

## Review of the implementation of the AGORA methodology in Afghanistan under SRDP IV



### Annex I - ACTED in Faryab Province: benefits and lessons learned from delivering through the AGORA approach under SRDP IV

## I. Executive Summary

The Sustained Rural Development Program - Phase IV (SRDP IV) that is at the centre of this review was able to build on the results of more than 10 years of cooperation between ACTED, IMPACT and Norway in the North of Afghanistan, with Norwegian support representing more than 60 percent of the more than € 100 million of funds received by ACTED to support affected communities there since 2001. Over the years, Norwegian support has been critical in at least two key respects: first, it enabled ACTED and IMPACT to respond with assistance tailored to both the emergency and development needs of affected communities; and second, it provided the type of multi-year implementation timeframe without which no proper development programming can take place and which allowed ACTED and IMPACT, over time, to develop and refine community based methodologies that have been essential for effective community mobilisation and ownership.

### A. Overview of approach taken and achievements under SRDP IV

The SRDP IV program, which currently covers the four provinces of Faryab, Jawzjan, Balkh and Sar-e-Pul uses the AGORA methodology, including identifying and mapping the right territorial entry point for engagement, multi-sector needs assessments, planning and prioritisation at the level of each target territory, support to the implementation of priority projects identified by communities at territorial level, as well as support to area-based coordination mechanisms and institutional cooperation.

In keeping with the AGORA approach, the SRDP IV uses an area-based approach that works through territories that are locally understood and owned, using the *manteqa*<sup>1</sup> as its territorial entry point for community engagement, aid planning and delivery in rural areas. The *manteqa* can be tentatively defined as a geographic area containing a number of villages and identified by both its inhabitants and the other inhabitants of the district under one common regional name. *Manteqas* can have different names depending on the region, such as wanda, khel, hazarkhanagi, or kent, but they all refer to the same notion. On average, based on the *manteqa* mapping undertaken since 2018 under the SRDP IV in 27 districts, there are about three *manteqas* per district on average, or about 1,500 countrywide.

Five rounds of data collection were carried out as part of SRDP IV between 2018 and 2021 to map and understand 64 *manteqas* in 24 districts across the four provinces. Two additional rounds of research were undertaken in the first quarter of 2022 to deepen our understanding of the key features of *manteqas* and refine our assessment tools.

Following the mapping of *manteqas*, community platforms were elected in each *manteqa* (called *Manteqa* Development Platforms or MDPs), using a similar model than the Community Development Councils (CDCs) created under the National Solidarity and Citizen Charter for Afghanistan Programs (NSP and CCAP). A total of 2,032 people were elected or selected to the MDPs across the *manteqas*, including 786 (31 percent) women, representing a wide variety of profiles, with 40 percent of members being traditional community leaders (elders, arbabs, mullah, commanders) and the remaining 60 percent representing civil society activists, intellectuals (*rushanfikr*), teachers, doctors and other professionals.

ACTED worked with every MDP to identify the key recovery priorities of each *manteqa*. These were then assessed for their feasibility and associated costs and time frames and compiled into *Manteqa* Development Plans that have been used by the community platforms to advocate for funding with ACTED as well as other aid and government actors. Overall, the MDPs identified 471 priority projects, for an estimated cost of US\$ 12,7 million. The three top priorities for communities were irrigation,

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<sup>1</sup> Although *manteqa* (area) in Persian is the singular of *manoteq* (areas), we have chosen for ease of reading to use the word *manteqa* throughout, and to pluralise the word in English when referring to two or more *manteqa*. For more information on the notion of the *manteqa*, please refer to annexes II, III and IV.





agriculture support and road / bridges projects, followed by drinking water, livestock, education and health projects. These community identified projects spanned the full gamut of needs from humanitarian to development, with the bulk of projects falling in the development category.

From 2019 until now, ACTED supported communities to implement 79 of these projects, at a cost of over US\$ 2,3 million, picking up the projects identified as highest priority by the communities. This support was provided in the form of cash block grants to each MDP, Agro Group and Water User Association.

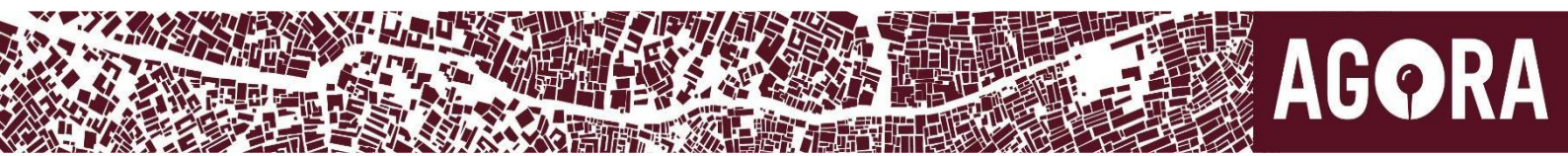
## B. Value added from the use of the AGORA methodology under SRDP IV

A review of the work carried out under SRDP IV since 2018 shows that planning and delivering aid through the AGORA methodology comes with a number of concrete benefits, as follows:

1. **Planning at the right scale:** As a notion familiar and tangible to Afghans that espouses pre-existing socio-spatial realities, the *manteqa* provides an entry point that is culturally appropriate, useful to understand the social and economic relationships between villages / neighbourhoods and the political economy of target areas.
2. **Building resilience:** Because many of the resources essential to rural livelihoods serve multiple villages and are managed at that level through community solidarity systems, planning and delivering through the MDPs at *manteqa* rather than village level was instrumental in building the resilience of communities and helped to address or manage local conflicts around natural resources. The potential for AGORA to understand and help address tensions within and between *manteqas* was also found to be significant.
3. **Inclusive planning:** Working through community platforms representing all communities in a given *manteqa* has also enabled ACTED to include all communities into the planning of the local plans and implement multiple projects that served previously excluded groups.
4. **Localising aid:** The bottom-up and inclusive community-based planning, the reliance on community governance structures, and the fact that the grants delivered through SRDP IV were managed by communities also ensured a higher degree of community buy-in, oversight and accountability than projects implemented directly. An indicator of this is the fact that most of the projects prioritised and implemented through community platforms under the SRDP IV have benefitted from the traditional systems of community maintenance and upkeep of 'ashr' and 'chanda'<sup>2</sup>.
5. **Operationalising the nexus:** By shifting towards multi-sectoral responses to needs of crisis affected populations and helping local actors identify their own priorities outside of the traditional humanitarian - development divide, the AGORA methodology allowed for the planning and delivery of assistance tailored to the needs of communities, from emergency to development.
6. **Fostering participation of women and girls:** On the issue of representation, while the conservative nature of many of the areas in which the SRDP IV is implemented did not make full parity in terms of MDP membership possible, women still represented a third of MDPs and took an active part in their deliberations. Beyond MDP membership, the needs of women and

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<sup>2</sup> Ashr is the provision of free labour by the community members towards the creation or maintenance of a collective good, and chanda the provision of money or in-kind resources by the community for the same purpose.



girls were systematically addressed in particular through the education, youth, and business development components of the SRDP IV. In addition, several MDPs took steps to mainstream the needs of women and girls in their plans and priorities.

