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

Annex II - Initial secondary data review on the notion of Manteqa in Afghanistan

Introduction

By providing an initial review of English and French language sources available online around the notion of *manteqa* in Afghanistan, this report is the first step to ascertain the degree to which this notion has infused research and practice among academic and aid actors.

The question of local knowledge was identified as a central issue by ACTED's founders Marie-Pierre Caley and Frédéric Roussel, leading them to draft an unpublished paper for the United Nations Office for the Rehabilitation Strategy for Afghanistan (UNORSA) in 1993 on the importance of the notion of *manteqa* in rural Afghanistan. This paper, titled "Constraints and Perspectives in the present context for the elaboration of an immediate rehabilitation strategy for the Afghan Rural Areas: Notion paper for UNORSA." has become something of a reference on the notion of *manteqa*, imbuing much of the research that has been undertaken since then.

This report therefore first presents key excerpts from this initial paper, before presenting a review of the rest of the literature on the issue.

Excerpts from the 1993 paper by Caley and Roussel for UNORSA

The territorial organisation of Afghanistan, which commenced in earnest at the end of the 19th century, was based on the countrywide linkage through districts and sub-districts. The centres of these districts, the current organisation of which dates back to the 1930's, progressively gained importance in the 1950's and have since then been the principal tool of intervention for the state in what remains a largely rural country.

Consequently, access to rural zones was to a large extent controlled by these district centres. Our comprehension of the local communities is also based on the relations between the local communities and the district centres.

The base unit of these communities, the village, with no clearly established legal or social definition, was accepted as such and has thus rarely been studied. The existence of territorial identities, called *"manteqas",* which include a varying number of villages, remained to a large extent a mystery. These zones of territorial solidarity played a major role during the war and, as such, can no longer be overlooked.

"On the eve of the war, the district remained the smallest administrative unit in Afghanistan". In other words, the village had neither status, nor did it exist legally. The administrator managed his district not on a territorial basis (the village) but on a segmentary/sectorial basis (the notable/local dignitary and his clients). In fact, the district administrator managed current affairs with the notable/local dignitary *(malek, arbab)*.

Thus, in 1978, the process of the territorial organisation of Afghanistan remained unfinished and village status had not been formally acknowledged. This basic reality should probably be the starting point of any research into the ambiguities and inaccuracies of the pre-war notion of the village.

From the 1960's onwards, the district administrative centre was increasingly connected to the provincial capital by a surfaced road and, in most cases, a telephone line. Initially working with a police service alone, the district administrative centre at this time expanded with the adjoining of other administrative services as well as the systematic construction and running of schools and clinics.

The district administrative centre therefore played an increasingly important role in the daily lives of the villagers as it became both the place where the local community could access modern technology (post, telephone, roads and often a bus) and come into contact with the State (administration).

However, and above all, the district centre remains the place where the State exercises control over the local community. Indeed, the *woloswal* (district chief) or *alaqadar* (sub-district chief) rarely leave the district administrative centre.

The villagers relied on their representatives *(maleks, arbabs)* to manage relations with the widely mistrusted and misunderstood district centre' and to limit the allegedly damaging results of state visits to the villages. The civil registers, taxes, enlistments, amongst others, are thus managed by the district chief, in collaboration with the local notables, who are in particular responsible for distributing identity cards *(tazkira).*

It was not until the 1970's, when Afghanistan decided to adopt a reliable statistics mechanism to assist the country's development efforts, that the Afghan districts, as operational bases for all ministerial and administrative services, were defined administratively.

Thus, even though the district has a clearly identified framework due to their systematic setup in the 1930's, their progressive structuring during the decades thereafter and their defining during the post-war years, their content, the names of the district villages, is much less clear. This situation can be linked to the fact that the notion of villages itself is unclear.

Observers agree that the village is the basis of Afghan rural society. However, the concept of village is faced with a major problem: there is no official definition of the village in Afghanistan.

The absence of any formal administrative definition of village and the ambiguity of the concept of village, need to be put into the aforementioned context of the *Woloswal/Malek* relationship. This relationship was not based on the notion of territory, the *Woloswal* did not consider the village to exist as such, but on the principle of segmentalisation (for the administrator, what counts is the *malek* and his network, the *qawm.* Although the *malek* and his *qawm* are often linked to a village, this is not always the case. The PGA recognises that, "there is normally for each village at least one village headman *("Qariadar, Malik, Arbab…"),* although a village may have more than one headman or a headman may be responsible for more than one village".

All in all, the absence of a clear definition of the village, the existence of extremely disparate village lists, the differences between the 1975 and 1986 PGAs, the various maps, the ambiguous nature of the notion of village within the rural community, are associated concepts that require clarification.

In line with the administrative norm of the time, by referring to the district as "an administrative centre with neighbouring villages"; villages represented by *maleks,* the administration, statisticians, and even researchers, failed to comprehend a basic reality: local communities have their own system of identification, which is expressed, in particular, through certain set levels of territorial identity.

The existence of groups of villages in rural Afghanistan - including on average 10-30 villages - identified by their inhabitants and neighbours using a unique regional name has not been studied in depth. To a certain extent, the notion of valley has, until now, been used to reflect this reality.

The term *manteqa,* selected to identify the notion of neighbourhood zone, corresponds to the notion of space. A Persian term, originating from Arabic, it can be used to refer to vaste expanses (e.g. the *manteqa* of central Asia) as well as more modest areas (such as a garden sector).

However, this term is mainly used throughout Afghanistan to refer to these groups of villages. It should be noted that in the very mountainous areas (Hazarajat, for example) the notion of valley *(Darrah)* is often used with the notion *manteqa.* In zones with a strong tribal structure, such as the provinces of Paktya and Paktika, tribal references are also used *(khel, zai...).*

One would first ask a stranger about his ethnic or geographic origins. The first answer is generally a link to a province "I am from Kandahar"[xxi]. One would rarely enquire as to tribal links at this stage, preferring to clarify the geographical origin of the person in question. The response would be "I am from the district of Panjwai". If pushed, he may respond "I am from the *manteqa* of *Tuluqan".* The interrogation would stop there as, apart from the inhabitants of *Taluqan* or the immediate neighbours, nobody would know the villages of *Tuluqun.* Generally speaking, the inhabitants of *manteqas* located within the same district know the details of the villages of the *mantegas* bordering on their *manteqa.*

Thus, just as the idea of *qawm* allows us to conceptualise the phenomenon of segmentation/sectarianism in Afghan society, with various levels of identity, the idea of *manteqa* should allow us to conceptualise the phenomenon of territoriality in this same society.

To sum up, the *manteqa* may thus be defined as "a geographic zone re-grouping a certain number of villages and identified by its own inhabitants and by the inhabitants of the surrounding zones by a single local name". A *manteqa* can thus be referred to as a specific identity commonly known to the inhabitants of the villages that make up the *manteqa.*

The events of 1978 gave rise to a primary and fundamental change in the rural world: the neutralisation of the district administrative centre and the dispelling of the notables. This change was the prelude to a series of major changes in which the *manteqa* was to play the lead role.

The spontaneous revolt that spread from region to region and affected much of rural Afghanistan between the end of 1978 and autumn 1979 took roughly the same form throughout.

The leaders of the uprising, more often than not of religious background, rapidly, and sometimes abruptly, replaced the leaders of their *qawm,* the traditional notables who had survived the Government purges, thereby creating a new social category: the militia chiefs.

The arrival of the Soviets equated with a long-term presence of the resistance. The structures set up at this point were based on two concepts: segmentation/sectarianism, encouraged by the political parties of Peshawar, and territorialisation, generated by the conditions of the war and the aspirations of the militia chiefs to ensure their status.

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Each *qawm* was represented politically and sought the recognition of the parties of Peshawar, via their new representatives, the militia chiefs. The latter used the support (arms, money, material) received from the parties to establish their influence and, secondarily, to pursue the war.

