

AFGHANISTAN

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# Sustained Rural Development Programme Phase IV

## Manteqa Profiles

Findings from Key Informant  
Interviews in Northern Afghanistan

August 2019

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**AGORA**

# SUSTAINED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME - PHASE IV

Executive Summary, Afghanistan – June 2020



**ACTED**

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AGORA, a joint initiative of ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives, was founded in 2016. AGORA promotes efficient, inclusive and integrated local planning, aid response and service delivery in contexts of crisis through applying settlement-based processes and tools.

AGORA enables more efficient and tailored aid responses to support the recovery and stabilization of crisis-affected communities, contributing to meet their humanitarian needs, whilst promoting the re-establishment of local services and supporting local governance actors. AGORA promotes multi-sectoral, settlement-based aid planning and implementation, structured around partnerships between local, national and international stakeholders.

AGORA's core activities include community mapping, multi-sector and area based assessments, needs prioritisation and planning, as well as support to area-based coordination mechanisms and institutional cooperation.

These manteqa profiles represent a key product within a global AGORA program supported by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, targeting cities in crisis to inform area-based response and recovery plans, and provide support to information management and coordination efforts. The results of this assessment are the sole responsibility of the author and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry.



## FOREWORD

On behalf of ACTED and its donor, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is my great pleasure to share with you this executive summary of the AGORA research conducted on mantedas as part of the Sustained Rural Development Programme - Phase IV (SRDP IV).

Following 40 years of protracted conflict and frequent natural disasters, including drought and flooding, Afghanistan remains one of the world's most complex and difficult humanitarian crises. Persistent conflict and environmental disruptions to life and livelihoods has significantly undermined the population's resilience, and has left approximately 6.3 million people in acute need of assistance by the end of 2018.<sup>1</sup> With conflict affecting nearly half of the population, the capacity of the government to provide its population with basic services and economic opportunities is limited and hinders the country's development, leaving 54% of the population below the poverty line.<sup>2</sup>

ACTED was founded in Afghanistan in 1993 and has been active in the country ever since. Since 25 years, ACTED has been delivering multi-sector emergency assistance, as well as supporting inclusive, community-driven early recovery initiatives throughout the provinces. In northern Afghanistan, ACTED has also provided long-term development support to communities in Northern Afghanistan. This allowed ACTED to develop extensive community knowledge and expertise, as well as making ACTED highly accepted in communities across Afghanistan. As one of the largest aid actors in Afghanistan, ACTED currently supports 3,586,792 individuals, over 10% of the Afghan population in 2018.<sup>3,4</sup>

This report is a first step. It opens a door on the northern provinces of Afghanistan. Throughout these pages, which describe local services such as water, agriculture, community leadership, and economy, you will get a glimpse on the daily reality in these provinces. Passing that door, you will start to understand better the dynamics running these provinces. This however, is only the beginning. You will not find here the answers to improve local governance, or a proposition on new administrative mechanisms. The work that this report summarizes merely tries to ask the right questions, on how to best describe the relationship between local community structures and inclusivity of stakeholders, livelihood opportunities, and service provision in four provinces of Afghanistan. This door is the beginning of a journey. This report is a roadmap for what comes next.

From there, more specific profiles will complete the picture, lifting the veil on the specificities of these areas, helping to bring a practical comprehension. ACTED and IMPACT, through the AGORA initiative, aim at bringing local knowledge to stakeholders in order to provide a predictable capacity to localize aid action. This roadmap will hopefully foster linkages between local actors and external stakeholders and promote synergies, in order to bring a more sustainable recovery of crisis-affected communities.



François Hericher  
Country Director  
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1. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA), Humanitarian Needs Assistance, November 2018.  
2. Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey, 2016/2017.  
3. ACTED, Annual Report 2018, July 2019.  
4. UNOCHA, 2019 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview, December 2018.





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Concept of the Manteqa

Following decades of crisis from protracted conflict and natural disasters, Afghanistan continues to struggle with access to basic services and livelihoods for the majority of its people. The majority of development plans tend to act through the nationally recognized administrative system of provinces, districts, and villages defined by the 2003 Constitutional Loya Jirga meeting.<sup>5</sup> However, many Afghans identify themselves as being part of a larger, historical, social, and territorial unit, which in Northern, Central and Western parts of Afghanistan is known as a *manteqa*.<sup>6</sup> There are similar systems in place also in other parts of Afghanistan, although they vary slightly in definition and nomenclature.