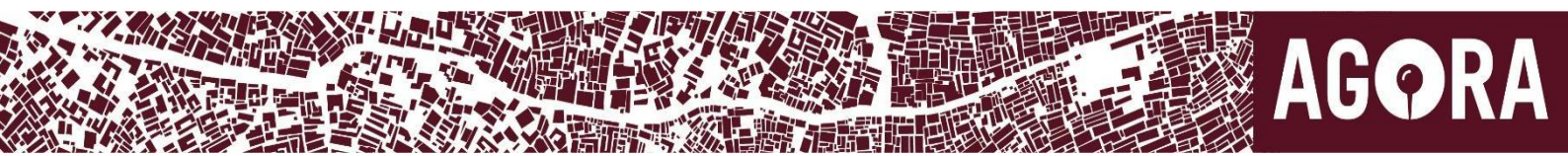
7. **Complementarities with CDCs:** Another key finding from the review of the SRDP IV is that the AGORA approach has worked well with and has been complementary to the CDCs created under the National Solidarity Program, and its successor the Citizen Charter for Afghanistan Program. Under AGORA, the *manteqa* community platforms provided a degree of coordination and planning at area level for inter-village needs and resources, while the CDCs would focus on the more micro but equally important village level needs.
8. **Facilitating planning for basic health and education services:** Because clinics typically serve multiple villages, working through MDPs at *manteqa* level was useful for communities to identify and agree on gaps particularly in terms of basic health care coverage. When it comes to schools, the AGORA model has enabled communities to identify villages within the *manteqa* that lacked schools and prioritise them for construction and advocacy with the Ministry of Education (for teachers etc.).
9. **Empowering communities:** In a number of cases, MDPs also took responsibility to carry out their own projects independent of aid actors, while in other cases MDPs were able to give their *manteqa* plans visibility with government and aid actors beyond ACTED so as to encourage them to channel resources towards priorities included in the plans.
10. **Understanding urban – rural linkages:** Combining a *manteqa* based approach in rural areas and a *nahia/guzar*<sup>3</sup> focus in urban areas has potential to generate a better understanding of rural / urban relationships, useful both to inform programming as well as broader policy choices.

### C. Lessons learned and suggested improvements

While the review validated the appropriateness of the AGORA methodology adopted under SRDP IV, in terms of its ability to deliver aid bridging the humanitarian-development divide in ways that ensured community ownership of projects, it found that the program design would benefit from a number of adjustments, building on key lessons learned from the last four years:

1. **Develop a different approach for urban area:** While a *manteqa* based approach is appropriate for rural areas, a different approach is needed towards urban areas. First, population numbers and concentrations are much higher in urban areas, making a more granular territorial approach necessary. Second, unlike in rural areas, there are clear sub-municipal administrative boundaries in urban areas that aid actors must work within. Going forward, it is therefore recommended that the territorial entry point for work in urban areas should be the *nahia*, and to rename the *Manteqa* Development Plans Local Recovery and Resilience Plans (Local RRP) in future.
2. **Adjust block grants amounts to population size:** Under the SRDP IV, block grants channelled through community platforms were uniform in size. Given the broad variations of population numbers across *manteqas*, block grants amounts should be adjusted to population size as much as possible going forward, in order to achieve more balanced coverage across areas.
3. **Ensure greater reliance on the MDPs for aid planning and delivery in each *manteqa* within and**

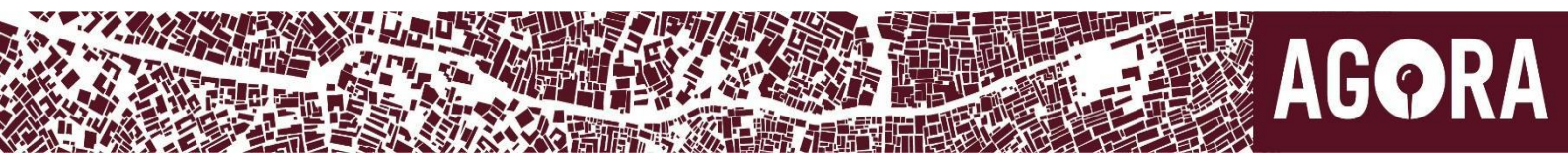
<sup>3</sup> *Guzars* are small urban neighbourhoods organised around one or more mosque. *Nahias* are made up of multiple *guzars*.



**outside of the project:** Although *Manteqa* Development Platforms were setup, drew up local recovery plans, and received block grants from ACTED to implement part of the plans, much of the support provided through the project went to activities outside of the local recovery plans. While this may be warranted for some activities (for example small business development activities), going forward there is a strong rationale to further empower the MDPs and to make their local recovery plans the central planning tools against which programmatic priorities are identified. Beyond the SRDP, the review recommends that, as much as possible, ACTED should make the local recovery plans the central planning tool for all the assistance that it delivers to areas where they have been developed.

4. **Improve women and girls representation and participation:** Given the challenges in achieving sufficient and meaningful female representation in MDPs, it is recommended to setup separate female *Manteqa* Development Platforms or *Nahia* Development Platforms wherever mixed platforms cannot operate for cultural or political reasons and ensure that the female specific MDPs have input and oversight over the development of Local plans.
5. **Give more visibility to local plans with external actors:** While the ability of *manteqa* platforms to engage with government and other aid actors beyond ACTED to promote their priorities is a key potential benefit of AGORA, this potential has not been fully tapped. ACTED and IMPACT should therefore make the promotion of the Local RRP's more of a priority going forward in order to give them greater visibility with external aid actors interested in resilience. This would require paying greater attention to the local coordination element of the AGORA methodology.
6. **Use local plans to address gaps in basic service coverage:** Experience from the SRDP IV also clearly shows that *manteqas* are a good prism through which to ascertain gaps in Basic Service Units (BSUs) for education and health services. Going forward, the local plans should be used more systematically to identify gaps in basic service coverage and inform advocacy with government and aid agencies towards meeting these gaps.
7. **Capitalise on existing complementarities with CDCs:** As clusters of CDCs are smaller than either rural *manteqas* or urban *nahias* and taking into account the benefits of working at *manteqa* level in rural areas for the purpose of aid planning and delivery as well as its local governance potential as identified by the review, there appears to be a strong rationale for aggregating CDC clusters at the *manteqa* and the *nahia* levels in rural and urban areas respectively. It is therefore hoped that the review's findings will help inform discussions on the issue of CDC clustering, notably with regards to the importance of ensuring that the parameters for clustering are sufficiently flexible to allow for the creation of *manteqa* and *nahia* level clusters in places where it is found to be pertinent.

The experience gained under SRDP IV shows that a *manteqa*-based approach works and entails tangible benefits with regards to aid planning and delivery, enabling direct delivery of aid to communities in an effective and accountable manner. It is therefore recommended to make the above adjustments to the approach and consider scaling it up throughout the North and extending it to the Northeast under a future SRDP phase, and to work with other stakeholders and donors to further expand the approach to other regions of the country.





## **II. Introduction**

This report has been put together at the request of ACTED and IMPACT headquarters with the broad aim of taking stock of how the AGORA methodology implemented through SRDP IV has lived up to its ambition of being a practical vehicle to effectively localise aid, make aid more accountable to affected people, and deliver assistance tailored to locally articulated needs across the humanitarian-development divide. The review of SRDP IV presented in this report is therefore an attempt to benchmark the different elements of the AGORA methodology against these broad aims.

The choice of Faryab Province as the area of focus for the review stems from the fact that it is where the partnership with Norway has been most extensive and longest running, starting in 2008. It is also the province of the North where ACTED has been present the longest.

Following a brief introduction to the AGORA model and an overview of the emergency, recovery and development programming undertaken by ACTED and IMPACT with the support of Norway and other donors in Faryab Province in the last two decades, the report explores the value added of planning and delivering aid using the AGORA methodology from a programmatic perspective under SRDP IV, formulating recommendations to improve the approach going forward.

## **III. Brief introduction to the AGORA model**

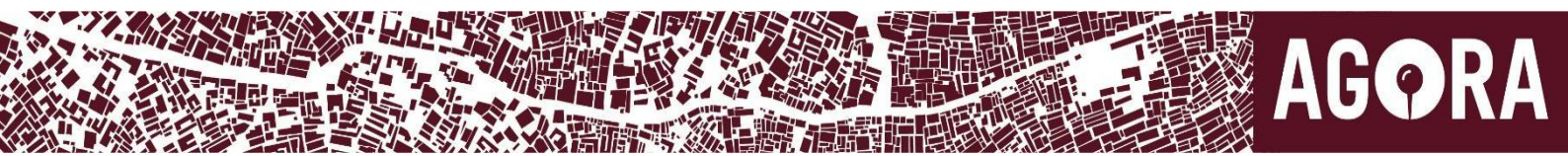
AGORA is a joint venture between ACTED and IMPACT created in 2016. It is an approach anchored in local territories and knowledge to better support people in protracted crisis. It aims to deliver effective recovery and resilience programming in ways that are accountable to local communities as well as actors and promotes the resilience and recovery of crisis affected people in fragile contexts. AGORA also aims to provide support tailored to local needs that transcends the humanitarian – development – peace divide.