This tendency of the resistance towards segmentation/sectarianism by way of manipulation of the *qawm* networks by political parties (or should we rather say that the *qawm* network manipulates the political parties?) is, however, countered by a tendency of the resistance towards territorialisation.

The war is played out over territory that one has to defend, relinquish or attack. The territorialisation of solidarity networks thus appears first and foremost to be a military necessity.

When a Soviet armoured column appears, the immediate support of the neighbouring villages was crucial in order to protect the families, barricade the roads, gain time... Consequently, it is of no great surprise that the *manteqa,* as the main identity reference, immediately became the prime area of solidarity with the fighting.

Although groups of resistance spontaneously organised themselves on the basis of the *qawm,* they were organised within the territorial framework of the *manteqa.* It was in this context that the majority of the confrontations between militia chiefs occurred at the outbreak of the war.

It can be argued that the autonomisation of the political structures within each *manteqa* was one of the fundemental changes that occurred in rural Afghanistan during the first years of the war. The outcome was that the *manteqas* became a sort of "politico-military puzzle" of rural Afghanistan.

The war-time territorialisation of spaces of solidarity on the basis of the *manteqas* thus took the following path:
-   In the first months of the war, the disappearance of the tandem *Woloswal/Malek* and the intense fighting meant that the *manteqa* was transformed from a main identity reference to a space of solidarity.
-   In the first years of the war, the increase in the military and political independence of each *manteqa* gave rise to a kind of politico-military puzzle in rural Afghanistan.
-   Thirdly, after the Soviet withdrawal, after the external subsidies progressively disappeared and after the force of the *Jihad* weakened, the growth in the differences increased between those *manteqas* where a front had succeeded in monopolizing the armed forces, and thereby ensuring their survival, and those *manteqas* where no front had such a monopoly.

The *manteqas* played an important role in the rehabilitation strategy for the rural Afghan zones which, prior to the war, included over 80% of the population and, until 1992, witnessed the majority of the fighting and destruction.

We could say that the war "unveiled" the *manteqas.* It would be difficult to create a statistical model, the basis for long term rehabilitation of rural Afghanistan, without taking this evolution into consideration. The *manteqa* should not only be considered as an intermediary statistical link between the district and the village but could also, on a mid-term basis, be used to facilitate access to local communities".

I. The *manteqa:* the missing level between the district and the village

Many elements tend towards the integration of the *manteqa* in the implementation of a rehabilitation strategy in rural Afghanistan.

Firstly, the *manteqas* are generally speaking included within the boundaries of the existing districts. Their inclusion would therefore lead to the consolidation, as opposed to the questioning, of the basic administrative make up of Afghanistan. Beyond an improved understanding of the internal balance of the district, this consolidation would also favour the setting up of a realistic statistical model/mechanism and should in the mid-term allow for the creation of "rural base units", thereby providing improved access to local Afghan communities.

1.   The manteqa, a natural subset within the district

The *manteqa* network superimposes and completes the pre-war administrative structure.
It has already been noted that until the beginning of the 1970's, the districts had no official frontier and were defined only on the basis of their administrative centres.

The publication of the PGA in 1975 established the borders between the districts. These borders were set empirically by the authors of the PGA, who marked the zones of influence of each district on the maps of the Afghan Institute of Cartography using the lists of villages per district available at the various ministries.

In reality, it was extremely rare that a *manteqa* found itself divided between two administrative centres situated kilometres apart. Generally speaking, a district centre was administratively responsible for a varying number of *manteqas.*

The district borders outlined by the PGA thus cover a certain number of *manteqas* long since administered by one and the same administrative centre. An initial study would require defining, at the level of each district, the zones of influence of various *manteqas.*

2.   The manteqa, a better understanding of the local communities
This understanding is achieved thanks to the minimal identification and characterisation of the *manteqas* and the relationship between the same at district level.

- The identification of the 5, 10 or 15 *manteqas* that make up a district would be advantageous in so far as they would replace the 5, 10 or 15 groupings clearly identified in the complex and contradictory lists of villages currently available.

- Once the *manteqas* have been identified, they can be easily characterised on the basis of the following elements:
    - topography (valley),
    - dominant irrigation systems in the *manteqa,*
    - type of agriculture,
    - general economic situation,
    - bazar (<100 stands, <20 stands…),
    - town/dominant village,
    - road,

      − tribal-/-language situation.
These elements give us a clear overall view of each of the *manteqas.*

- The identification and characterisation of the *manteqas,* as well as the summary overview of the relationships between neighbouring *manteqas,* allows for a better understanding of the internal balance of the district. Thus, *manteqa* A, is traditionally closer to *manteqas* B and C than many of the other *manteqas* in the district. *Manteqa* C will be quite close to *manteqa* D... It is not uncommon that the *manteqas* of one district are based around two or three significant points: large town, bazar, pilgrimage centre.

3. The manteqa: a statistical mechanism and a mid-term means of access to local communities.

The basis for demographic statistics in Afghanistan — in accordance with what was selected by the PGA of 1975 — is the village/district tandem, to be replaced by the relation district/*manteqa*/village. The advantage being creating a mechanism whereby an intermediary step can be established, generally including about ten easily identifiable variables, between the data, that is the district, and the hundred or so variables (actually quite poorly identified), that is the villages. We would thus be equipped with a statistical tool at national level including 25 provinces, 325 districts, and probably approximately 3,000/4,000 *mantegas,* if we apply the rule of an average of ten or so *mantegas* per district.

This cataloguing of the *manteqas* allows us to:
- simplify and improve the local level data collection. It is true that the populations of each *manteqa* have a clear understanding of the nomenclature of the villages that make up their *manteqa.*
- at national level, have available an instrument (30 provinces/ 325 districts/ 3-4000 *manteqas)* that would largely facilitate data collection and works planning at national level.

The logical outcome of considering the *manteqa* as an intermediary level statistic between the village and the district should be the progressive adoption of the *manteqa* as a "base rural unit". Indeed:
- As a long-standing identity reference, the *manteqa* is clearly recognised by all populations of the district; any action at *manteqa* level would thus be immediately "apparent" for the local communities within the district.
- As a space of solidarity during times of crisis, the *manteqa* gained strong status during the war. In particular, access to the populations for programs requiring a close following by the local communities (such as for health or primary education), should be viewed in terms of the *manteqa.*

An example: planning the distribution of agricultural and irrigation assistance in the district of Wardak (Sayedabad).

This example should allow us, on the basis of the main existing sources (PGA of 1975 and American maps) to get a clear vision of the district and suggest minimum priorities in the agricultural and irrigational sectors.

The district of Saidabad is located on the Kabul-Kandahar axis, directly north of the town of Ghazni. Sayedabad is made up of a North-South facing valley, with isolated villages situated at the foot of

the mountains that run along both sides of the valley, and concentrations of villages along the zones irrigated by the rivers *Shneez* and *Tchak* in the centre and to the north of the valley.

The PGA lists 145 villages for the district, with a population of 20,000 inhabitants according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MAO, and 25,000 according to the Interior Ministry (Wol.).

Excepting the contrast of irrigated and non-irrigated zones, the above data is of little practical use when it comes to establishing priorities in the area of agricultural rehabilitation. This problem is further highlighted when comparing the American maps and the PGA lists which reveal that a large number of villages mentioned by one source are not catalogued by the other source. This disparity of data between the maps (geography/villages) and the PGA (villages/populations) means that the implementation of a credible statistical mechanism is uncertain.

A study of the situation from the *manteqa* perspective allows for an improved understanding:

Firstly, by studying the map, it appears that in the district of *Sayedabad* three *manteqas* are mentioned as such on the American map *(Shashqala, HaftAsyab* and *Shneez). Another manteqa* is indicated as a valley *(Tangi).* In total, 4 of the 10 *manteqas* in the district *(Top, Sheikhabad, Tangi, Hunkhi, Sayedabad, Takya, Shneez, Aftasyab, Lawara and Shashqala.).*

Traditionally speaking, these various *manteqas* re-form to create three groups: the northern *manteqas,* facing Kabul and centred around *markaz-e-Sayedabad,* the district administrative centre, those of the centre, those alongside the river *Shneez,* centred around the town of *Hasan Khel* and the bazaar of *Solar,* and the southern *manteqas,* facing the town of Ghazni.