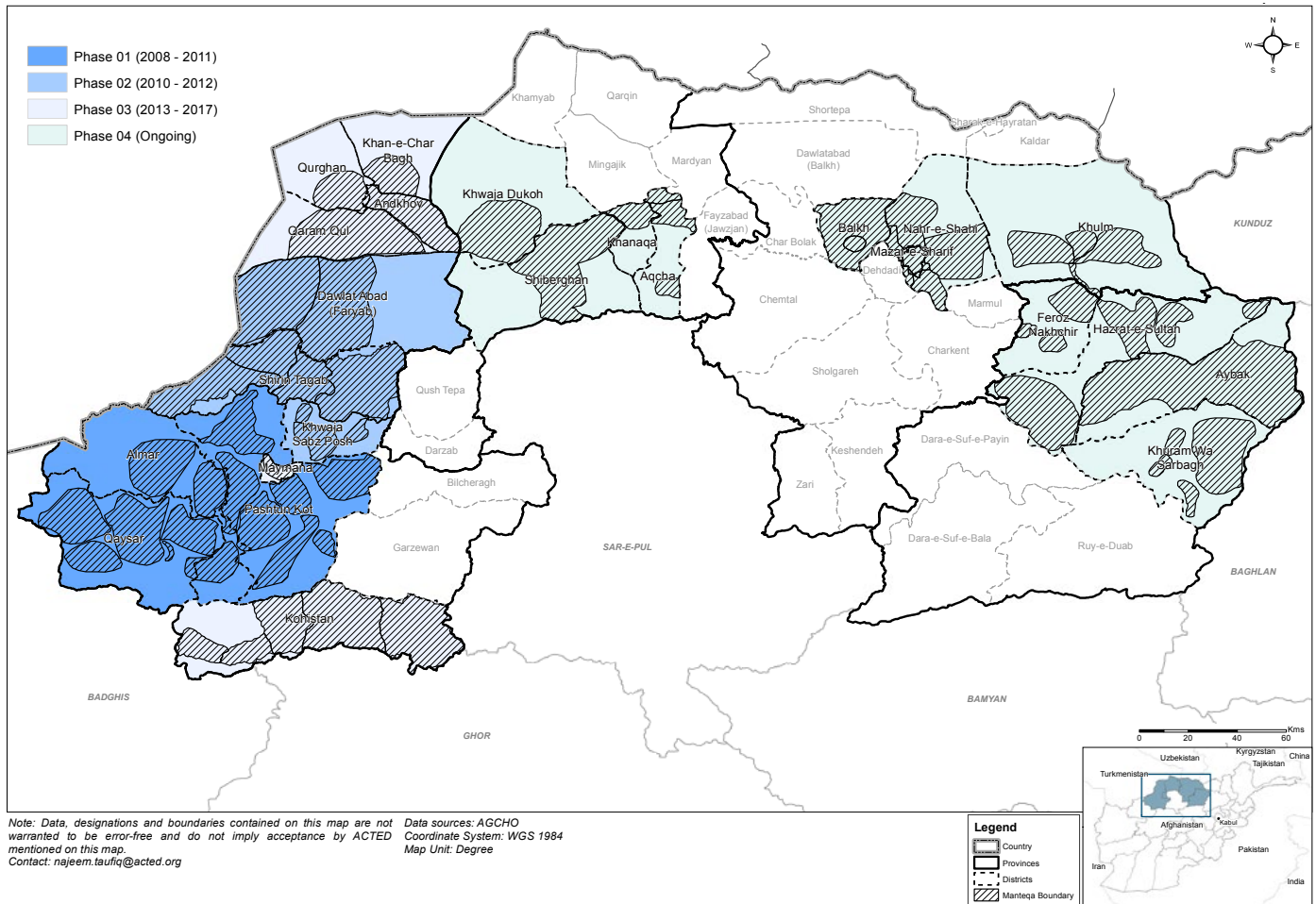
There is no single definition for defining the *manteqa*. It is often defined as “a unit, often between districts and village, which usually describes a village cluster and structures the institutions of village life”<sup>7</sup> or as “a group of settlements/hamlets of heterogeneous size (“qaria”, “aghel”, “deh”, “kalay”, “banda” or “qishlaq”) that are commonly identified by its inhabitants, or other communities, under a single name. Located between the district and settlement level, the “*manteqa*” does not have