The AGORA model has three key features: (1) using settlements that make sense to people as the territorial unit for the planning, coordination and provision of assistance; (2) ensuring that this planning, coordination and assistance is guided by local knowledge, and supports local structures and capacity and; (3) developing synergies between local and exogenous aid stakeholders, including development and where relevant climate financing actors.

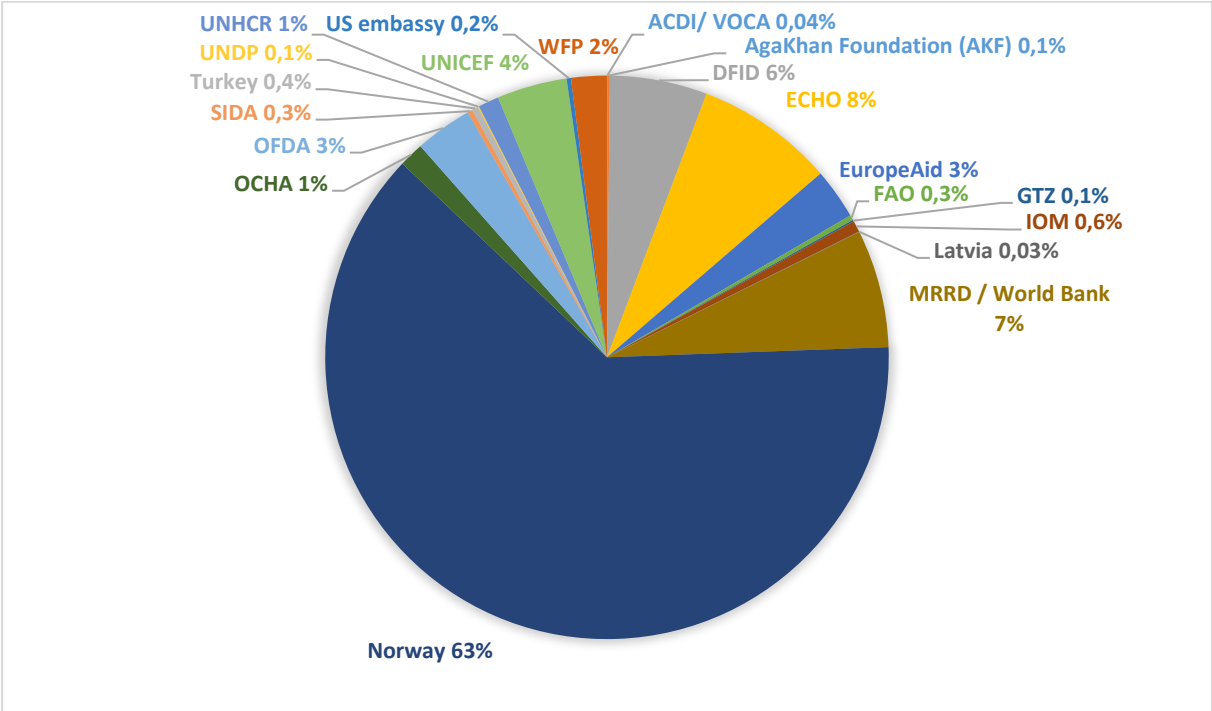
The AGORA methodology is designed flexibly in order to be able to adapt to the specific context of communities. As such, it is intended as a model that can work in both urban and rural contexts, and both stable and fragile contexts.

## **IV. Overview of ACTED's work in Faryab: 2001 – 2021**

From 2000 to 2021, ACTED and IMPACT implemented €100 million worth of projects in Faryab Province through 123 projects, of which over €62 million came from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway. Chart 1 below provides an overview of funding by donor during this period.



**Chart 1 – Funds received by ACTED and IMPACT in Faryab from 2000 to 2021, by donor**



With these funds, ACTED and IMPACT were able to provide a range of programs tailored to the needs of the population, reaching a cumulative total of more than 6,2 million beneficiaries across projects, as shown in table 1 below.

**Table 1 – Breakdown of projects by sector**

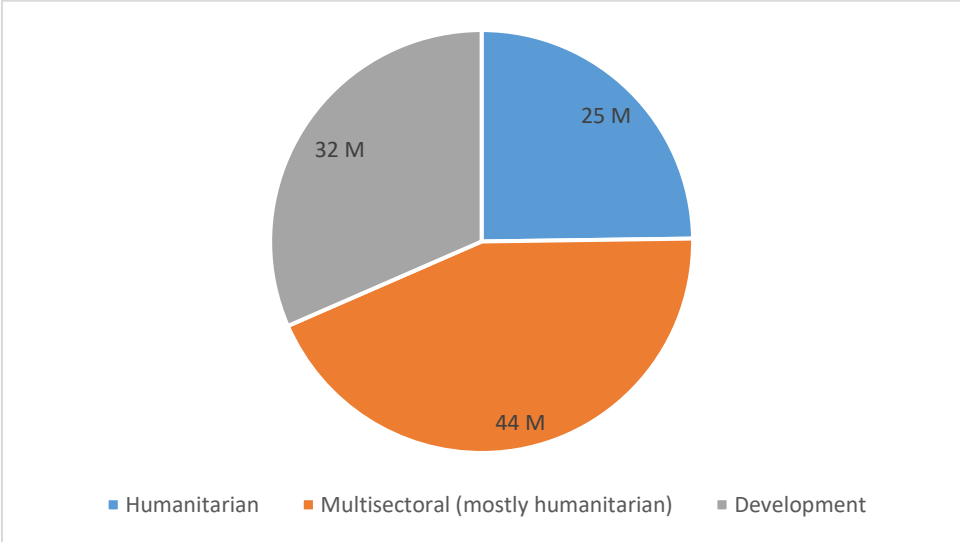
| Sector           |                      | Total budget per sector in EUR | Total nb of beneficiaries reached per sector (ind) | Nb of projects per sector |
|------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| Humanitarian Aid | Coordination         | 4,376                          | n/a  | 1                         |
|                  | Early Recovery       | 263,172                        | 10,670   | 3                         |
|                  | Education            | 8,900,989                      | 50,676   | 6                         |
|                  | FSL                  | 10,113,790                     | 1,428,801  | 38                        |
|                  | Health               | 590,835                        | 43,992   | 5                         |
|                  | Shelter              | 2,125,764                      | 88,449   | 12                        |
|                  | WASH                 | 1,806,404                      | 231,293  | 10                        |
| Dvpt             | Business development | 4,035,432                      | 135,556  | 10                        |
|                  | Governance           | 11,709,664                     | 469,827  | 11                        |
|                  | Support to CSOs      | 15,758,355                     | 2,561,691  | 13                        |
| Multisectoral    |                      | 44,552,169                     | 1,218,254  | 14                        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>     |                      | <b>€ 99,860,949</b>            | <b>6,239,209</b>                                   | <b>123</b>                |

As shown in chart 2 below, development represented about two thirds of the overall ACTED portfolio in Faryab in monetary terms over the period, with the bulk being invested in support to agriculture,



education, support to CSOs and governance. Humanitarian sectoral and multisectoral support represented the remaining third of ACTED’s programming in the Province, with an emphasis on food security, WASH and shelter. Humanitarian projects were implemented throughout the period to respond to emergency needs, in particular droughts and displacement, while development projects started being implemented on an increasing scale from 2006 onwards.

**Chart 2 – Breakdown between humanitarian and development projects (in million of EUR)**



**A. Projects implemented with Norwegian support in Faryab**

From 2008 onwards, ACTED and IMPACT implemented 12 Norwegian-funded projects in Faryab for a total of over €62 million, reaching millions of beneficiaries, of which €47 million was contributed through the four multisectoral SRDP projects. Table 2 below provides a summary overview of these projects.