North of the district: 5 *manteqas: Sheikhabad, Top, Tangi, Sayedabad* and *Hunkhi,* that is 42% to 47 % of the district population (source PGA).

Centre of the district: 2 *manteqas: Takya* and *Shneez,* that is 29% to 35% of the district population (source PGA).

South of the district: 3 *manteqas: Aftasyab, Lawara, Shashqala* and associated villages, that is 23% to 25 % of the district population (source PGA).

From an agricultural/irrigational point of view, each *manteqa* has its own characteristics:

NORTH:
Tangi: Irrigation: *Tchak* River*.* Excellent irrigation.
                 Agriculture: Thriving. Tangi is reputed in the region for its orchards and rice growing.
Sheikhabad: Irrigation: *Tchak* River
                 Agriculture: average; wheat, horticulture, pastoral activities
Unkhi: Irrigation: underground water channel, sources
                 Agriculture: highly inadequate, wheat, dry climate
Sayedabad: Irrigation: *Shneez* River
                 Agriculture: average; wheat, horticulture

CENTER
Shneez: Irrigation: *Shneez* River
                 Agriculture: thriving; wheat, horticulture, market gardening

Takya: Irrigation: *Shneez* River

Agriculture: thriving; wheat, horticulture, market gardening

SOUTH
Aftasyab/Lawara/S'hashqalalassociated villages:

Irrigation: underground water channel / sources, highly inadequate.

Agriculture: highly inadequate; wheat, dry agriculture, pastoral activities.

Any irrigation and agricultural input should thus take into consideration that the *manteqas* of the district are divided into the following three clearly defined categories, from an agricultural and irrigational viewpoint.

1. **Highly irrigated zones with intensive agricultural activity:** 1 *manteqa* (approximately 10% of the district population).

Tangi (8 to 11% of the district population).
Highly irrigated agricultural zone with added value (horticulture, rice). To sum up: an abundance of water, little soil (enclosed valley).

The ideal objective in this situation would be an input that contributes to increasing the profitability of agricultural production with high added value, that is to say in horticulture: nurseries, improved species, plant protection, rice growing or fertilizers.

2. **Well irrigated zones. Good agricultural position:** *4 manteqas* (approximately 50% of the district population)

Takya (12 to 15% of the district population).
Shneez (23 to 27% of the district population).
Markaz-e-Sayedabad (6 to 15% of the district population).
Sheikhabad (5 to 9% of the district population).

These *manteqas* reflect the average agriculture situation in Afghanistan. The priorities are thus not new: irrigation; improvement of the canal system; agriculture: seeds and fertilizers; agricultural mechanisation; fruits trees...

3. **Poorly irrigated zones. Deficient agriculture:** 4 *manteqas,* approximately 40% of the district population).

Hunkhi: 10 to 11% of the district population.
Lowara, Haftasyab, Shashqala, associated villages: 23 to 25% of the district population.

These zones, not favoured from an irrigational viewpoint, are also largely deficient from an agricultural point of view. Seeds adapted to the dry climate *(lalmi)* of these zones should be added to the distribution of the more traditional inputs (underground water channel repairs, seeds and fertilizers, agricultural mechanisation). Support to pastoral activities should also be considered.

Summary of key findings from the Secondary Data Review

1. The word *manteqa* appears in 125 sources from 110 authors between 1993 to 2020, with a peak between 2004 and 2013. The sources reviewed can be broken down in four broad

categories: (1) a very small number - six percent - of sources, all but one related to ACTED, focus solely on research on the notion of *manteqa* and are grounded in primary sources and research; (2) 20 percent of sources do not focus specifically on the *manteqa* but discuss the notion based on primary sources and research; (3) a majority - 50 percent - of sources discuss the *manteqa* based on secondary sources and; (4) 25 percent of sources simply mention the *manteqa* as evidence without discussing the notion, often as part of aid projects.

2. Rather than a single definition, 11 academics and two aid specialists put forward a range of tentative definitions which may differ at the margins but share common core features, whereby 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. *Manteqa*s can have different names depending on the region, such as *wanda*, *hazarkhanagi*, or *kent*, but they all refer to the same notion. Authors differ in their assessment of the number of *manteqa*s in the country, ranging from 1,500 to 4,000. *Manteqa*s assessed in the reviewed literature were located in many different regions of the country, suggesting the notion's country-wide relevance.

3. There is broad agreement across sources that the *manteqa* exist as bounded spaces that include a number of villages, that they are typically associated with natural terrain features such as a valley or drainage basin, and that they constitute an important identity reference for their population. There is also a clear consensus across sources about the existence and legitimacy of local informal community governance systems in most rural areas of the country, as illustrated by the existence of a range of community managed systems to manage common goods.

4. The *manteqa* is a socio-spatial construct that can evolve over time, although this evolution is likely to be slow. For example, the civil war that has raged on for the last decades may have re-shaped allegiances, urbanisation may gradually weaken or strengthen community bonds, and the shift from rural to urban livelihoods will impact the reliance on community managed systems around which rural livelihoods are built.

5. Caley and Roussel stress the predominantly segmentary nature of solidarity in pre-war Afghanistan, articulated around networks of kinship (qawm), with the *manteqa* existing alongside as an important territorial identity reference. They note that the *manteqa* gradually became also a primary space of solidarity after 1978 due to the war, in large part because the conflict forced a process of territorialisation of solidarity as a result of the rise of commanders as the new rural elite, and their need for territorial control.

6. There was however discussion in the literature on the *manteqa* as a primary space for solidarity in rural areas, with some authors correlating differences in agro-ecological zones and economic conditions with the strength of community solidarity. This should be further investigated in order to ascertain the extent to which *manteqa*s are spaces of solidarity beyond being identity references.

7. Many authors also found that the *manteqa* may have potential in terms of sub-national governance in the Afghan context. Indeed, as community-based informal structures are in charge of providing key public goods at sub- district level, a number of authors have argued that the *manteqa* could also be a useful operational unit for the purpose of managing and addressing a range of local governance issues that have not been adequately addressed to

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date through formal governance. They suggest this could be done by recognizing and supporting, rather than replacing, informal systems and linking them with formal governance mechanisms, for issues such as water management, pasture management, and land tenure administration. Some authors have argued that reliance on these community-based systems could play an important part in solving Afghanistan's local governance challenge, and more broadly be a catalyst for improved state – community relations going forward.

8. Although the notion put forward by Caley and Roussel has been taken up in a relatively large number of sources and infused debate on several key topics over the last 25 years, its treatment has remained limited and it has not been taken up by the aid system for the purpose of aid planning and delivery, or by the Afghan government for the purpose of sub-national governance. However, the notion has been an important reference that both the Afghan government and communities have used to inform the process of creating new districts over the last decades.[1]

9. The discussions on the practical relevance of the *manteqa* in the literature overwhelmingly focus on two issues: sub-district governance and aid delivery within the framework of the National Solidarity Program (NSP) and its successor the Citizen Charter Program (CCAP), and land and natural resources management. Five issues for which the notion of *manteqa* should have logically been relevant to are largely missing from discussions: (1) basic health care; (2) primary education; (3) irrigation; (4) urban areas; and (5) sub-district aid outside of the remit of the NSP and the CCAP.

10. The literature discusses the decision of the NSP, one of the largest World Bank programs implemented in Afghanistan as of 2003 / 2004, to deliver development projects through community level grants overseen by NGOs as Facilitating Partners (FPs) through a community-based approach that aggregated communities at village or sub-village level into Community Development councils (CDCs) based on a set number of households. This led to debates amongst academics and aid practitioners, with critics arguing that instead of replacing existing community structures and realities, the approach should build on existing community recognised socio-spatial notions. Faced with this criticism, the NSP decided to cluster CDCs, an approach its successor program continued until the 15 August 2021.

