

Evaluation Study of NSP Assesses Community Impacts

A multi-year impact evaluation study of phase two of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) is underway to provide evidence-based recommendations to the Government of Afghanistan on ways in which the implementation of the program might be refined.

The study is being conducted by Andrew Beath, a Ph.D. candidate at Harvard University; Dr. Fotini Christia, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.), and Dr. Ruben Enikolopov, a professor at the New Economic School in Moscow. The design and implementation of the study has been advised by leading experts in evaluation and development economics from Harvard University and the Poverty Action Lab at M.I.T.

The study will track key outcome indicators in 500 villages across Afghanistan over two to three years.

Half of the 500 villages have been selected to be mobilized by NSP, with the other half serving as a control group. By comparing how outcome indicators in the two groups change during the timeline of the study, the evaluation team will be able to pinpoint how and to what extent NSP changes the lives of villagers in rural Afghanistan.



NSP was created by the Government of Afghanistan in 2003 to develop the ability of Afghan communities to identify, plan, manage and monitor their own development projects. NSP empowers communities to make decisions and manage resources during all stages of the project cycle. The program lays the foundation for a sustainable form of inclusive local governance, rural reconstruction, and poverty alleviation.

NSP provides direct block grant transfers to a bank account established by the CDCs to support rehabilitation and development activities planned and implemented by the elected CDCs. The funding takes the form of block grants which are calculated at US\$200 per family with an average grant of US\$ 27,000 and maximum of US\$ 60,000 per community. Portions of the block grant are released for procurement and phased implementation of the approved subproject(s).

Planning for the NSP evaluation took place between September 2006 and July 2007 and involved consultations with donor representatives, NSP Facilitating Partners (FPs), development economists, and program evaluators. Also involved were the staff and management of MRRD and NSP. Through this process, the study was designed to meet the very highest standards of methodological rigor, without disrupting NSP activities.

The 500 villages included in the study are located within 10 districts in Balkh, Baghlan, Daykundi, Ghor, Herat, and Nangarhar provinces. The communities were selected based on size, security conditions, and the stage of mobilization under NSP. The evaluation districts provide

what is considered to be a representative sample of Afghanistan's geographic, ethnic, and economic diversity.

Within the 10 evaluation districts, 50 'evaluation villages' were selected by the assigned FP. The evaluation team then used existing geographic and demographic data to form 25 'matched village pairs' in each district, grouping villages with similar characteristics. Next, a random number generator selected one of each matched village pair to receive NSP. This approach made the selection process completely independent of the characteristics of villages, so that the estimation of impacts of NSP becomes a relatively simple and transparent exercise.



During August and September of 2007, the baseline survey was administered to 13,000 participants in the 500 communities. NSP activities in the 250 treatment villages commenced following administration of the baseline survey. 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.

As of July 2008, CDC elections and sub-project selection procedures have been completed in the 10 evaluation districts. The evaluation team plans to undertake project implementation monitoring during the fall of 2008, with the first follow-up survey occurring in late 2008 and/or spring 2009 and a second follow-up survey to be conducted the following year.

Data collection and processing is being undertaken by the Vulnerability Analysis Unit (VAU), a survey unit of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and Central Statistics Office (CSO), which administers the biannual National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA), Afghanistan's only major nationwide household survey. The NSP evaluation is a key component in an on-going project to build the capacity of VAU to design and implement rigorous program evaluations for the Government of Afghanistan.

For more information on the study, visit <http://web.mit.edu/cfotini/www/NSP-IE/> or e-mail Andrew Beath at: beath@fas.harvard.edu; Fotini Christia at: cfotini@mit.edu; and Ruben Enikolopov at: renikolopov@nes.ru