



Despite Challenging Environment the National Solidarity Programme is Making Significant Progress in Building Community Institutions in Rural Afghanistan, Finds World Bank Report

KABUL, February 04, 2008 — The National Solidarity Programme (NSP), a community-led reconstruction and rural infrastructure initiative, has made significant achievements in empowering communities, improving community relations, and increasing public faith in the system of government, according to a World Bank project assessment report released today.

According to the report – Implementation Completion and Results Report of the National Solidarity Programme I – the NSP has reached over 15.4 million Afghans (around 81 percent of Afghanistan’s rural inhabitants) since its inception in 2003. As January 24, 2008, some 19,100 communities have been mobilized while 18,303 communities have successfully elected Community Development Councils (CDCs). Over 31,396 community projects had been partially or fully financed, of which more than 15,111 projects had been completed. The NSP is currently active in 352 districts of the 364 districts in Afghanistan’s 34 provinces.

The National Solidarity Programme was created by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 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.

The report concludes the project has empowered local communities through the establishment of a village-level consultative decision making mechanism. It has used representative local leadership as a basis for interaction within and between communities on the one hand, and the administration and aid agencies on the other. It has financed local-level reconstruction, development, and capacity building through block grants.

“This report demonstrates that NSP is making tangible inroads in helping reduce poverty and strengthen local governance and community empowerment in Afghanistan,” said HE Mohammad Ehsan Zia, Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. “The progress to date and the great deal of work that still lies ahead demonstrate the value and the need for continued international support so that NSP and local communities may complete the impactful work we have begun.”

Throughout the life of the NSP 1 — from December 2003 to March 2007 — the program made significant achievements despite high security risks, lack of professional capacity in rural Afghanistan, and delays in funding availability. Between December 2003 and March 2007, some 16,502 Community Development Councils (CDCs) had been elected through secret ballot by both men and women, establishing the outreach of NSP to two-thirds of Afghanistan’s estimated 24,000 villages. A total of 22,458 sub-projects submitted by 12,270 CDCs have been funded with an average US\$23,121 grant disbursement per CDC.

“The NSP has for the first time in Afghanistan’s history introduced an institutionalized framework for inclusive consultative decision-making at the village level as part of the state governance system,” said Mariam Sherman, World Bank Country Manager for Afghanistan. “Before NSP, women were not permitted to participate in rural institutions, thereby excluding half the population from any recognized voice in community affairs. With the introduction of CDCs, equal representation for women is actively promoted, and on average, 35 percent of the CDC representatives are female.”

The major strengths of the program design are the transfer of funds directly to communities, enabling a strong sense of ownership of the program, and democratic elections through secret ballots, which ensure that poor and marginalized peoples are included in decision-making processes, commented a group of Facilitating Partners.

The World Bank is the main source of financing for the NSP by contributing US\$306 million. Other sources include the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (US\$216 million), the Japanese Social Development Fund (US\$21 million), and several bilateral contributors.

The Implementation Completion Report is prepared at the time of project completion and marks the transition from implementation to project operation. It assesses the degree to which the project achieved its development objective and outputs as set out in the project documents; other significant outcomes and impacts; prospects for the project's sustainability; and World Bank and borrower performance, including compliance with relevant World Bank safeguards and business policies. It also provides the data and analysis to substantiate these assessments, and it identifies the lessons learned from implementation. Copies of the report are available via the World Bank in Afghanistan website: www.worldbank.org.af.

For more information about the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development activities, please visit www.mrrd.gov.af/nsp

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