11. The clustering approach that ended up being endorsed aggregated a set number of CDCs together, with the government initiating a process of redrawing *guzar* (urban neighbourhoods – the lowest formal administrative sub-division in urban areas) boundaries based on a set number of families that would allow them to match with CDC clusters, rather than adapt the clusters to the existing community-based *guzar*s.

12. This review pointed to the need to further investigate the relevance of the notion of *manteqa* across agro-ecological zones and economic conditions, as well as the need to deepen our understanding of community solidarity systems such as 'ashr' and 'chanda'[2], and of the management of irrigation systems and pastures, as key elements underpinning effective rural

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[1] See annex III for details.

[2] 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.

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development programming. To this end, ACTED and IMPACT should undertake further field research, or work with third parties and subject matter experts.

I.   Methodology

This report provides an initial review of English and French language sources publicly available on the web by searching for the words "*manteqa* Afghanistan" and "Hawza Afghanistan" in the Google search engine. Other possible spellings for the word were also included in the search.[3]

It provides a preliminary and non-exhaustive overview of available literature on the notion of *manteqa*, excluding sources in local languages, those not available online (books, academic papers, operational documents of aid agencies etc.), as well as those referring to the same notion by using different words. As such, it only constitutes the first part of a broader effort to understand the significance and relevance of the *manteqa* in Afghanistan in both rural and urban contexts (see suggested way forward section below).

Since the initial source for most of the material reviewed is, directly or indirectly, the articles of Marie-Pierre Caley and Frédéric Roussel[4], and since both authors, who are now leading the French NGO ACTED, have been to our knowledge the only ones to attempt to use the notion of *manteqa* in practice, the review also includes a number of unpublished ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives sources relevant to the notion.

II.   Overview of resources

125 sources from 110 authors were reviewed as part of this exercise, written between 1993 to 2020.

A.   Authors, timeframe of publication and type of sources – basic statistics

This initial literature review indicates that the notion of *manteqa*, as discussed in this paper, does not appear clearly in pre-1978 sources, although the notion was at times expressed using different terms. Since the notion was put forward by Caley and Roussel in 1993, it has gained some profile and infused research and debate, appearing in 125 sources.

1.   Timeframe of publication

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[3] *Manteqa*s, Manteka, Minteka, Mintaka, Mantika, Mantaka, Mintiqa, Mintaqa, *Manteqa*h, Mantiqua, Mantequa, Mantega.

[4] See « Constraints » op. cit. and Roussel, Frédéric; Caley, Marie-Pierre. "Les *manteqa*s: le puzzle souterrain de l'Afghanistan" (unpublished, 1994). A number of sources do not quote or refer to Roussel and Caley directly but use the definitions of authors who relied on their work to build their own tentative definitions.

Fig 1 - Number of sources referencing *manteqa* by year
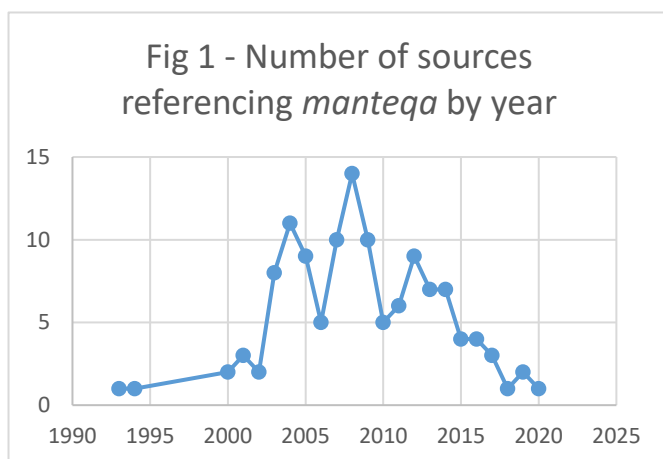
Sources reviewed were published from 1994 to 2020 with a peak between 2004 and 2014 (see figure 1). The proliferation of resources during this time coincides with a moment in Afghanistan's history when the aid system and the Afghan government attempted to understand how to access and engage communities for the purpose of aid delivery and local governance. It also coincided with a period during which large amounts of funding were available, leading to the presence of a significant number of consultants and experts.

2. Authors

Altogether, there are 110 authors, including 27 co-authors. The authors can be divided in six broad categories: a majority (46 percent) of consultants or consulting firms / research organisations working for the aid system (including academics working as consultants); followed by academics (27 percent); aid specialists or practitioners (13 percent); government (6 percent); military (5 percent) and 4 percent of others (see fig. 2).

Fig 2 - Type of authors
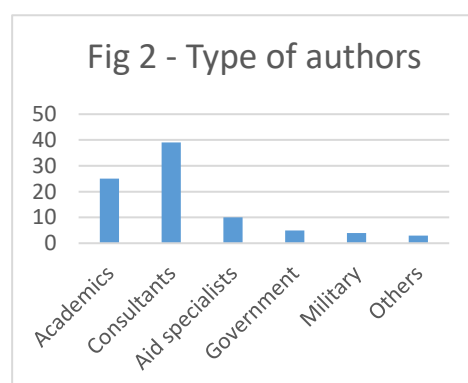
3. Type of sources

The sources reviewed can be broken down in four broad categories: (1) a very small number - six percent - of sources, all but one related to ACTED, focus solely on research on the notion of *manteqa* and are grounded in primary sources and research. (2) 20 percent of sources do not focus specifically on the *manteqa* but discuss the notion based on primary sources and research. (3) a majority - 50 percent - of sources discuss the *manteqa* based on secondary sources and; (4) 24 percent of sources simply mention the *manteqa* as an evidence without discussing the notion, often as part of aid projects (assessments etc.).

Sources whose sole focus is research on the notion of *manteqa* and that are grounded in primary sources	7	6%
Sources that do not focus specifically on the *manteqa* but discuss the notion based on primary sources and research	31	20%
Sources that discuss the *manteqa* based on secondary sources	62	50%
Sources that mention the *manteqa* as an evidence without discussing the notion	31	24%

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Within the first two category, a limited number of in-depth case studies provide the empirical evidence underpinning the discussion around the *manteqa* notion among researchers. These cover 64 *manteqa* across four Northern provinces (ACTED 2019), 13 *manteqa* in Jaghatu district of Ghazni and 10 *manteqa* in Saydabad district of Wardak (Roussel 1994), one *manteqa* in Jaghuri district of Ghazni (Monsutti 2004), six *manteqa* in three districts of Faryab (Alden Wily 2004), eight *manteqa* in two districts of Bamyan (Alden Wily 2004), a number of *manteqa* in Shinwar districts of Nangarhar (Mansfield 2008), one *manteqa* of Tirin Kot district of Uruzgan (TLO 2011), *manteqa* in Khas Kunar district of Kunar (integrity Watch 2013), and a number of *manteqa* in Kunduz, Ishkaskhim, Burqa and Warsaj districts of Kunduz and Baghlan (Mielke 2015).[5] Other authors relying on primary sources refer to the existence of *manteqa* in many provinces in all parts of the country, but not within the framework of detailed case studies. The wide geographical distribution of *manteqa*s assessed in the literature suggests that the notion has country-wide relevance.

B.	Issues addressed in the sources reviewed

Figure 3 below gives an overview of the type of issues discussed in the sources reviewed, with the number of sources in each case.

