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Stakeholder perceptions of agriculture and nutrition policies and practice: Evidence from Afghanistan

Nigel Poole,¹ Chona Echavez,² Dominic Rowland³ and the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), Kabul, Afghanistan

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¹ London International Development Centre and SOAS, University of London

² AREU

³ London International Development Centre and SOAS, University of London

About this paper

This paper is a product of research consortium Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA), and is funded by UK aid from the UK government. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies. For more information see www.lansasouthasia.org.

About LANSAs

Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA) is an international research partnership. LANSAs is finding out how agriculture and agri-food systems can be better designed to advance nutrition. LANSAs is focused on policies, interventions and strategies that can improve the nutritional status of women and children in South Asia. LANSAs is funded by UK aid from the UK government. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies. For more information see www.lansasouthasia.org

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Glossary of Terms

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
AFSANA	Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
APP	Agricultural Production and Productivity Programme
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ARDZ	Agricultural and Rural Development Zone
ASGP	Afghanistan Subnational Governance Programme
BDK	Badakhshan Province
BMN	Bamyan Province
BPHS	Basic Package of Health Services
CARD-F	Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development Facility
CDC	Community Development Council
EDP	Economic Development Package
DCC	District Coordination Council
DDA	District Development Assembly
DFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development
DGO	District Governor's Office
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
FSAC	Food Security and Agriculture Cluster
GoIRA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

HNSS	Health and Nutrition Sector Strategy
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
IMC	Inter-Ministerial Committee
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
IRoA	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
IYCF	Infant and Young Child Feeding
KBL	Kabul
KDH	Kandahar Province
LANSA	Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia
MAIL/DAIL	Ministry/Department of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock
MCN	Ministry of Counter Narcotics
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoPH/DoPH	Ministry/Department of Public Health
MoWA/DoW A	Ministry/Department of Women's Affairs
MRRD/DRRD	Ministry/Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NABDP	National Area-Based Development Programme
NADF	National Agricultural Development Framework
NAF	Nutrition Action Framework
(I)NGO	(International) Non-governmental Organisation
NGH	Nangarhar Province
NPP	National Priority Programmes
NSP	National Solidarity Programme

OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PC	Provincial Council
PDC	Provincial Development Committee
PGO	Provincial Governor's Office
SNG	Subnational Governance
SWG	Sector Working Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Health
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme
WHO	United Nations World Health Organization

I Introduction

I.1 Aims and objectives of this report

Like in other countries in the South Asian region, malnutrition is a serious problem in Afghanistan: the latest national statistics confirm high rates of stunting among vulnerable groups such as children under the age of five (nationally 40 per cent and in certain provinces over 70 per cent) (UNICEF 2014). Additionally, micronutrient deficiencies are strongly implicated in malnutrition among women and adolescent girls (Flores-Martinez et al. 2016), conditions which are likely to perpetuate the generational consequences. To improve nutritional status, a multipronged approach has been called for (Johncheck and Holland 2007). While there are multiple causes of malnutrition, undernutrition and lack of dietary diversity are significant causes and point to the need to address micronutrient deficiencies rather than generalised food insecurity (Miller and Welch 2013). Therapeutic approaches to treating undernutrition are important, particularly in situations of conflict and disaster, but food-based approaches can play a significant part in addressing chronic deficiencies, implying a major role for agriculture (Thompson and Amoroso 2011). In Afghanistan, more than projects and interventions, there is potential to re-orient the whole agriculture sector towards the nutrition agenda (Levitt et al. 2010).

More research on policies and policy formulation is needed to explore the nature of the linkages between diverse stakeholders in agriculture and nutrition policies, policy and project processes, and the mechanisms of intersectoral coordination (Gillespie et al. 2013). A crucial policy question is: what are the pathways and incentives needed to ensure that agriculture can have an impact on nutrition? The objectives of the research reported here were to identify the interrelationships among key organisations in agriculture and nutrition, evaluate the local evidence base linking agriculture to nutrition, and understand the perceptions of decision makers about policy making and implementation, and the capacities for improving nutrition through the agri-food system.

It was conducted in Afghanistan, at central (Kabul) and regional (provincial capital) levels, within the DFID-funded research programme Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA). It follows previous research in South Asia and East Africa in terms of mapping important stakeholder organisations and policies (van den Bold et al. 2015), and also the work of Levitt et al. (2011) in one province of Afghanistan, Balkh.