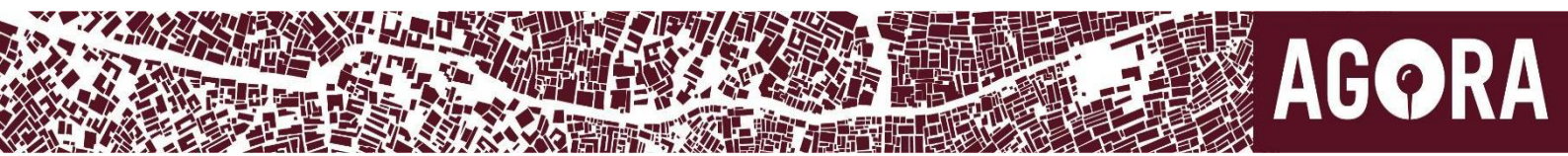
**Table 2 – Summary of projects implemented in Faryab Province with Norwegian support**

| Number | Year           | Project name   | Budget for Faryab in EUR | Sector  |
|--------|----------------|--|--------------------------|---|
| 1      | 2018 (ongoing) | SRDP IV  | 8 220 258                | Multisectoral – agricultural development, education, business development, support to civil society, governance |
| 2      | 2016           | Increased access to quality education for women and girls in Faryab, Afghanistan | 1 527 600                | Education   |





|    |      |  |            |   |
|----|------|--|------------|---|
| 3  | 2013 | Faryab SRDP III  | 13 200 000 | Multisectoral – agricultural development, education, business development, support to civil society       |
| 4  | 2012 | Emergency Storage Construction and Seed Distribution to Vulnerable Farmers in Faryab Province                                      | 3 501 980  | Food security and livelihoods   |
| 5  | 2011 | Facilitating People’s Council Project in partnership with the Royal Norwegian Embassy and the Provincial Governor’s Office, Faryab | 159 975    | Governance  |
| 6  | 2010 | Construction of storage facility in flood-affected communities of Faryab Province  | 247 960    | Food security and livelihoods   |
| 7  | 2010 | SRDP II 2010-2012  | 15 041 566 | Multisectoral – agricultural development, education, business development, support to civil society, WASH |
| 8  | 2009 | Shelter assistance to flood-affected households in Faryab Province   | 642 863    | Shelter   |
| 9  | 2009 | Maymana Vocational Training Center (VTC)   | 1 373 580  | Business development  |
| 10 | 2008 | SRDP I   | 10 679 428 | Multisectoral – agricultural development, education, business development, support to civil society, WASH |
| 11 | 2008 | Renovation of Maymana Detention Centre   | 7 169 580  | Governance  |



|    |       |   |              |   |
|----|-------|---|--------------|---|
| 12 | 2008  | Food Security and Disaster Preparedness in Faryab | 452 025      | Food security and disaster preparedness |
|    | TOTAL |   | € 62 216 815 |   |

## V. ACTED and IMPACT's *manteqa* based rural development program – the SRDP IV

Since its creation nearly 30 years ago in Afghanistan, ACTED has been built around the idea that local knowledge is central for both aid delivery and local governance in Afghanistan. Two ideas form the core of ACTED's reflection in this regard: first, the importance of planning and implementing with crisis-affected communities in the areas they inhabit by using territorial entry points that espouse existing socio-spatial realities meaningful to local communities; and second, the belief that in many fragile contexts where state formation is incomplete, there is a need to complement the traditional focus of aid actors on supporting formal governance mechanisms with a greater focus on supporting existing legitimate community-based systems and linking them with formal governance where relevant.

This reflection matured over the years through informal implementation and trial and error, leading to a decision to create the AGORA flagship program in 2016 as a joint venture with IMPACT Initiatives to practically implement the ambition of both organisations to ground humanitarian and development work in local knowledge in keeping with their motto "think local, act global".

The agreement reached with Norway in 2018 to make the SRDP IV project a pilot program designed to practically demonstrate the relevance of the AGORA approach for community level aid delivery in Afghanistan, and to use the *manteqa* as a territorial entry point for aid planning and delivery should be understood against this backdrop.

In line with the AGORA methodology, the SRDP IV is articulated around a number of core activities, including identifying and mapping the right territorial entry point for engagement, multi-sector needs assessments, planning and prioritisation at the level of each territory, support to the implementation of priority projects identified by communities at territorial level, as well as support to area-based coordination mechanisms and institutional cooperation.<sup>4</sup>

### A. Identifying, mapping and understanding *manteqas* under the SRDP IV

Seven rounds of data collection were carried out between 2018 and 2022 to map and understand 64 *manteqas* in 24 districts across Faryab, Jawzjan, Balkh and Samangan Provinces.

- Between October and November 2018, community leaders were interviewed and each target *manteqa* was mapped out and its infrastructure identified.
- Between January and February 2019, key informant (KI) interviews focused on agricultural land, community leadership, and access to basic service were carried out in every village in each target *manteqa*.

<sup>4</sup> SRDP IV contains programmatic elements not directly related to the *manteqa* approach, notably the education, youth and vocational training components, which have not been included in the current review. For more information on these please refer to the regular SRDP IV reports to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



- Between August and September 2019, a third round of data collection was conducted to provide additional information on access to basic services, markets and the economy in each target *manteqa*. Data from all three rounds of data collection was analysed and then aggregated to the *manteqa* level, Individual *manteqa* indicators were combined to form composite indicators to be used for prioritisation of needs within each *manteqa*.
- A fourth round implemented between November 2019 and December 2019 mapped the irrigation water networks and land types of each of the 24 SRDP IV target districts, in order to more precisely map the links between *manteqas* and resources managed collectively by communities that are of key importance for agricultural livelihoods, as well as assemble a database of irrigation canals and water managers in order to improve the SRDP IV's capacity for engagement in agricultural activities.
- In early 2021, a review of the *manteqa* and irrigation system of Khulm district was undertaken in order to address gaps in qualitative data identified during previous rounds.
- In February 2022, a round of data collection was undertaken in order to address gaps in qualitative data identified during previous rounds, in the form of a qualitative review of nine *manteqa* in Qaisar, Shirin Tagab and Dawlatabad districts of Faryab Province, and refine *manteqa* assessments tools.
- An additional round of data collection was undertaken in Balkh Province in March 2022 to pilot the revised *manteqa* assessment tools.

In total, based on population data provided by KIs, the assessment area covered approximately 2,239,746 rural and 1,093,657 urban individuals, for a total estimated population of 3,333,403 people, as indicated in table 3 below.

**Table 3: Villages, families, population and number of KI interviews for assessment, by rural/urban environments**

| Province     | District  | <i>Manteqa</i> | Environments | Villages     | Families       | Population       | KI Interviews |
|--------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|
| Jawzjan      | 3         | 5              | Rural        | 100          | 38,643         | 202,198          | 39            |
|              | 1         | 1              | Urban        | 136          | 32,931         | 229,151          | 12            |
| Balkh        | 3         | 9              | Rural        | 253          | 82,636         | 400,092          | 67            |
|              | 1         | 2              | Urban        | 100          | 85,726         | 345,731          | 24            |
| Faryab       | 11        | 33             | Rural        | 1024         | 223,538        | 1,256,562        | 225           |
|              | 1         | 1              | Urban        | 65           | 16,478         | 103,887          | 9             |
| Samangan     | 1         | 11             | Rural        | 127          | 23,077         | 231,939          | 58            |
|              | 3         | 1              | Urban        | 130          | 33,223         | 200,173          | 12            |
|              | <b>18</b> | <b>59</b>      | <b>Rural</b> | <b>1,504</b> | <b>367,894</b> | <b>2,239,746</b> | <b>419</b>    |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>6</b>  | <b>5</b>       | <b>Urban</b> | <b>431</b>   | <b>168,358</b> | <b>1,093,657</b> | <b>57</b>     |
|              | <b>24</b> | <b>64</b>      | <b>Total</b> | <b>1,935</b> | <b>536,252</b> | <b>3,333,403</b> | <b>476</b>    |

The final results inform our understanding of both the key features of *manteqas* as well as their individual local characteristics. This includes the community leadership, the scale and scope of community managed resources (irrigation, pastures etc.), active economic sectors, production of goods, market access, trade, and basic service access for health, education, and water. The below map shows the geographic expansion of the Norwegian-supported program over the years and gives an overview of districts and *manteqa* boundaries resulting from the mapping exercise.