Fig 3 - *Manteqa* sources by type of issue
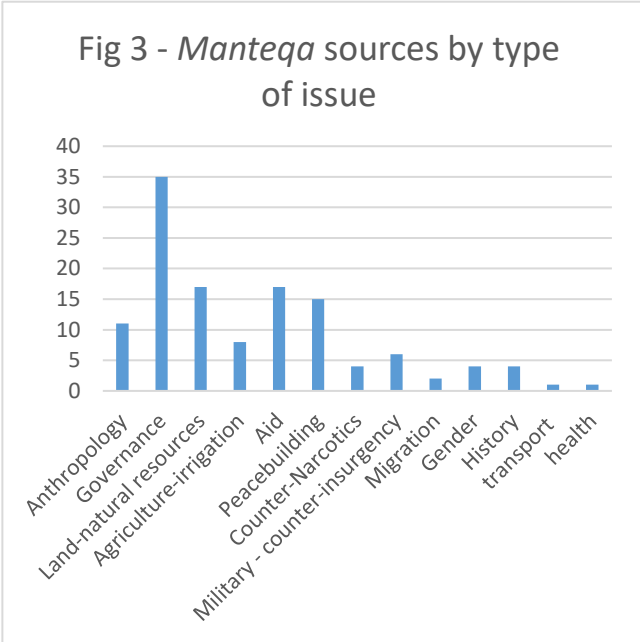
1. Issues addressed in the sources reviewed

The review shows that aid delivery at community level and local governance on the one hand, and land and natural resources management on the other are the most prominent issues discussed, with peacebuilding, counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency also discussed but to a lesser extent.

This focus on aid delivery, local governance and natural resources management is not surprising given that it corresponds to a moment in Afghanistan's history when the aid system and the Government were attempting to identify, understand and define villages and communities to deliver at that level.

2. Issues not discussed: A number of gaps

Five gaps emerge from the review: primary health care, education, irrigation, urban areas and sub-district aid delivery outside of the NSP / CCP framework.

The near absence of discussion in the literature of the relevance of the *manteqa* with regards to health care and education is surprising in particular considering the cultural sensitivities around women and girl's travel and interaction outside of home, and the considerable investments of the aid community and the Government in these fields.

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[5] See all sources categorised as 1 in section VIII.

Another notable gap is irrigation. Although irrigation may be implied as subsumed under natural resources management, given the centrality of irrigation for livelihoods in much of rural Afghanistan and the extensively documented community solidarity mechanisms existing around it, it is striking that no source specifically addresses the issue.

With regard to aid delivery outside of the National Solidarity Programme or Citizen Charter framework, it should be noted that apart from ACTED, there is only one passing reference to another aid actor (WFP in Bamyan in the 1990s) actively seeking to consciously use the *manteqa* as a way to improve the planning and delivery of their programs. As most sources related to aid programs remain internal to the aid organisations delivering them, the degree to which specific aid organisations have adopted the notion of *manteqa* to structure their work with communities could not be ascertained clearly as part of the review and requires further research.

Similarly, the degree to which the notion of *manteqa* may also be relevant in urban contexts has not been explored in the literature.

III.   Terminology and definition

The review indicates that the notion of *manteqa* is not clearly defined, but that one aid specialist and 10 academics have offered tentative definitions, of which only a handful are grounded in primary sources and field work.

C.   Terminology

The term *manteqa* - مخصصة (plural: manoteq - مناطق in Persian) is of Arabic origin and is used widely throughout the Middle East and North Africa, often with a topographical connotation.[6] It has been taken over in Persian without alteration, but not in Pashto or Uzbek.

For the sake of simplicity, the singular *manteqa* is being used throughout this paper, irrespective of whether the reference is to a single *manteqa* or a plurality of manoteq.

In the context of Afghanistan, the term literally means "area" or "country", or "region", but there is great fluidity with regards to the size of the territory it can describe: from the very local (this area in my garden) to the very macro (manoteqe shamol) – northern areas. On this sliding scale, the focus of this note is solely on the notion of *manteqa* as traditional solidarity zones at the sub-district level, in line with the tentative definitions outlined below.

D.   Tentative definitions

The review concludes that the notion of *manteqa* has not been firmly defined in the literature. Instead, the review found that out of 110 authors, 10 academics and 1 consultancy / research firm have tried to provide tentative definitions using different angles based on their area of interest or expertise (land, tribal etc.).

As outlined below, these tentative definitions can be broken down in four categories: (1) the initial tentative definition provided by Roussel and Caley; (2) four that do not appear to be grounded in field

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[6] A Treasury of City Words: Multilingual Historical Dictionary. CNRS, UNESCO. editorial chapter, 2000), 9

work; (3) three that are informed by field work carried out as part of consultancy work and (4), three grounded in field academic work and anthropological research.

1. Initial tentative definition

#1 - Roussel and Caley (1994)[7]: the *manteqa* is 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. It is thus the basic reference point for the village population in the area. The *manteqa* is usually based on geographic features – notably on the irrigation system – which are modified by various social factors.
   1. *Manteqa* are social facts and can evolve. As such they cannot be considered as mini districts clearly fixed and geographically defined.
   2. *Manteqa* do not include all villages. Some are stand-alone (isolated).
   3. Solidarity zones do not preclude conflict, as it does not eliminate the segmentary nature of Afghan society, but it is the primary theatre of the local political process.

The notion of qawm that is generally used to understand Afghan society needs to be complemented by a territorial approach: the grouping of villages, or solidarity / neighbourhood zone, or *manteqa*. *Manteqa* are a reality throughout Afghanistan, and while the term *manteqa* is used in many areas, different terms are used to describe solidarity zones in others: for example 'valley', 'hawza', or 'khel' / 'zai' in Pashtun tribal areas.

Manteqa have seen their importance increased since 1978 as a result of the war, from being a mere referent of identity to becoming a space of primary solidarity.

2. Tentative definitions not grounded in field work

#2 - Allan (2001)[8]: defines *manteqa* as a spatial notion. A "place" that can be made up of a variety of components (villages serviced by irrigation network, common pastures shared by a number of villages). In some cases, *manteqa* are shared by a single lineage group, in others not, but in all cases the '*manteqa* prevails'. Seasonal migration, social networks, and trading patterns are all based on *manteqa*. Residents spatially proscribe any breach in *manteqa* boundaries.

#3 - Favre (2005)[9]: the "*manteqa*" which literally means "area" or "region", is a group of settlements/hamlets of heterogeneous size ("qaria", "âghel", "deh", "kalay", "banda" or "qishlaq") that are commonly identified by its inhabitants, or other communities, under a single name. Somewhere, between the district and the settlements/hamlets, the "*manteqa*" do not have administrative recognition, but represent the actual social and territorial unit of rural Afghanistan. The "*manteqa*" may sometimes refer to lineages, but not necessarily as solidarity can also be maintained by the proximity of various people living in the same area. The notion of village should refer to the settlement/hamlet - "qaria", "âghel", "deh", "kalay", "bonda" or "qishlaq" while the "*manteqa*" refers to a group of people sharing a common identity, which shapes the solidarity space. The "*manteqa*" also refers to the smaller unit where agriculture production is organised. The irrigation systems, by

[7] Roussel, Frédéric; Caley, Marie-Pierre. Op. Cit. 5

[8] Nigel J.R. Allan, "Defining Place and People in Afghanistan" (Post Soviet Geography and Economics, 2001, 42, No. 8), 554

[9] Favre, Raphy, "Interface between State and Society in Afghanistan: Discussion of the Key Social Features affecting Governance, Reconciliation and Reconstruction", (Addis Ababa: AIZON 2005), 7-8

creating reciprocity links amongst users, are the most standard and frequently recurring variable among the various criteria used to define a "*manteqa*". It is at the "*manteqa*" level that communal structures that shape solidarity among the resident population exist, such as bazaars and schools. However, field experiences show that local perception of the boundaries of a "*manteqa*" in the sense of "area" or "region" may vary depending on the considerations involved in the definition. For instance, pastureland/rangeland access, irrigation structures (i.e. larger size than existing social groups), and social groups may represent different levels of identification of a "region". Also, boundaries between "*manteqa*" may be disputed at the local level between various population groups.