Findings concern agriculture and nutrition linkages already existing within the policy environment, how such policies operate in practice at central and provincial levels, the political economy and policy-making process, and gaps and opportunities for leveraging agriculture for nutrition in Afghanistan.

1.2 Agri-nutrition policy and programme impact pathways

1. To explore agriculture and nutrition linkages in Afghanistan, the research aimed to invite respondents to frame discussions according to the pathways summarised by Gillespie et al. (2012):
2. **Agriculture for food** refers to the agricultural crops and livestock produced for own consumption.
3. **Agriculture for income** refers to either income from the sale of agricultural products or as a result of waged labour in the agricultural sector.
4. **Agriculture and food prices** refers to the contribution of agriculture to food supply, in relation to total demand for agricultural food products. The price of agricultural food products thus affects both the price a farmer receives in return for selling a product and the ability of net buyers to purchase foods from markets.
5. **Non-food expenditure of agricultural income** refers to how income derived from agricultural practices is allocated. It refers to investment of income in nutrition-relevant sectors such as education and health.
6. **Female agricultural labour and power** refers to the intra-household distribution of income and expenditure, which it heavily influences. Female empowerment is one of the biggest predictors of a child's nutritional status.
7. **Female agricultural labour and child care and feeding** refers to the opportunity cost of women's' labour in agricultural practices in terms of child care and feeding. Women in poor households tend to spend more labour time on agricultural work, reducing the time for child care than more well-off households.
8. **Female agricultural labour and women's nutritional status** refers to feedbacks between agricultural work, health and nutrition in terms of energy expenditure, or health-related concerns resulting from work that can ultimately affect nutritional status.

We report stakeholders' perceptions of policies and the extent to which agriculture and nutrition have been integrated to date, as well as examine how in practice policies and projects are formulated, communicated and implemented. Data comprised the opinions and perspectives of the secondary actors in key stakeholder organisations within Afghanistan's nutrition and agriculture sectors.

The scope of the work was necessarily limited. This report is not a review or critique of specific policies, nor is it designed to give an objective assessment of the state of agriculture and nutrition in Afghanistan. Rather, it is a mapping of stakeholder policy perceptions and aims to present an honest reflection of the opinions and views of stakeholders and actors within the agriculture and nutrition community.

After this introduction, the report continues with an explanation of the methods used (section 2), followed by an overview of current health, nutrition and agricultural policies in Afghanistan (section 3) and the main empirical data: the themes illustrated by quotes from the stakeholder interviews. Section 4 presents conclusions.

1.3 Summary of main findings

A summary of the main findings follows. Visual representations of some of the data are included in the appendices.

- Awareness of policy among many was confined to their own sector, and most considered that agriculture and nutrition policies were not strongly linked.
- Respondents were aware of broad policy approaches but were unable to cite policies precisely.
- Approaches to nutrition policy were health-oriented and therapeutic, focusing on curative services for malnutrition rather than preventive strategies.
- There was valuable evidence of interventions focused on nutrition-sensitive agriculture, such as kitchen gardens and fruits, to enhance dietary diversity.
- There was evidence that respondents considered that efficient food markets could contribute to food security and enhanced nutrition.
- Nevertheless, most articulations of formal agricultural policy tended to be productivist, concerned with outputs, income generation and employment, as also with agri-food trade.
- Agricultural policies did not address the many constraints for developing appropriate agriculture, technologies and agribusinesses.
- Intersectoral policies did not address constraints such as infrastructure and energy necessary for developing a viable agricultural economy.
- Women's participation in the pathways linking agriculture and nutrition was almost entirely unrecognised.
- Policy making was highly centralised in Kabul among people who do not understand the provinces, districts and communities, and who, for fear of the prevailing insecurity, often do not travel to gain first-hand knowledge.
- Policies and projects were said to be strongly influenced by donors and often were copied and pasted from the experiences of other countries and were not relevant for Afghanistan.
- Provincial respondents said that policies were not based on local realities or on trustworthy data, and were inappropriate for local needs.
- Short-termism was said to pervade programmes, projects and staffing of many organisations, particularly those relying directly on foreign financial and human resources.
- Research was said to be weak and data often fabricated for fear of insecurity during field visits.
- Capacity to use research, and levels of human capacity in general, were said to be low in the provinces and in the central Ministries.
- There was little evidence of use of modern knowledge management and communications technologies for disseminating policy and other information.
- Vertical communication for consultation from the centre down to the provinces was minimal, even though there were systems for feeding information upwards from the provinces to the centre.
- There was evidence of good intersectoral policy coordination fora in Kabul, viz., the clusters and other linkages.