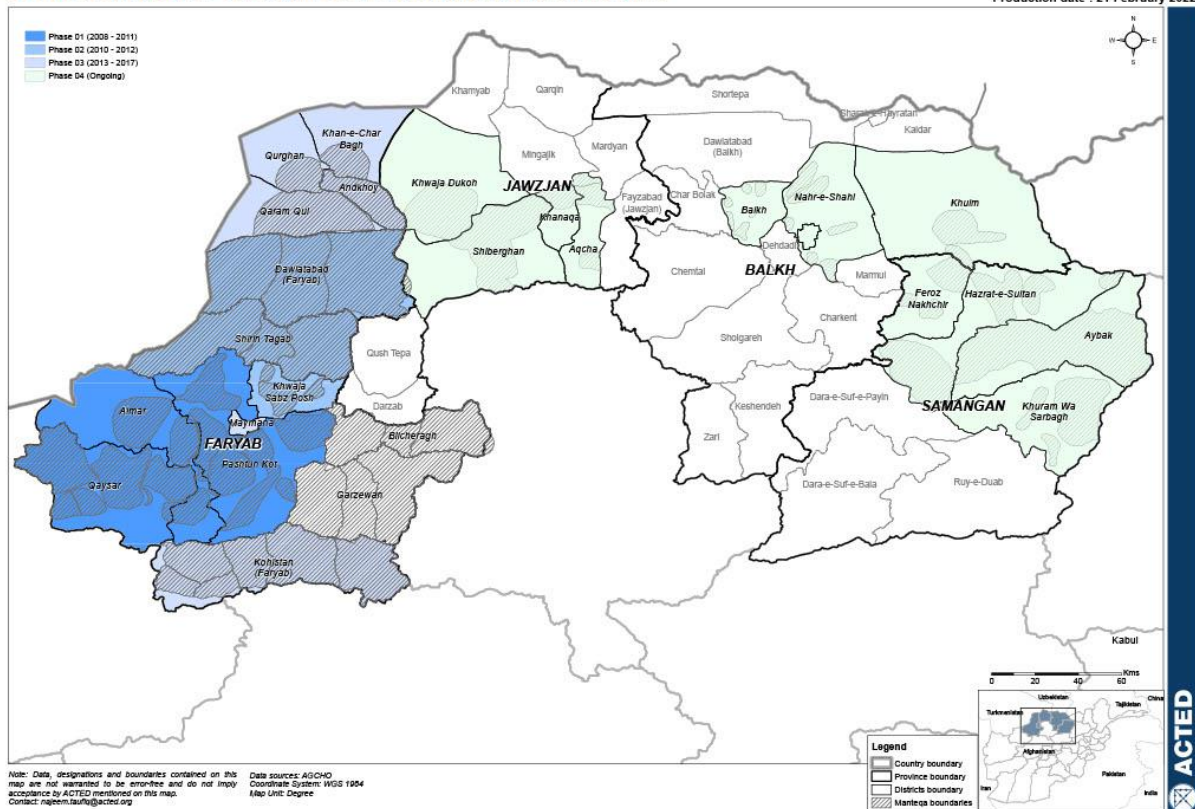




## Map 1 – SRDP geographical expansion and *manteqas* of intervention in Northern Afghanistan

ACTED AFGHANISTAN - Norwegian Sustained Rural Development Program

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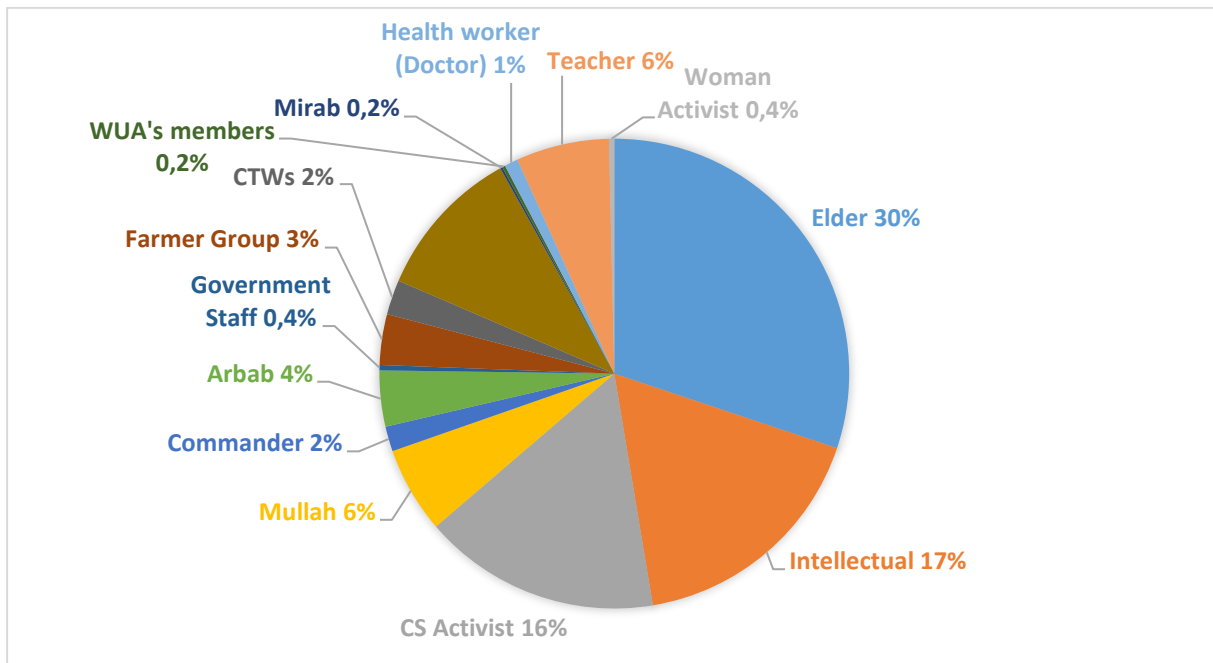
### B. Creating community platforms at *manteqa* level

Following the mapping of *manteqas*, community platforms were then elected in each *manteqa* (called MDPs), using a similar model than CDCs created under the NSP and CCAP. MDPs were created in 58 of the 64 assessed *manteqas* between August and September 2019, with no elections taking place in the remaining six *manteqas* due to security and accessibility problems at the time. Of the 41 out of the 58 *manteqas* were located in areas not covered by the Citizen Charter's Program, while the remaining 17 had active CDCs. In the 41 non CCAP *manteqas*, MDPs were therefore elected through a process including representatives of all villages in the *manteqa*, while for the MDPs of the 17 CCAP *manteqas*, the electoral body were members of the CDCs who elected representatives to the MDP from within their ranks.

A total of 2,032 people were elected or selected to the MDPs across the 58 *manteqas*, including 786 (31 percent) women. Of this total, 902, or nearly half, were also members of CDCs underlining the very close link and complementarity between the SRPD and the NSP / CCAP.

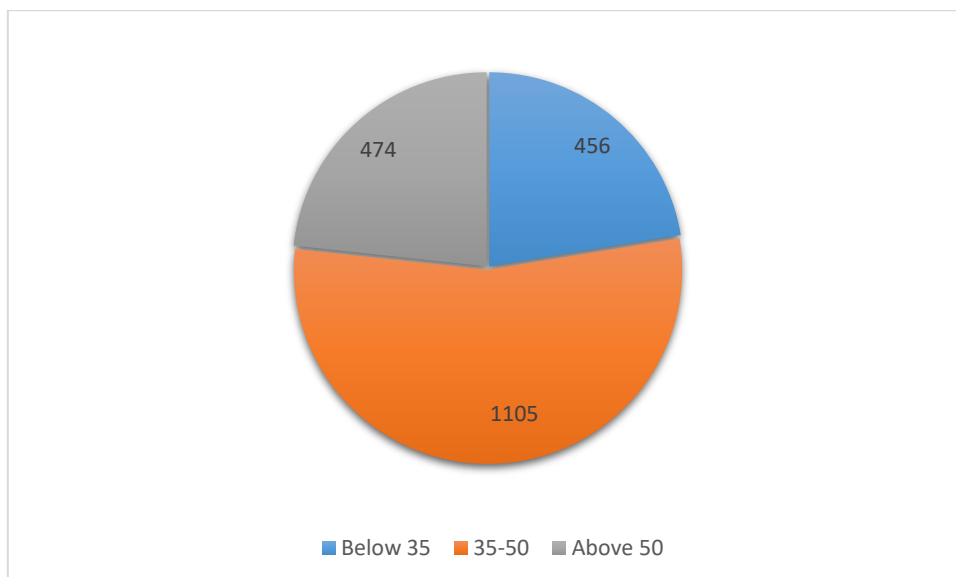
As shown in chart 4 below, the MDPs are composed of a representative group of Afghans, with 40 percent of members being traditional community leaders (elders, arbabs, mullah, commanders) and the remaining 60 percent representing civil society activists, intellectuals (*rushanfikr*), teachers, doctors and other professionals.