The *manteqa* or the hidden structures of rural Afghanistan have been shaped during two and half decades of war and have provided military commanders their smallest base of legitimacy. The main social structure changes caused by the war are a) a simplification of the social structures at local level with the elimination of the "qawm" opposed to those of local commanders and b) the contraction/alignment of social groups within a defined geographical space at local level; the *manteqa*. These adjustments, although incomplete, were often enforced with extreme violence.

In other words, the notion of "*manteqa*" lies at a specific level of the intricate structure of the "qawm" that happens to have a territorial basis, while otherwise the very notion of "qawm"/social group network tends to be non-territorial. In the past 25 years, the actors of the Afghan wars also happened to strengthen this territoriality of the "*manteqa*". Therefore, though the Afghan society is fragmented and organised in "qawm", there are territorial social patterns or "units" which have been mostly shaped during the war that can be recognised and strengthened. Field work demonstrated that "*manteqa*" is a social reality throughout Afghanistan.

Preliminary quantitative work conducted by the author on "social groups" suggests that the total number of "*manteqa*" in Afghanistan probably lies in the range of 3,000 to 4,000.

They also note that watersheds do not correspond to administrative boundaries in Afghanistan but that preliminary observations indicate that there is convergence between micro-watersheds (valley systems) and *manteqa*.[10]

The author adds that the *manteqa* represents not only the territory of a social group, but also the minimal territorial unit where a maximum of common properties (public goods) can be managed. These common properties include the informal judiciary and conflict resolution systems, security, natural resources such as irrigation water or public pastures, and public services/infrastructures such as school, market and the roads which lead to the villages.[11]

#4 - Miakhel (2009)[12]: notes the existence of *manteqa* in tribal areas, defined as "an idea of shared space in which its inhabitants maintain a great degree of cultural uniformity, sections which are comprised of a cluster of qaryas". They note that these are not rigid.

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[10] Raphy Favre, "Watershed Atlas of Afghanistan" (Kabul: FAO, AIMS, 2004), 45

[11] Favre, Raphy, "Interface between State and Society in Afghanistan: Discussion of the Key Social Features Affecting Governance, Reconciliation and Reconstruction", (Addis Ababa: AIZON 2005)

[12] Shahmahmood Miakhel, "Understanding Afghanistan: The Importance of Tribal Culture and Structure in Security and Governance", (Kabul: USIP, 2009), 11 and 15

Notes that some *manteqa* have homogeneous ethnic / tribal compositions while others do not. Argues that the *manteqa* are an operative notion in most areas of the country (Hazarajat, Pashtun tribal areas, West, North).

5 - Hamish Nixon and Brendan Whitty (2009): citing Roussel, defines the *manteqa* as "area of origin", a unit, often between districts and village, which usually describes a village cluster and structures the institutions of village life. [13]

3. Tentative definitions grounded in primary research undertaken within the framework of consultancies

#6 – Alden Wily (2003 / 2004):[14] the notion of *manteqa* usually refers to a cluster of related village communities that work together, make decisions or operate in some way as a single unit. Members of a *manteqa* know the social and territorial limits of the unit. These areas and their populations are workable as operational units to the extent that a range of social linkages and events already define its natural boundaries. Within this manageable context, the full range of local property issues could be addressed, including land tenure administration itself. The boundaries of each *manteqa* are known, identified by natural features such as rivers, streams, and rocky outcrops. The *manteqa* typically include settled and farming areas, and open pastures. A *manteqa* is generally but not always ethnically distinct. Where this is not the case, people of different ethnic groups usually live within their own villages or at least in their own neighbourhood of a mixed village.

#7 - The Liaison Office (2009):[15] defines the *manteqa* in the tribal context of Paktia as a "tribal area of jurisdiction", composed of several wandas, which represent the share in loss and profit of a community within the jurisdiction of the sub-tribe that inhabits a specific territory. The wanda also reflects the population size with the size of shuras being aligned with the wandas / population size. Normally each wanda is represented by a single elder, while the *manteqa* will normally have more than one.

#8 - Pain and Kantor (2010):[16] a variable unit of social allegiance or spatial territory that may unite villages, and, in some circumstances, may have greater meaning than even that of a village.

4. Tentative definition grounded in academic field work and anthropological research

#9 - Glatzer (2001):[17] *manteqa* refers to an area between village and district, with unchangeable physical and metaphysical features which remain intact even when depopulated. When populated, it is a primary social space, the preferred framework for communication and economic transactions. Often congruent with watan by inhabitants. The size of the *manteqa* is considered fixed and not negotiable. One may conquer but not divide a *manteqa*.

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[13] Nixon, Hamish; Whitty, Brendan. "External Democracy Promotion in Post-Conflict Zones: Evidence from Case Studies. 33

[14] Liz Alden Wily, "Land Rights in Crisis: Restoring Tenure Security in Afghanistan" (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Issues Paper Series, 2003), 71 and "Land Relations in Faryab Province: Findings from a Field Study in 11 villages" (AREU, Case Studies Series, 2004), 3

[15] The Liaison Office, "Tribal Jurisdictions and Agreements: The Key to Sub-National Governance in South-eastern Afghanistan" (Kabul: TLO Policy Brief / 1, 2009) pp.6-7

[16] Adam Pain and Paula Kantor, "Understanding and Addressing Context in Rural Afghanistan: How Villages Differ and Why" (Kabul: AREU, 2010), 15

[17] Bernt Glatzer, "War and Boundaries in Afghanistan: Significance and Relativity of Local and Social Boundaries, (in "Weld des Islams", Leiden, 41,3, 2001), 2

<u>#10 - Monsutti (2004):</u>[18] uses Caley and Roussel's definition, and states that in the context of one *manteqa* of Jaghuri district, lineage and the different forms of neighbourliness (from the hamlet to the *manteqa*) are the prevailing registers of solidarity, as well as, paradoxically, rivalry. Notes the existence of common community infrastructure at the level of the *manteqa* (bazaar, school, Friday mosque).

<u>#11 - Mielke (2015):</u>[19] *manteqa* is used by locals for denoting bounded space, the boundaries of which are well-known, but invisibly located in between the micro-cosmos of daily life and the wider region of origin. In some cases the *manteqa* describes a naturally-bounded system of joint resource use by a group of people, such as an irrigation system or common pastures upon which the community depends. Notes the existence of 'natural resource user groups' as social action units and networks, with the usage and allocation of resources requiring some type of coordination and collective action, such as annual agreements on a rotation schedule for times of water scarcity, contributions to irrigation infrastructure, maintenance, or adherence to temporal access restrictions in areas of rangeland overuse.

All other sources use or refer to one of these definitions to describe the notion, or more basic ones such as "cluster of villages".

IV.   Overview of discussions on the notion of manteqa in the sources reviewed

Sources reviewed discuss the notion of *manteqa* at two different levels: first the reality and relevance of the notion *manteqa* as an identity reference and a space of solidarity for communities in rural Afghanistan, and second a discussion on the practical relevance of the *manteqa* in a number of areas, as outlined in section III.B. above.

At the heart of the debate over the relevance of the notion of *manteqa*, researchers and practitioners promoting it have argued that given the weakness of the state in Afghanistan, the bulk of sub-district governance and natural resources management functions in rural areas has been handled by communities, and that development approaches should complement their traditional focus on the formal governance systems with greater attention and support to these community-based systems (of organisation, of rights, of resource management and conflict resolution etc.). Some authors have argued that reliance on these community-based systems could play an important part in solving Afghanistan's local governance challenge, and more broadly be a catalyst for improved State – community relations going forward.

It is within this framework that the territorial unit of the *manteqa*, where a maximum of common properties (public goods) are managed in rural areas, acquires its relevance for the purpose of improving aid planning and delivery.