administrative recognition, but represents the actual social and territorial unit of rural Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> *Manteqas* are usually based around shared economic resources, particularly irrigation canals, forests and communal water resources, but also often include roads, mosques, and other infrastructure.<sup>9</sup> Each *manteqa* shares a sense of collective ownership over the resources inside of the *manteqa*, as well as a sense of belonging, referred to as “*mushtarakat-e-manteqa*.”

## Research Carried Out Under SRDP Programme

ACTED’s long-running Sustained Rural Development Programme, now in its fourth phase (2018-2021) has been funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2008 to improve effectiveness of local governance, livelihoods, and the provision of basic services in Northern Afghanistan. As a part of the programme, AGORA, an initiative of ACTED and IMPACT, a think tank dedicated to humanitarian research,<sup>10</sup> conducted an assessment of 64 *manteqas* in Faryab, Balkh, Jawzjan, and Samangan provinces between October 2018 and September 2019. The assessment sought to establish an understanding of stakeholders, agricultural resources, livelihoods opportunities, and access to basic services in order to inform the SRDP IV

Map 1: SRDP Phases and Manteqas of Intervention in Northern Afghanistan, 2008 - 2021



Note: Data, designations and boundaries contained on this map are not warranted to be error-free and do not imply acceptance by ACTED mentioned on this map. Contact: najem.taufiq@acted.org

Data sources: AGCHO  
Coordinate System: WGS 1984  
Map Unit: Degree

5. Lister, Understanding State-Building and Local Government in Afghanistan, Crisis States Research Centre, Working Paper no. 14, May 2007.  
6. Wily, Putting Rural Land registration in perspective: the case of Afghanistan, AREU, 2004; Wily, Commons at the core of the conflict: looking for peace in rural Afghanistan,

AREU, 2004.  
7. Nixon and Whitty, “External Democracy Promotion in Post-Conflict Zones: Evidence from Case Studies, 2008.



project of the communities' needs at the manteqa level, as well as identify the ways in which the manteqa can be used as an entry point for the provision of development and early recovery support in rural Afghanistan.

In order to collect the necessary information for the assessment, four rounds of data collection were initiated. Between October and November 2018, community leaders from each manteqa were interviewed, the boundaries of the manteqas were mapped out based on their feedback, and key infrastructure present in each manteqa was identified. Between January and February 2019, key informant (KI) interviews were carried out in every village of each manteqa, focusing on agricultural land, community leadership, and basic service access. Between August and September 2019, a third round of data collection was conducted to provide additional information on access to basic services and assess the markets and economy in each manteqa. Data from all rounds of data collection was digitized and then aggregated to the manteqa level. Individual manteqa indicators were combined in order to provide an understanding of overall service access and community needs. The fourth round between November 2019 and December 2019 mapped the traditional water user networks and land types of each of the 24 SRDP IV districts, in order to more precisely map the links between manteqas and collectively managed resources, as well as assemble a database of canals and water management structures in each district. This research gave both a deeper understanding of manteqas in these districts, and improved the SRDP IV project teams' capacity for engagement in agricultural activities at a local level.

## Key Findings and Methodological Limitations

The research conducted under SRDP IV provided detailed information about the local characteristics of each manteqa, including the community leadership available, active economic sectors, production of goods, market access, and trade, and basic service access for health, education, and water. These key factors are summarized per manteqa through the manteqa profiles as well as the manteqa development plans. However, the research also informed our understanding of how manteqas work more generally. Overall, the manteqa approach revealed more nuance within districts than previously acknowledged. Though more research needs to be done, the findings below suggest that a manteqa-based approach is both recognized by local actors and may provide a good entry point through which to identify the population's needs.

