>Multi-lateral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afghan Civil Society Forum</td>
<td>ACSF</td>
<td>NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief</td>
<td>ACBAR</td>
<td>NGO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flag International</td>
<td>FI</td>
<td>PRI</td>
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</table>
Annex 2: Stakeholder Questions

- **Background**
  - How are you involved in the dealing with livelihoods/basic services/social protection in insecure environments?
  - What do you see as the major challenges for livelihoods, basic service provision and social protection in insecure environments?
  - What platforms, institutions or methods exist that improves access and service delivery in insecure areas?
  - Does your organisation have a research capacity?

- **Knowledge gaps and research quality**
  - What do you feel are the critical knowledge/information gaps in the areas where you are working?
  - What types of research is there available in the areas you are working?
  - What organisations, institutes or consultancies are you aware of that produce research on livelihoods/basic services/social protection?
  - What is the quality of this research?
  - What are the main challenges for organisations that undertake practical and policy-relevant research in Afghanistan?
  - Are there particular research methods that have produced high quality and also applicable research to your work?
  - Do you think that policy makers use this research? Practitioners?

- **Evidenced Based Research**
  - Do you think you have a good understanding of how people manage to make their living under conditions of conflict in Afghanistan?
  - Do you think you have a good understanding on the informal ways in which men and women gain social protection and support?
  - Do you think you have a good understanding of how effective aid has been in improving access to basic services and social protection for men and women?
  - Do you think you think that there is good evidence to support the role of the private sector in Afghanistan in delivering services & social protection and stimulating pro-poor growth?

- **Research uptake**
  - Where do they get the information/data for their work?
  - Is this in the form of primary (raw) data, or do they draw on analytical research?
  - How would they prefer to access information?
Annex 2: Current Providers of Research on Livelihoods, Social Protection and Public Services

Institutes
The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)
www.areu.org.af

Research NGOs
Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation (APPRO)
http://www.appro.org.af/

Peace Training and Research Organisation (PTRO)
http://www.ptro.org.af/

The Liaison Office (TLO)
http://www.tlo-afghanistan.org/

NGOS conducting research into livelihoods
Groupes Energies Renouvelables, Environment et Solidarites (GERES)
- Renewable Energy

Solidarites International
- The white gold of Bamiyan : a comprehensive examination of the Bamiyan potato value chain from production to consumption
http://www.solidarites.org/ourprog/afghanistan/humanitarian-action.shtml

Platforms
Afghan Livelihoods Network (ALN)
http://afghanlivelihoods.com/

Afghanistan Early Recovery Network (ERN)

Agency Coordinating Body for Afghanistan Relief (ACBAR)
http://www.acbar.org/

Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET)
http://www.fews.net/Pages/country.aspx?gb=af&l=en

Information Management & Mine Action Programs (IMMAP)
- Providing baseline information and maps for humanitarian clusters
http://www.immap.org/index.php?do=operations&view=country&c_id=Afghanistan

Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MIFSA)
http://www.misfa.org.af/

Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (OCHA)

Sustainable Land Management Institute (SLMI)
- Training and academic courses, knowledge management and technology development
http://www.slmi.org.af/

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11 The list should be viewed as a summary of providers rather than an extensive list or all available organisations providing or conducting livelihoods research. Many organisations conduct livelihoods research in Afghanistan, but may not have a permanent presence in the country or conduct commissioned research that is not available to the general public.
**International Organisations**
Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (OCHA)

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)
http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan.html

The World Food Program (WFP)
http://www.wfp.org/countries/afghanistan

World Health Organisation (WHO)
http://www.emro.who.int/afghanistan/

The World Bank
http://go.worldbank.org/EEXQX5S800

The Asian Development Bank (ADB)

**USAID Programs/Partners**
Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)
http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/USAID/Activity/1/Accelerating_Sustainable_Agriculture_Project_ASA

Afghan Small and Medium Enterprise Development (ASMED)
http://www.asmedproject.info/joomla/

Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives North, East and West (IDEA-NEW)
http://ideanew.af/

**Government of Afghanistan**

Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA)
http://www.andma.gov.af/

Central Statistics Office

- Afghaninfo and the Afghan Socio-economic database
- National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA)

Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL)
www.mail.gov.af/

- Perennial Horticulture Development Project (PHDP) -
  http://afghanistanhorticulture.org/index.aspx

Ministry or Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)
www.mrrd.gov.af

- Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program (AREDP)
  http://www.aredp-mrrd.gov.af/
- Afghan Institute of Agricultural Development (AIRD)

**Joint Government Programs**
Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD)

- Interventions to improve the performance and sustainability of agricultural value chains
  http://www.cardf.gov.af/
International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)
The Afghan Country Stability Picture
http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/pressreleases/2008/02-december/pr080210-065.html

Private Companies
Afghan Centre for Socio-Economic Research and Opinion Surveys (ACSOR)
http://www.acsor-surveys.com/

Altai Consulting
http://www.altaiconsulting.com/

Non-Domestic Organisations
University of California Davis, USA
- Afghanistan Agricultural Repository (funded by US Department of Agriculture)
http://afghanag.ucdavis.edu/

The Food Economy Group (FEG), USA
- Private company specializing in livelihoods-based household food security analysis.
http://www.feg-consulting.com/

Tufts University, Feinstein Center, USA
- Research centre focused on the nexus between aid and security as well as humanitarianism
https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=19270958

Groupe Urgence Rehabilitation and Developpement, (URD) France
- Organization dedicated to linking relief, rehabilitation and development activities

International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), Syria
- Social, economic and policy research is an integral component
http://www.icarda.org/Facelift.htm

HTSPE, UK
- Consultancy specializing in advising clients on a range of livelihoods activities
http://www.htspe.com/our_work.htm
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Samuel Hall is a research and consulting company with headquarters in Kabul, Afghanistan. We specialise in perception surveys, policy and socio-economic research, evaluations and impact assessments for governmental and non-governmental organisations. Our teams of technical experts, practitioners, and researchers have years of field and research experience in Afghanistan. This has allowed us to (i) acquire a firm grasp of the political and socio-cultural context of development in Afghanistan; (ii) design data collection methods and statistical analyses for monitoring, evaluation and planning of programmes; (iii) apply cross-disciplinary knowledge in providing integrated solutions for policy interventions.