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[18] Alessandro Monsutti, "Guerres et Migrations : Réseaux Sociaux et Stratégies Economiques des Hazaras d'Afghanistan", (Neuchâtel : Editions de l'Institut d'ethnologie – Paris : Edition de la maison des sciences de l'homme, 2004), 117

[19] Katja Manuela Mielke, "(Re-)Constructing Afghanistan? Rewriting Rural Afghans' Lebenswelt into Recent Development and State-making Processes: An Analysis of Local Governance and Social Order" (Bonn: PhD dissertation, Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universtitaet zu Bonn, 2015) pp. 121-123

Despite sometimes notable differences between definitions, there is broad agreement across sources that the *manteqa* exist as bounded spaces that include a number of villages, that they are typically associated with natural terrain features such as a valley or drainage basin, and that they constitute an important identity reference for their population. Sources also posit that the existence of shared common resources in those spaces generates solidarity, illustrated through joint management / governance mechanisms, and agree that community-based governance systems are generally considered legitimate and accountable by community members in the Afghan context. Some authors suggest that there may be 3,000 to 4,000 *manteqa* in the country, with each *manteqa* composed of 10 to 30 villages on average, although ACTED and IMPACT's own research suggest the number is likely to be closer to 1,500.[20]

Beyond this broad consensus there are a number of questions. The majority of authors believe that *manteqa* residents can be connected by ties and mutual obligations beyond those of their common property resources, with the *manteqa* in essence being the primary spaces for community solidarity over other territorial (i.e. village) or social spaces (qawm), and as such reflecting the underlying social structure of rural Afghanistan.[21]

Caley and Roussel note the predominantly segmentary nature of solidarity in pre-war Afghanistan, articulated around networks of kinship (qawm), with the *manteqa* existing alongside as an important territorial identify reference. They argue that that the war forced a gradual process of territorialisation of solidarity due to the rise of commanders as the new rural elite, and their requirement for territorial control, leading to the rise of the *manteqa* as a solidarity space.[22]

Others suggest that levels of solidarity may vary in line with the great diversity of socio-economic situations characterizing different agro-ecological zones of the country. [23]

For example, while acknowledging that *Manteqa* can be more important than village in some instances, Pain and Kantor argue in their study of 11 villages across 4 provinces (Kandahar, Badakhshan, Sar-i-Pul, Faryab) that although there is wider evidence of the ability of communities to deliver public goods through customary structures, the variation in this ability between communities is linked to existing levels of inequality. High levels of inequality reduce social solidarity, while conditions that generate social solidarity include low levels of inequality, subsistence economies and villages elites who are economically insecure, suggesting that geography may play a key role in this regard (poor mountain or desert areas tend to be less unequal than rich plain highly irrigated areas).[24] This has been further validated in a study of 92 villages undertaken in 2015 by Pain and Sturges.[25]

Mielke's PhD thesis findings seem to lend some credence to this view: she sees differences between Kunduz, a heavily irrigated plain area where both the notion of village and *manteqa* are fluid and contested, and the mountainous districts of Farkhar, Burqa, Ishkashim and Warsaj, where territorial

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[20] See Roussel, op.cit., 15 and Favre, "Interface between State and Society in Afghanistan: Discussion on Key Social Features affecting Governance, Reconciliation and Reconstruction" (Addis Abeba: AIZON, 2005), 8

[21] See Roussel, Favre, Glatzer, Allan, Monsutti op. cit.

[22] Ibid, 10

[23] See Mielke, op. cit. (2015); Pain and Kantor (2010); Brick (2016)

[24] Pain and Kantor (2010), ix, 30

[25] See Pain and Sturges (2015) and Pain (2016)

delimitations can be explained by geographical conditions, and where the spatial forms of villages or *manteqa* are not contested to the extent observed in Kunduz. There, she notes that the notion of bounded rural settlement is transparent, and that although competing notions of locality exist simultaneously, they are not mixed to the extent as in Kunduz' irrigation areas. [26]

In her extensive research carried out in 32 villages in 16 districts across six provinces of the country, Jennifer Brick Murtashasvili identified five factors influencing inter-village (not necessarily *manteqa*) cooperation with regards to the management of three public goods: irrigation, law and order, and public infrastructure (roads, hydro dams, electricity, health services, and mosques). These were: (1) the number of villages (with higher numbers translating into greater and less manageable monitoring costs); (2) geographic scale (with larger scale linked to greater monitoring and transaction costs); (3) fixed costs (with high fixed costs decreasing cooperation); (4) political instability (with uncertainty / short timeframes leading to decreased cooperation) and; (5) social heterogeneity (decreasing cooperation). [27]

For her part, Mielke stresses the diversity of the different notions of locality and community encountered during their research in Kunduz at three analytical levels (macro, meso and micro), and notes that the fluid notion of village and *manteqa* extends to all scales.[28] Mielke and Schetter note that while *manteqa* serve as a reference point in people's worldviews, they have not been institutionalised at community level (through a *manteqa* shura for example).[29] Mielke concludes that in the peculiar context of Kunduz, the *manteqa* do not supply a basis for solidarity and cooperation, except as a naturally bounded system of joint resource use by a group of people. For this reason, they believe that rather than *manteqa*, 'environmental resource user communities' are the adequate level and unit of analysis for the investigation of local governance dynamics in this particular context.[30]

B.   The manteqa and sub-district governance and aid delivery

Afghanistan's state formation process is incomplete, with the highly centralised but weak State only gradually extending its formal administration first to the provincial level at the end of the 19th century, and then to the district level in the second half of the 20th century. In the absence of a well-defined 'tier 4' administrative layer (villages), rural communities have enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy with regards to local governance, with State-community relations being traditionally managed through malek, arbab or qaryador, representing the interests of their qawm or network to the State, and being endowed with some formal functions by the State (issuing tazkiras, taxation, conscription, death and birth certificates etc.) within their communities. Although the situation has evolved in the last 40 years, with traditional elites often being displaced by commanders or other figures, this fundamental pattern remains largely unchanged.

Against this backdrop, academics and practitioners have struggled to make sense of the complex social and territorial landscape of Afghanistan: on the one hand, the unit of political and community cognition

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[26] Mielke (2015), 125

[27] Brick Murtashasvili, Jennifer. "Informal Order and the State in Afghanistan." Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. pp. 157-160

[28] See Mielke, op. cit. 134

[29] Katja Mielke and Conrad Schetter, "Where is the village? Local Perceptions and Development Approaches in Kunduz Province" (Asien 104, 2007), 77

[30] Mielke (2015), 134

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which can denote clan, solidarity group, profession, nation, tribe or sub-tribe referred as *qawm,*[31] and on the other, what constitutes the relevant territorial identify reference or solidarity space for communities, and how the interplay of both of these realities explain patterns of solidarity and conflict in Afghan society. Researchers have in particular tried to understand what underpins rural Afghanistan's resilience despite near state collapse and four decades of conflict. The discussion on the notion of *manteqa* sits at the centre of this debate.

It is therefore no coincidence that the NSP sits at the heart of the discussions on the *manteqa* in the sources reviewed. One of the largest World Bank programmes implemented in Afghanistan as of 2003 / 2004, it had two principal aims: firstly to deliver development projects through community level grants overseen by NGOs as Facilitating Partners (FPs), and secondly to use the community structures created as sub-district governance platforms. The programme, in which ACTED was one of the key FP and which also gave rise to an updated list of villages / settlements, broke down or aggregated communities into Community Development Councils (CDCs) based on set numbers of households. In the literature, the NSP and its successor are therefore often presented as assuming that communities or villages lacked institutional structures and accountable governance mechanisms, or that when these existed, they were unaccountable and should be bypassed.[32]

Many field researchers have argued that the NSP and CCP essentially created new community units through the CDCs without considering pre-existing local socio-spatial realities such as *manteqa*, combining or splitting settlements to meet its size requirements, and may as a result have created new divisions and thereby altered the 'pre-existing' principles of social organisation in rural Afghanistan.[33] To remedy this, some have also argued that the *manteqa*, as a pre-existing zone of community solidarity, is the right territorial entry point for local governance and aid delivery, and that the clustering of CDCs offered an opportunity to align the new clusters with *manteqa* boundaries. [34]

Starting in 2008 the NSP decided to cluster CDCs. The clustering approach that ended up- being endorsed aggregated a set number of CDCs together, with the government initiating a process of redrawing *guzar* (urban neighbourhoods – the lowest formal administrative sub-division in urban areas) boundaries based on set number of families that would allow them to match with CDC clusters, rather than adapt the clusters to the existing community-based *guzar*s.