However, it should be noted that there are limitations to the understanding of the notion of the manteqa that should be considered by any actor considering the use of the manteqa as an entry point for development initiatives in Afghanistan. For instance, the manteqa is largely based around the collective management of economic resources, primarily land, markets, and roads. They are unlikely to be an adequate forum for entry on other service-access related issues, such as healthcare, where services may vary considerably between individual villages within manteqas.

8. Favre, Interface between State and Society in Afghanistan: Discussion on Key Social Features affecting Governance, Reconciliation and Reconstruction, February 2005.

9. ACTED, Social Water Management in Faryab: A Manteqas Case Study, 2016.

Moreover, manteqas are a rural Afghanistan concept; urbanisation, displacement and changes in provincial or district boundaries all have effects on the cohesiveness and relevance of the manteqa as a useful concept for community organisation in rural Afghanistan. All of these changes introduce new ways in which resources are managed, the cohesiveness of the population that live in and uses manteqa resources, and the links between the community and the economic resources they use. Any efforts to use the manteqa as an entry point for development initiatives in Afghanistan should take these into consideration.

Taking this into consideration, ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives' own research, as well as a review of all publically available resources discussing the manteqa concept indicates that while there is a clear consensus on the manteqa as a space for community solidarity in rural areas, three questions require further research: (1) What are the key objective characteristics that might be used to define a manteqa? (2) Can the manteqa act as a primary unit for community solidarity in rural Afghanistan beyond the joint management of shared economic resources? and (3), Is the manteqa concept applicable in other parts of the country (and if so, what aspects of the community/land relationships vary)?

However, our experience suggest that the manteqa is an effective entry-point for development actors seeking to carry out rural development programming in communities in rural Afghanistan, and can act as an effective forum for decision making and resource management at the community level.

## Assessment Key Findings

- Manteqa boundaries are based around contiguous geographic units, and usually correspond with rain-fed or irrigated agricultural land that rural communities use, along with the traditional water management structures (mirbashis, mirabs, and chakbashis) formed by the local communities to manage water distribution for the agricultural land.<sup>11</sup>
- The manteqa is largely based around the collective management of economic and social resources, primarily land, markets, and roads but also other infrastructure such as mosques. Manteqas are largely cohesive socio-economic units, where livelihoods, markets, land, irrigation networks, and related economic infrastructure are collectively shared and managed between the members of the manteqa. The manteqa is a concept shared not just among leadership of the villages belonging to a manteqa, or specialized structures for water and land management; mushtarakat-e-manteqa applies to all members of the manteqa, who share a common understanding of its boundaries and collective resources. For instance, people belonging to each manteqa will only gather firewood or plants from inside of their own manteqa's boundaries.

10. For more information, see: [impact-initiatives.org](http://impact-initiatives.org)

11. Roussel and Caley, Les Mantea: le puzzle souterrien de l'Afghanistan, 1994.





- The *manteqa* is a similar concept as the so-called Basic Service Unit (BSU), in which all people living inside of a BSU access the same health, water, or education services. BSUs tend to be much smaller and are focused on provision of services, while *manteqas* are based around the collective management of shared socio-economic resources. *Manteqas* may encompass several BSUs, and BSUs can conversely include populations from more than one *manteqa*. As a result, the level of health, education, water, and other basic services can vary considerably between individual villages within *manteqas*. Given how important and sensitive health and education are in the context of rural Afghanistan, it is expected that the notion of *manteqa* could be a useful prism to decide where to locate health points and primary schools and define their catchment areas, something which has not been done to date.
- *Manteqas* were reported to function well alongside other community-based development structures, including the World Bank and Afghanistan National Government-led Community Development Councils (CDC) and CDC Clusters. In practice, CDCs and CDC Clusters were found to fit comfortably within *manteqas*, creating a co-existent layer for community engagement with the more traditional resource management structures, with somewhat different functions for both structures.
- It was not uncommon for one *manteqa* to be affected by conflict while the rest of the district or province was not. Given that *manteqas* are a key community structure for resource management and resource sharing, disputes over resources such as water and land often likely occur at *manteqa* level, which in turn suggests they could also be used as an entry point for conflict resolution. Only in conflict-affected *manteqas* did KIs report a complete absence or unavailability of services.
- *Manteqas* do not have a formalized way for selecting a leadership structure. Based on the research conducted for this report, *manteqas* are typically led by a forum of traditional local leaders, often consisting of leaders of villages belonging to the *manteqa* in question. The villages in the 64 *manteqas* researched had at least one type of traditional leadership position (*arbab/maliks/qarya dar, qumandan, elders, mirabs*) present. However systems vary between *manteqas*, with some *manteqas* reporting more centralized leadership system than others, while in others individual village leaders may assume stronger individual leadership roles. While most *manteqa* leadership insisted that women, minorities, and other marginalised groups received representation in *manteqa* leadership structures, leadership was observed to be primarily older and male.