**Chart 3 – MDP composition**

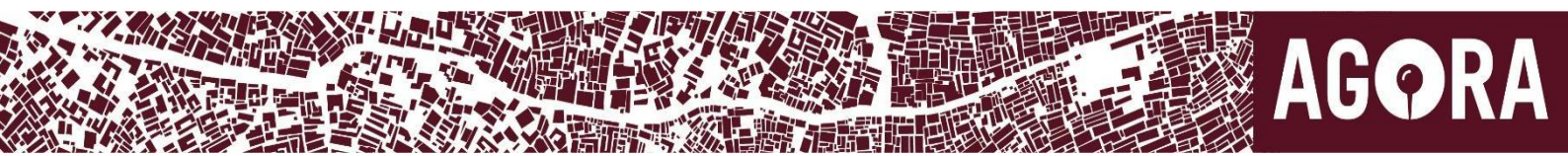


The representativity of the *manteqa* platforms is also illustrated by the age breakdown of its members. As shown in chart 5 below, 22 percent of MDP members were below 35 years old, 55 percent between 35 and 50, and 23 percent above 50 years of age, showing clearly that the MDPs were not dominated by older men but a representative cross-section of the *manteqa* communities. In some of the more conservative areas, it was necessary to elect separate male and female MDPs in order to make the election and participation of women socially acceptable.

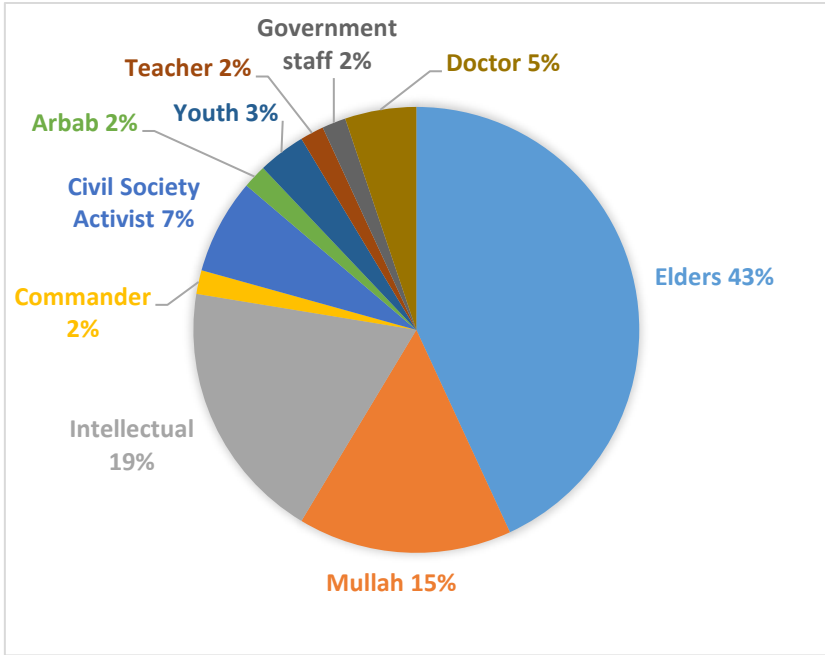
**Chart 4 – Age breakdown MDP members**



With up to 40 percent of leaders coming from the ranks of civil society or non-traditional socio-professional categories, the MDPs were also diverse at leadership level, as shown in chart 6 below.



**Chart 5 – Socio-professional categories of the MDP chairpersons**

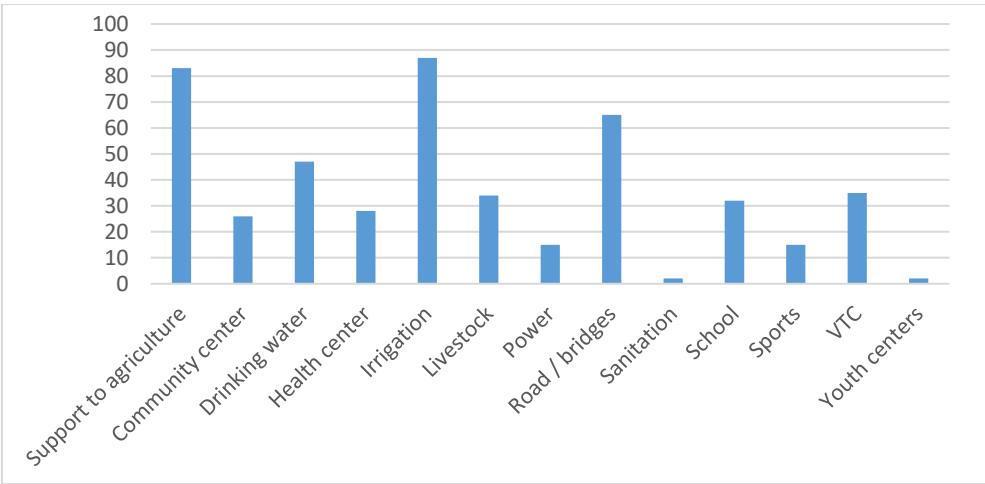


**C. Working with communities on local development plans and supporting their implementation**

ACTED worked with every MDP to identify the key recovery priorities of each *manteqa*. These were then assessed for their feasibility and associated costs and time frames and compiled into *Manteqa* Development Plans that have been used by the community platforms to advocate for funding with ACTED as well as other aid and government actors.

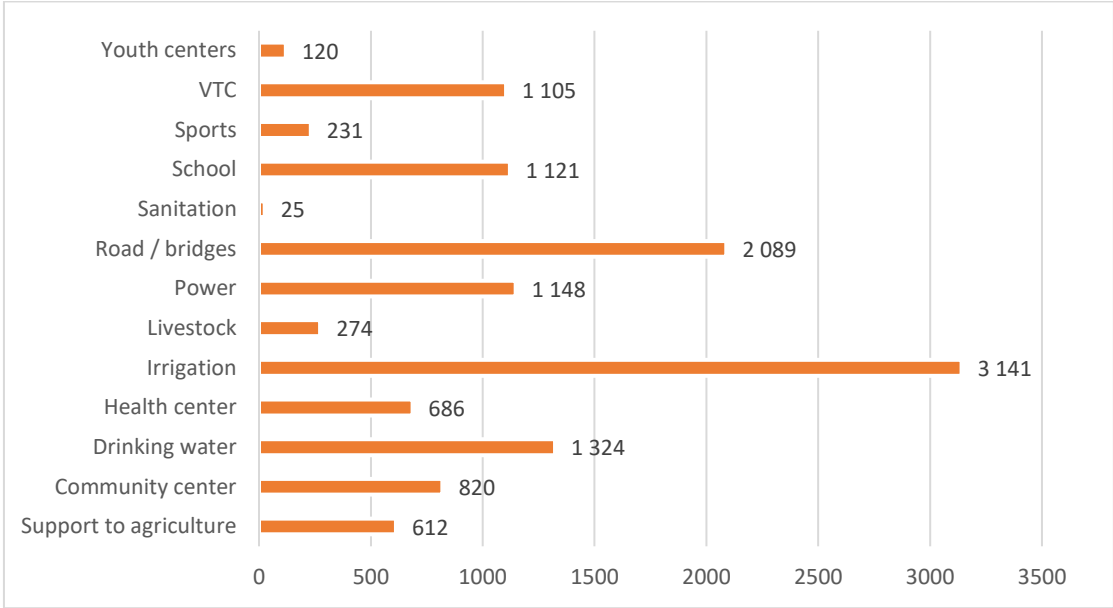
Overall, the MDPs identified 471 priority projects serving more than 1,1 million people, for an estimated cost of US\$ 12,7 million. The three top priorities for communities were irrigation, agriculture support and road / bridges projects, followed by drinking water, livestock, education and health projects. Charts 7 and 8 provide an overview of the priorities of the MDPs in terms of number of projects and dollar amount respectively.