Another line of argument found in the literature relates to the push by the government and donors to formalize the CDCs and turn them into whole of government community/village level governance platforms, rather than simply structures designed to deliver community level development projects. In this regard researchers have pointed both to a lack of legitimacy and capacity of CDCs to take on such expanded tasks, as well as the unsustainability of maintaining tens of thousands of sub-district governance units from a budgetary and administrative capacity point of view.[35] In this regard, if the

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[31] Bathia, Michael; Sedra, Mark. Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict - Armed Groups, disarmament and security in a post-war society." Contemporary Security Studies, Routledge, 2008. 89

[32] "Taking village context into account in Afghanistan". Kabul: AREU, 2015. 1

[33] See in particular in list of sources Favre (2005 and 2006); Nixon and Ponzio (2007); Afghanistan Institutional Case Study, Community Development Councils, AREU (2008); Brick (2008); Monsutti (2009 and 2012); Saltmarshe and Mehdi (2011); Dennys (2012); Katz (2017)

[34] See Kakar (2005); Favre (2005 and 2006); Nixon and Ponzio (2007); Afghanistan Institutional Case Study, Community Development Councils, AREU (2008); Brick (2008); Monsutti (2012); Saltmarshe and Mehdi (2011).

[35] Katz, David. "Community-Based Development in Rural Afghanistan: First, Assume a Community". Washington: USIP, 2017, 31; Brick, Jennifer. "Final Report: Investigating the Sustainability of Community Development Councils in Afghanistan". Kabul: AREU, 2008. 14-15, 33, 51

ACTED estimate of 1,500 *manteqa* countrywide is accurate, that number would appear to be much more manageable and realistic than the 10,000 or so CDC clusters that may end up being created if the current process is brought to completion using existing clustering standards. Finally, since the CDCs were initially created only for the express purpose of managing development projects, it is argued that *ex ante* formalisation with a broader mandate may cause resistance against the CDCs as it may be perceived by community leaders such as maliks as a breach of the contract under which they initially allowed the CDC into communities. [36]

A number of sources also put forward the *manteqa* as a more appropriate entry point for conflict resolution[37], or as a way through which the State could have improved control over communities and be more effective in its fight against insurgents, but none appear to have grounded their arguments in primary research.[38]

Beyond the NSP and Citizen Charter, the review finds that apart from the NGO ACTED, it is unclear whether any aid actor has attempted to turn the *manteqa* into the entry point for analysis of, interaction with and development programming in local rural communities. After relying informally for many years on the notion of *manteqa* to inform its programming in the North of the country, ACTED decided to formally mainstream the approach into its large rural development project in the North of the country, currently covering the four provinces of Faryab, Sar-i-Pul, Jawzjan and Balkh. This Norwegian funded project therefore uses the *manteqa* as the unit of analysis and engagement with communities for the purpose of identifying needs and community priorities and providing rural development support. To this end, ACTED has identified and mapped 64 *manteqa* across 24 districts, worked with communities to create *Manteqa* Development Platforms in each that have articulated, with ACTED's support, community development priorities which have served as a platform to implement projects against identified priorities.

C.	The manteqa and the management of natural resources

Manteqa have also been central to discussions around the management and administration of land, natural resources (rangeland, pastures, forests) as well as community irrigation schemes.[39]

With regards to land, Alden Wily notes that since the 1960s, the legal framework created by successive Afghan governments have not promoted community ownership over farmlands within their village or *manteqa*, placing unfarmed land, rangeland or barren land under the authority of the Government instead, which routinely allocated it to favoured groups on open-ended terms[40]. Alden Wily further notes that this rampant dispossession effectively affects the customarily-held communal rights to off-farm resources of more than 30,000 rural communities, and, if left unaddressed, could be a major source of state – community tension going forward.

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[36] Brick (2008), op. cit., 38. "if quasi formal leaders anticipate that CDCs will legally usurp their authority in the community, they will be much less likely to work with them in the future to serve the aims of community governance"

[37] See in particular Dennys and Zaman (2009)

[38] See in particular Katz, David. "The Afghanistan Conflict: Reforming the Village War." Middle East Quarterly, 7-30, Spring 2011 and Mahendrarajah, Shivan. "Conceptual Failure, the Taliban's parallel hierarchies, and America's strategic defeat in Afghanistan." Cambridge: Small Wars and Insurgencies, 25:1, 91-121, 2014

[39] See in particular Alden Wily (2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005 and 2013); Stanley, Safar and Salam (2008)

[40] Alden Wily, Liz. "Land, People and the State in Afghanistan: 2002-2012." Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2013, 23

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Drawing on best practices in other countries, Alden Wily advocates for a citizen-based land governance regime that accepts the existing, usually customary, notions of local land areas as the spatial basis for community governance.[41] She posits that *manteqa* often plays the role of these local areas in Afghanistan, and argue that they therefore provide the right territorial context to address the full range of local property issues, including land tenure administration itself.

She also argues that in practical terms, for land ownership and a range of social and developmental matters, failure to take the *manteqa* or comparable socio-spatial clustering as the working unit may result in highly skewed findings from a statistical perspective. This is because, in land ownership for example, one village in the *manteqa* may comprise of mainly land-owners while others comprise mainly of landless families, and a third may constitute an evenly mixed group. All villages/hamlets in the *manteqa* therefore need to be included to afford an accurate picture of landholding. [42]

With regards to pastures and rangeland, field researchers have found that the local legitimisation of rights, which is potentially a very complicated process, show that community definition of such rights is entirely feasible, relatively simple and normally quickly accomplished. On this basis, they have argued that when more than one village is involved, the *manteqa* is the right level to define domains owned and to establish agreed boundaries, access rights and systems for their regulation, and agreements for the sustainable uses of these greater community domains.[43]

V. Suggested way forward

The literature review pointed to the need to further investigate the relevance of the notion of *manteqa* across agro-ecological zones and economic conditions, as well as the need to deepen our understanding of community solidarity systems such as 'ashr' and 'chanda', and of the management of irrigation systems and pastures, as key elements underpinning effective rural development programming.

In addition, many new districts have been created by the Afghan government since 2001. ACTED and IMPACT have anecdotally noted in the areas that they are familiar with that the boundaries of these districts tend to align with *manteqa* or groups of *manteqa*s. Given that this government-led new district creation and boundary setting dynamic may continue, it would be interesting continue the research initiated by ACTED to empirically explore more in depth the relationship between the new districts and the *manteqa* to inform the broader debate on the future sub-district governance.

To this end, ACTED and IMPACT should undertake further field research, or work with third parties and subject matter experts.

This research should be complemented by three additional secondary data reviews:
1. A literature review of the sources containing the words "*Manteqa* Afghanistan" in Dari and Pashto.
2. A literature review of sources containing "village cluster Afghanistan" in English, French, Dari and Pashto. Reviewing sources including these words appears important given that the *manteqa* has not been firmly defined as a concept, with the village cluster at times being used by sources as synonymous to the *manteqa*.

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[41] Alden Wily (2013), op. cit., 58

[42] Alden Wily (2004), op. cit.,3

[43] See in particular Bedunah (2006); Stanfield, Safar, Salam, Brick (2010 and 2013); Alden Wily (2013)

3. A literature review of sources in English, French, Dari and Pastho for urban neighbourhoods containing the words "Nahiya Afghanistan" and "Guzar Afghanistan", both formal urban administrative divisions recognised by the Afghan state; and "mahalla Afghanistan", a term widely used to refer to informal urban neighbourhoods.

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