

NSP Impact Evaluation – Summary and Update

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The randomized impact evaluation of Phase-II of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP-II) is a multi-year study designed to quantify changes - across indicators such as economic activity, agricultural production, access to infrastructure and services, and structures and perceptions of local governance - in 250 ‘treatment communities’ mobilized by NSP and to compare these changes to those observed in 250 ‘control communities’ not participating in NSP. The evaluation spans communities located in Balkh, Baghlan, Daykundi, Ghor, Herat, and Nangarhar provinces and includes districts mobilized by seven national and international Facilitating Partners (FPs). The evaluation is being conducted in parallel with the implementation of NSP in the 250 ‘treatment villages’ and is designed to report impacts at different stages of the project cycle.

The methodology of the NSP evaluation is structured around a comparison, over a two- to three-year period, of changes in outcomes of interest between 250 ‘treatment communities’ and 250 ‘control communities’. Communities are to be surveyed multiple times over a three-year period, beginning with a ‘baseline survey’ conducted prior to NSP activities, followed by a ‘first follow-up survey’ after partial completion of program activities, and concluded by a ‘second follow-up survey’ after the completion of NSP-funded projects in treatment communities, but before the initiation of NSP activities in control communities. The evaluation is being led by Andrew Beath, a Ph.D. Candidate at Harvard University¹; Shahim Kabuli of the World Bank;² Dr. Fotini Christia, a Professor of Political Science at M.I.T.;³ Dr. Ruben Enikolopov, a Professor of Economics at the New Economic School in Moscow,⁴ and is being implemented in conjunction with the Vulnerability Analysis Unit (VAU) of MRRD.

The 500 communities included in the evaluation are located across ten districts in Balkh, Baghlan, Daykundi, Ghor, Herat, and Nangarhar provinces. The ten districts were selected based on size, security conditions, the consent of the assigned FP, and the constraint that no villages in the district had previously received NSP activities. The ten districts provide what is considered to be a representative sample of Afghanistan’s geographic, ethnic, and economic diversity, although security conditions have precluded the inclusion of southern provinces in the evaluation. Seven Facilitating Partners (FPs) are contracted to mobilize the ten evaluation districts, including two local FPs, as well as major international NGOs such as IRC and Oxfam.

Within each of the 10 evaluation districts, 50 ‘evaluation villages’ were selected by the assigned FP, with the understanding that 25 of the 50 villages would be randomly selected for participation in NSP and that the remaining 25 villages would form the control group and not receive NSP until following the completion of the evaluation. Within each evaluation district, the evaluation team used existing data to form 25 ‘matched village pairs’, grouping villages with similar pre-treatment characteristics. A computer algorithm was then used to randomly select one of each matched village pair to receive NSP.

Estimates of the impact of NSP will be based upon a comparison of changes in outcomes of interest from the baseline and the follow-up surveys between the treatment and control groups. As the 500 villages in the evaluation sample were randomly assigned to either the treatment or control groups, the pre-NSP characteristics of villages selected to receive NSP are, on average, identical to outcomes of interest in those villages not selected to not receive NSP. Accordingly, should any differences in the average level of outcomes of interest arise between the 250 treatment villages and the 250 control villages, it can be assured that those differences reflect the impact of NSP and not any differences in starting conditions between the treatment and control villages.

In the 250 treatment communities, FPs have implemented two “sub-treatment interventions” (STIs), which are designed to assess relative impacts of modifications in implementation strategies. The first of these STIs concern the manner by which communities elect CDCs, contrasting a “cluster-based” election with an “at-large” election. The second STI is focused on the method by which the community selects the sub-project, contrasting a referendum with a community consultation meeting. The impacts of these two STIs are to be assessed across numerous dimensions, such as the type of CDC members elected, the correspondence between selected sub-projects and the ex-ante preferences of community members, as well as general outcomes. In order to collect

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data to be used in the analysis of relative STI impacts and to systematically document the process of NSP implementation, a monitoring system was established to observe both the election and sub-project selection procedures and collect relevant data from community members. The results of these monitoring exercises are presented in the CDC Election Monitoring Report and the Sub-Project Selection Procedure Monitoring Report, available at: <http://web.mit.edu/cfotini/www/NSP-IE/>

During August and September of 2007, the baseline survey for the evaluation was administered, involving nearly 13,000 participants. Data from the baseline survey indicates that, prior to the initiation of NSP activities, respondents in the evaluation districts face high levels of poverty and are generally poorly served by other projects. Over 80 percent of households draw water from unsafe water sources and only 14 percent have access to electricity. Access to health care was also found to be limited, with around 89 percent of respondents reporting that there was no community health worker available to treat illnesses of people in the village and 10 percent of respondents claiming that there is no source of medical treatment at all for people in the village who fall ill.

The baseline survey found that village headmen and tribal elders usually play the leading role in making decisions on behalf of the community, establishing rules, and resolving disputes. Women, however, appear to have a very limited role in village governance, with 91 percent of female respondents stating that there was no formal role by which women could participate in the village council. Respondents generally indicated a strong desire for political participation and government involvement. Nine out of ten male household respondents indicated a desire to vote in the next presidential and parliamentary elections and approximately 50 percent knew the name of a parliamentary representative for their province. When asked to which entity people earning income should pay tax, over 86 percent respondents reported that tax should be paid to the central government or a representative thereof.