**Chart 6 – Priorities by sector in number of projects**





**Chart 7 – Priorities by sector in estimated US\$ cost (in thousands)**



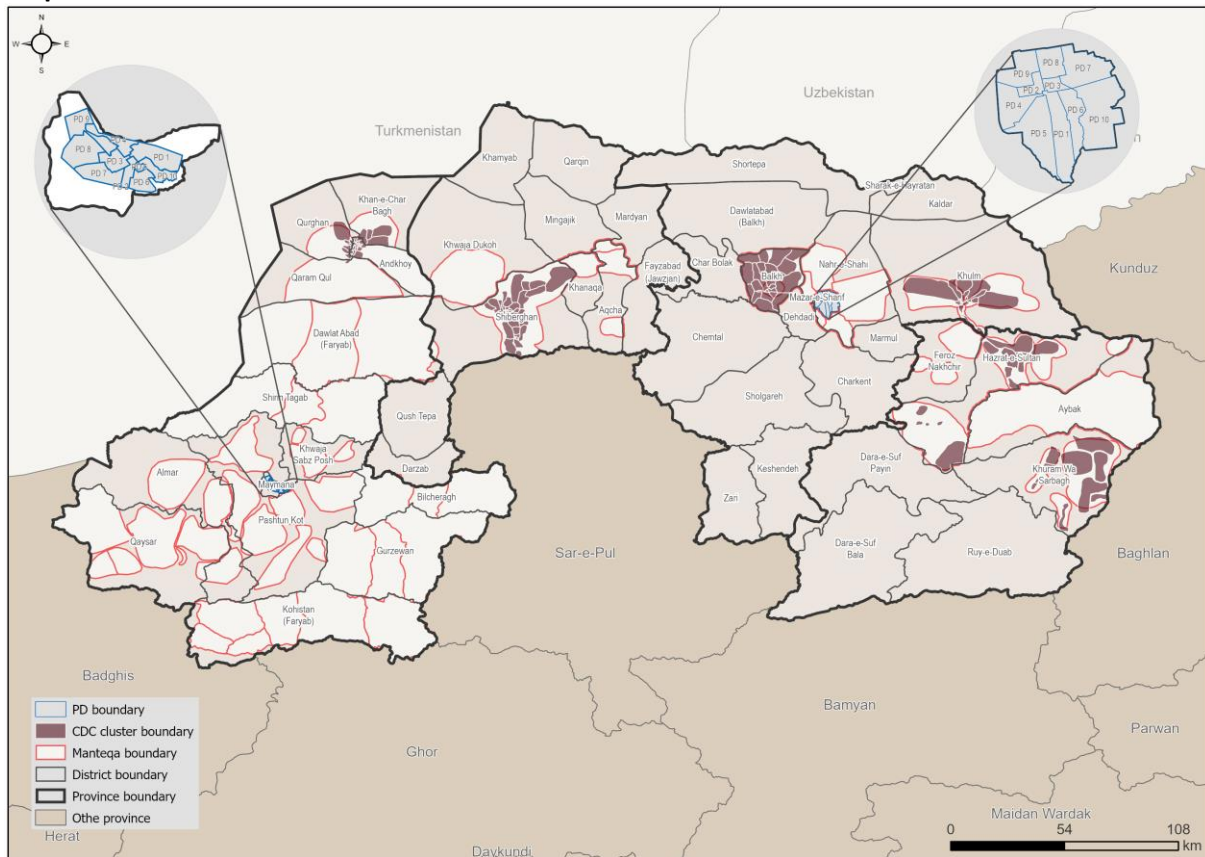
From 2019 until now, ACTED supported communities by implementing 79 of these projects, at a cost of over US\$ 2,3 million, picking up the projects identified as highest priority by the communities. This support was provided in the form of cash block grants to each MDP, Agro Groups and Water User Associations. Of the 41 block grants delivered through the *manteqa* platforms, 14 were for clean drinking water projects; 16 for protection walls; four for road construction; three for school construction; two for clinic construction; and two were for the installation of solar panel systems. Another 21 block grants were channelled through Water User Associations to build 10,974 meters of irrigation canals, as well as protection walls and other irrigation infrastructure designed to build or improve irrigation networks serving more than 750,000 jeribs of land. Finally, 17 grants were channelled through Agro Groups for the distribution of seeds, the creation of poultry farms for women, the purchase of agricultural machinery or the construction of greenhouses.

**VI. *Manteqas* and CDCs – the SRDP IV and the Citizen Charter for Afghanistan Program**

ACTED has been long standing NSP and CCAP partner in Afghanistan and has designed the SRDP IV with a view to ensuring complementarity and creating synergies between both programs. This initial objective was facilitated by the fact that CDC clusters already created always fit within the borders of *manteqas*, as map 2 below clearly shows.



**Map 2 – SRDP IV and clusters of CDCs**



As outlined above, in the 17 CCAP *manteqas*, the *manteqa* platforms were purposefully composed of CDC members, with the aim of providing a forum for the various CDC clusters of that *manteqa* to come together and identify issues of common concern for inclusion into the MDPs. CDCs and MDPs have worked well together, with the *manteqa* platforms providing coordination and planning at area level for inter-village needs and resources, while the CDCs focused on the more micro but equally important village level needs.

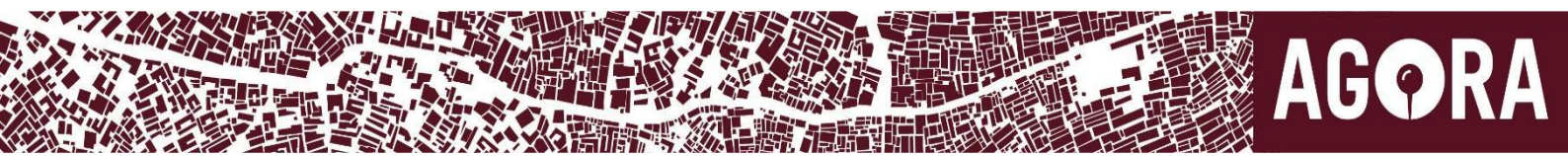
Taking into account the benefits of working at *manteqa* level in rural areas for the purpose of aid planning and delivery shown in this review and related research, as well as its local governance potential, there appears to be a strong rationale for aggregating CDC clusters at *manteqa* and the *nahia* levels in rural and urban areas respectively.

**VII. Value added of planning and delivering aid through the AGORA methodology under the SRDP**

Experience gained under the SRDP IV since 2018 shows that planning and delivering aid through the AGORA methodology comes with a number of concrete benefits, as follows:

**Building resilience**

Because many of the resources essential to rural livelihoods serve multiple villages and are managed at that level through community solidarity systems, planning and delivering through the MDPs at *manteqa* level was instrumental in building the resilience of communities. The potential AGORA to



understand and help address conflicts within and between *manteqas* is also significant and should be further explored going forward.

### **Greater sustainability of projects through reliance on community systems**

Beyond the value added of community-based planning, the fact that the grants delivered through the AGORA model were also managed by communities also ensured a higher degree of community buy-in, oversight and accountability than projects implemented directly. In fact, because they were the products of an inclusive bottom-up community deliberation process, most of the projects prioritized and implemented through community platforms under the SRDP IV have benefitted from the traditional systems of maintenance and upkeep of *ashr* and *chanda*. For example, at least twelve MDPs mobilised their communities to clean irrigation systems built with SRDP grants.

This is the case not only for irrigation projects, which benefit from sophisticated community management systems, but also of roads, bridges and other public goods that are often maintained by communities through these traditional collaborative systems.

### **Ability to identify gaps in basic health care and education across communities**

Because clinics typically serve multiple villages, working at *manteqa* level has enabled communities to identify and agree on gaps particularly in terms of basic health care coverage, as illustrated by the fact that MDPs prioritised 28 health projects. When it comes to schools, the *manteqa* approach has enabled communities to identify villages within the *manteqa* that lacked schools and prioritize them for construction and advocacy with the Ministry of Education (for teachers etc.), with 32 schools included as priority projects under the MDPs.