## Research Overview

As part of its research into *manteqa* from both a scholarly and practical application in the rural Afghanistan context, AGORA has produced the following products for SRDP IV:

- *Manteqa* Profiles
- *Manteqa* Baseline Report
- Water User Group Maps
- *Manteqa* Development Plans

A summary of these products is discussed below:

### Manteqa Profiles

The *Manteqa* Profiles, assessed between October 2018 and August 2019, provide a detailed understanding of the boundaries, populations, land types available, infrastructure and resources, market activity and capacity, local leadership and stakeholders, and overall access to key services available in each of the 64 *manteqas* assessed as part of the SRDP IV programme. These profiles are intended as operational documents to provide a general overview on the available resources and conditions of any development actors seeking to implement in the *manteqa*. The document also includes a table summarising the assessment and the overall conditions in each *manteqa*, in order to assist with prioritisation of *manteqas* for intervention by development actors.

[Faryab Province Manteqa Profiles \(Part 1\)](#)

[Faryab Province Manteqa Profiles \(Part 2\)](#)

[Balkh Province Manteqa Profiles](#)

[Jawzjan Province Manteqa Profiles](#)

[Samangan Province Manteqa Profiles](#)

### Manteqa Baseline Report

The [manteqa baseline report](#), based on April 2019 data and published in, January 2020, provides a population-representative household-level view of conditions in the SRDP IV areas of intervention, across three dimensions: 1) socioeconomic status, 2) access to basic services, and 3) inclusivity of leadership structures. The report assessed *manteqas* across six different typologies related to livelihoods, demographics, and participation in other development programmes. The report will be followed by a midline and endline assessment to assess the progress of the programme across all six typologies, alongside a control group to assess the overall impact of the programme.

11. Wily, Putting Rural Land registration in perspective: the case of Afghanistan, AREU, 2004; Wily, Commons at the core of the conflict: looking for peace in rural Afghanistan, AREU, 2004.

12. Kandiwal, Beyond Kinship and Tribe: A new form of solidary and interest

representation in Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, 2016.

13. Ibid.



## Water User Group Maps

As part of the additional research conducted following the manteqa profiles, AGORA [mapped the traditional water user groups](#) in each of the 24 districts of intervention, in order to understand better how manteqa boundaries are determined in their relations to the shared water and land resources that define much of mushtarakat-e-manteqa. These maps include the canal systems in each district, as well as the areas under each mater manager, as well as the boundaries of the water user groups that have been established by ACTED and the local government. In addition, land types are mapped and documented to show the relationship between water structure and land types.

## Manteqa Development Plans

The [Manteqa Development Platforms \(MDPs\)](#) were developed between October 2019 - November 2019 through consultation with local community leaders following the completion of the manteqa development plans. The MDPs provide an introduction to the manteqa-led approach to development, and outline the key steps to ensuring a community-led process. The document includes the final plans for 41 selected manteqas of intervention, and all key programmes developed by the community with support from the SRDP IV team. Expected, cost, time frames, available and needed resources, and involved government departments are all included for each project.

## Conclusions

All of these outputs represent a package intended to guide community-led development by development actors in rural Afghanistan. By using the manteqa as the geographic unit of engagement, development actors can more readily identify the resources and capacities available to the communities that live there, as well as their needs, and engage more directly with existing community structures in order to provide improved services more efficiently and focus more closely on those in need within a particular geographic area.

It should be noted that this still represents only one method of community-led development in rural Afghanistan. Additional research is needed to understand the manteqa as a potential territorial entry point for community mobilization, peacebuilding and basic service delivery. More broadly, it is a first step, intended as a bridge to future research aimed at aiding development work using customary community based governance mechanisms in Afghanistan.