In order to inform whether sub-projects implemented by NSP are reflective of the preferences of villagers, the baseline survey sought to obtain detailed information concerning which types of sub-projects respondents felt were most needed. The results indicate that male heads-of-household and female respondents believe that clean drinking water facilities are of primary importance, followed by schools, and health facilities. Projects focused on irrigation and roads and bridges were of high importance to male respondents, both at the household and focus group level, but were of lesser importance to female respondents. A detailed summary of the findings of the baseline survey is presented in the Baseline Survey Report, which is available at: <http://web.mit.edu/cfotini/www/NSP-IE/>

The monitoring of CDC elections was held across a sample of 131 NSP evaluation communities between October 2007 and May 2008. Overall, the evaluation team found that the CDC election process had been professionally executed by FPs and that, in general, villagers have a good understanding of the CDC election process and the NSP generally. Monitors reported no instances where ballot papers or ballot boxes may have been changed before the counting of the votes, indicating that instances of electoral fraud seemed to be largely absent, and there were only a few cases where monitors raised doubts about the integrity of the voting process. Results from spot-vote interviews conducted individually with voters suggest that villagers exhibit a high level of engagement with the electoral process and a solid understanding of both the procedural and substantive aspects of the election. The overwhelming majority of voters in the monitored NSP evaluation communities reported that they made their own decision for whom to vote, with only a very small fraction of the respondents suggesting that their choice was determined by others, and generally perceived the process to be free and fair.

In addition, 127 evaluation communities were subjected to detailed monitoring of the sub-project selection procedure, which occurred between November 2007 and July 2008 and were organized according to either a consultation meeting or a referendum. Overall, the evaluation team found that the sub-project selection process was professionally executed by FPs. Consultation meetings were well attended, attracting an average of roughly 70 men and a similar number of women and villagers in attendance outnumbered CDC officials by a ratio of ten-to-one. Monitors noted very high level of convergence of opinions between villagers and CDC members and between male and female participants, but no instances when the villagers appeared afraid or unwilling to express an opinion different to that of the members of the CDC or any other person at the meeting. Monitors found that referenda were professionally-executed, with various measures implemented to ensure the secrecy of the vote and the integrity of the process. When interviewed individually, the majority of participants expressed satisfaction with their CDC and believed that elections constituted a good way to select their community representatives. With respect to the sub-project selection process, respondents appeared largely informed on its governmental sponsorship and the steps it entailed, as FPs had discussed with them the logistics and rationale

behind subproject selection. Villagers were also found to be generally satisfied with the type and range of the proposed projects and expressed confidence in the process, stating that they truly expected it to determine project selection outcomes.

The first follow-up survey for the NSP evaluation is to be conducted during the summer and fall of 2009 and will collect data across indicators similar to the baseline survey. Although survey activities will be conducted sequentially across the ten districts in accordance with the differing rates of progress in project implementation, data will be processed and analyzed on a continuing basis to ensure impacts can be estimated across a partial sample of communities prior to the completion of survey activities in all ten districts. Accordingly, it is anticipated that a report on the impacts of NSP across a partial sample of communities will be available by October 2009. It is anticipated that the report will present the following:

- Recommendation on the most appropriate means by which CDCs should be elected (at-large vs. cluster elections), based on an analysis of impacts of election types on: elite continuity; human capital of CDC members; location of CDC members; and general economic, social, and institutional outcomes noted below;
- Recommendation on the most appropriate means by which sub-projects should be selected (consultation meeting vs. referenda), based on an analysis of impacts of selection types on: concurrence of selected projects with *ex-ante* preferences of villages, level of community contributions, quality of sub-projects, awareness of sub-projects, satisfaction with sub-projects and NSP generally; and general economic, social, and institutional outcomes noted below;
- Analysis of impact of NSP on the economic and social welfare of villagers, as measured by villagers' access to critical infrastructure and services; level of villagers' income and consumption; within-village inequality of income and consumption; impact of external shocks on villagers' income and consumption; incidence of different forms of borrowing;
- Analysis of impact of NSP on the level and distribution of agricultural and non-agricultural production, as measured by crop yields; diversification of crops under cultivation and other income sources; and extent of trade in agricultural and processed goods;
- Analysis of impact of NSP on integration between villagers and national government, as measured by perceptions of central and sub-national government, acceptance of core functions of the central government, and acceptance of democratic norms;
- Analysis of impact of NSP on female involvement in community governance and village life;
- Analysis of impact of NSP on levels of communal trust and the incidence and resolution of disputes and feuds;
- Analysis of impact of NSP on the structure and function of village governance, as measured by the roles and methods of selection of customary councils and decision-makers, methods of dispute resolution, and assignment of governance roles to village institutions, and of levels of satisfaction of villagers with local governance structures;
- Analysis of whether the effectiveness of NSP is affected by *ex-ante* village characteristics, such as village size; structure of village production; intra-community trust; inter-community trust; income, consumption, or asset inequality; structure of customary governance structures; attitudes to central and sub-national government
- Analysis of extent to which NSP sub-projects reflect *ex-ante* preferences of male villagers, female villagers, and male elites.

The first follow-up survey is to be followed by a second follow-up survey, tentatively scheduled for summer and fall of 2010, which will assess longer-term impacts of NSP along the dimensions noted above. A similar report is to be prepared following the completion of that survey.