### **Improving geographic coverage by including previously neglected communities**

Working through community platforms representing all communities in a given *manteqa* has also enabled ACTED to include all communities into the planning of the *manteqa* plans and implement multiple projects that served previously excluded groups. For example, this inclusivity enabled a number of projects to be implemented in four previously neglected areas (access to water for two communities living in Shahkh, Wali Bey (Aqcha district) and Astana Baba *manteqas* respectively, and access to education for one IDP settlement of Shebergan city).

### **Mobilising support for projects designed to support women and girls**

Under the SRDP, the focus in terms of gender inclusivity was to strive to ensure that women could actively take part in the determination of community priorities as members of the MDPs, and to work with communities to identify priority projects and activities targeted at women and girls. On the issue of representation, while the conservative nature of many of the areas in which the SRDP is implemented did not make full parity in terms of MDP membership possible, women still represented a third of MDP and took an active part in their deliberations.

Beyond MDP membership, the needs of women and girls were systematically addressed in particular through the education, youth, and business development components of the SRDP IV. In addition, several MDPs took steps to mainstream the needs of women and girls in their plans and priorities. For example, in Markaz Dawlatabad and Shor Darya *manteqa* (Faryab), the MDP was able to mobilize community support to include girls in the ACTED supported education program, with 60 girls enrolled in the ACTED supported Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) as a result. In Zangirga *manteqa* of Khulm district, the MDP worked with the community to facilitate market access for women and support women-owned businesses by establishing a specific section in the bazaar.

### **MDPs implementing their own projects through community mobilisation**





In a number of cases, MDPs also took responsibility to carry out their own projects independent of aid actors. For example, the MDP of Bandar *manteqa* of Kuhistan district (Faryab) mobilised the community through ashraf (80 volunteers for 50 days) to rehabilitate a total of 36 kilometres of unpaved roads in the *manteqa*, while two other MDPs mobilised youth to carry out cleaning campaigns.

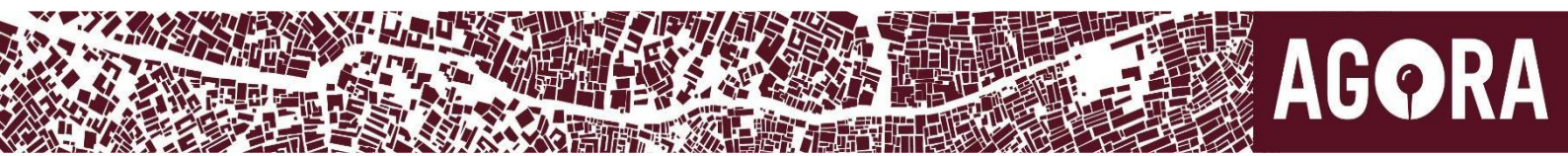
### **Potential for *manteqa* community platforms to engage with other external actors (aid actors, government) to support local development priorities**

In several cases, MDPs were able to give their *manteqa* plans visibility with government and aid actors beyond ACTED so as to encourage them to channel resources towards priorities included in the plans. For example, the Chilgazi MDP in Qaisar district (Faryab) secured a drinking water system from an INGO serving six villages, as well as emergency food parcels from an International Organisation. In Gor-e-mar *manteqa* of Nahr-e-shahi district (Balkh), the MDP secured a drinking water project and a range of agricultural support from the government (nine cold storage locations, seedlings for 1,500 jeribs of orchards). The MDP of Siyagird *manteqa* (Balkh) secured a drinking water network servicing five villages from the government, while the MDP of Shadyan in Nahr-e-shahi district secured a range of agricultural support (small cold storage locations and the building of six water reservoirs for irrigation). The MDP of Babayadgar in Nahr-e-shahi district successfully advocated for the building of seven kilometers of road with the government serving eight villages, and secured support from an International Organisation to build a drinking water system as well as support for 29 farmers from the government's agriculture department. As part of the recent scale-up in emergency assistance, the MDPs of Astana Baba and Jalayer *manteqas* of Shirin Tagab district (Faryab) engaged with NGOs for the purpose of targeting emergency assistance. Finally, two MDPs (Qaisar centre and Gor-er-Mar *manteqas*) were active in promoting COVID 19 and polio vaccination campaigns through outreach conducted by community volunteers mobilised through the MDPs, in close collaboration with religious leaders.

## **VIII. Lessons learned from SRDP IV and suggested way forward**

While the review validated the appropriateness of the AGORA methodology adopted under SRDP IV, especially in terms of its ability to deliver aid bridging the humanitarian-development divide in ways that ensured community ownership of projects, it found that the program design would benefit from a number of adjustments, building on key lessons learned from the last four years:

- 1. Develop a different approach for urban area:** While a *manteqa* based approach is appropriate for rural areas, a different approach is needed towards urban areas. First, population numbers and concentrations are much higher in urban areas, making a more granular territorial approach necessary. Second, unlike in rural areas, there are clear sub-municipal administrative boundaries in urban areas that aid actors have to work within. Going forward, it is therefore recommended that the territorial entry point for work in urban areas should be the *nahia*, and to rename the MDPs Local Recovery and Resilience Plans in the future.
- 2. Adjust block grants amounts to population size:** Under the SRDP IV, block grants channelled through community platforms were uniform in size. Given the broad variations of population numbers across *manteqas*, block grants amounts should be adjusted to population size as much as possible going forward in order to achieve more balanced coverage across areas.
- 3. Ensure greater reliance on the MDPs for aid planning and delivery in each *manteqa* within and outside of the project:** Although *Manteqa* development platforms were setup, drew up local recovery plans, and received block grants from ACTED to implement part of the plans, much of



the support provided through the project went to activities outside of the local recovery plans. While this may be warranted for some activities (for example small business development activities), going forward there is a strong rationale to further empower the MDPs and to make their local recovery plans the central planning tools against which programmatic priorities are identified. For example, the program would benefit from systematically including education, vocational training and youth components in future Local RRP, with a particular focus on the needs and participation of women and girls. Beyond the SRDP, the review recommends that, as much as possible, ACTED should make the local recovery plans the central planning tool for all the assistance that it delivers to areas where they have been developed.

4. **Improve women and girls representation and participation:** Given the challenges in achieving sufficient and meaningful female representation in MDPs, it is recommended to setup separate female *Manteqa* Development Platforms or *Nahia* Development Platforms wherever mixed platforms cannot operate for cultural or political reasons and ensure that the female specific MDPs have input and oversight over the development of local plans.
5. **Give more visibility to local plans with external actors:** While the ability of *Manteqa* platforms to engage with government and other aid actors beyond ACTED to promote their priorities is a key potential benefit of AGORA, this potential has not been fully tapped. ACTED and IMPACT should therefore make the promotion of the Local RRP more of a priority going forward in order to give them greater visibility with external aid actors interested in resilience. This would require paying greater attention to the local coordination element of the AGORA methodology.
6. **Use local plans to address gaps in basic service coverage:** Experience from the SRDP IV also clearly shows that *manteqas* are a good prism through which to ascertain gaps in BSUs for education and health services. Going forward, the local plans should be used more systematically to identify gaps in basic service coverage and inform advocacy with government and aid agencies towards meeting these gaps.
7. **Capitalise on existing complementarities with CDCs:** As clusters of CDCs are smaller than either rural *manteqas* or urban *nahias* and taking into account the benefits of working at *manteqa* level in rural areas for the purpose of aid planning and delivery as well as its local governance potential as identified by the review, there appears to be a strong rationale for aggregating CDC clusters at the *manteqa* and the *nahia* levels in rural and urban areas respectively. Therefore, it is hoped that the review's findings will help inform discussions on the issue of CDC clustering, notably with regards to the importance of ensuring that the parameters for clustering are sufficiently flexible to allow for the creation of *manteqa* and *nahia* level clusters in places where it is found to be pertinent.

The experience gained under SRDP IV shows that a *manteqa* based approach works and entails tangible benefits with regards to aid planning and delivery, enabling direct delivery of aid to communities in an effective and accountable manner. It is therefore recommended to make the above adjustments to the approach and consider it throughout the North, to extend it to the Northeast under a future SRDP phase, and to work with other stakeholders and donors to further expand the approach to other regions of the country.