- There was evidence of good intersectoral coordination fora within the provinces, such as Sectoral Working Groups and the Provincial Development Committees, and other elements of subnational governance.
- The tendencies in horizontal communication were towards information sharing rather than policy making and collaborative actions.
- Fears of insecurity, corruption, waste and nepotism, as well as lack of financial and human resources were major constraints.
- Management of the humanitarian/development interface requires deliberate processes in order to integrate efficiently the responses to Afghanistan's acute and chronic problems, of which agriculture, food security and nutrition are major but not exclusive components.

Areas of suggested policy response are:

- Greater decentralisation of governance to provincial levels
- Improved information flows and knowledge management between central and provincial governments
- Investment in infrastructure for agriculture and nutrition
- National trade policies for agribusiness
- Investment in departmental government capacity

2 Methodology

2.1 Questionnaire design

The fundamental question underlying the LANSAs research programme is to identify how agriculture and agri-food systems can be better designed through appropriate policies, interventions and strategies to improve the nutritional status of children and women (Kadiyala et al. 2014). The design for this policy mapping research was led by the UK staff of the DFID-funded LANSAs research consortium in collaboration with the local partner, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using a questionnaire which was adapted from that used by LANSAs colleagues in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan (van den Bold et al. 2015), which in turn was based on previous work published in the *Lancet* journal (Gillespie et al. 2013). Changes were made to take into account the security context and to capture the importance of regional differences, with particular emphasis on provincial stakeholders as well as central policy makers in Kabul.

The three questionnaire sections covered stakeholders' perceptions of the following:

1. The political and institutional context, governance systems, structures and processes
2. Knowledge and evidence concerning nutrition and agriculture policies
3. Stakeholder and policymaking capacity and resources

2.2 Implementation

Interviews were conducted in Kabul and in the four provincial capitals of Badakhshan (Faisabad), Bamyan (Bamyan City), Kandahar (Kandahar City) and Nangarhar (Jalalabad). These provinces were selected for a number of reasons: to achieve a high degree of regional representation in terms of agriculture, remoteness and ethnicity; access was most easily facilitated by the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit; and physical insecurity could be managed at an acceptable level.

Respondents initially were purposively selected from among public sector organisations, (I)NGOs, and universities who were willing to participate, and then through a 'snowballing' technique. **Table I** lists the respondents' organisational affiliations, with females indicated by an asterisk. A total of 46 interviews were conducted.

Table I

Organisation type	Central government	Provincial government	UN agency	NGO	University	Other
Badakhshan BDK		3	2	4		
Bamyan BMN		4		5*	1	
Kabul	4**		1	4		
Kandahar KDH		3		4	1	cooperative
Nangarhar NGH		3		4	1	consultancy

* female; ** two females

Individual anonymity was assured, and therefore identifiable positions have not been reported. However, included among the central government respondents was one Deputy Minister. Others were at Director-level and below. Provincial government staff included one Deputy Governor, Department Directors, programme managers and Provincial Council members. UN staff were programme and regional managers. NGO staff were programme and regional managers, heads of section and technical specialists. University staff were two lecturers and one university Dean. Some interviewees had a double affiliation, for example, university and NGO. Their primary affiliation has been used in reporting.

Conduct of the interviews

Six experienced national enumerators (five male, one female) were trained in the purposes of the research. Enumerators tested the questionnaire among stakeholders in Kabul and appropriate changes were made to clarify questions of understanding. Implementation ran from April to September 2015, beginning in Kabul.

Initial permissions to conduct the research were sought from the Provincial IDLG. Appointments were made by telephone by AREU, sometimes with difficulty. Occasionally, interviews for requests were declined or there was no response. Interviews were conducted in the offices of the respondents. Interviewees were invariably courteous and hospitable, although meetings were sometimes changed, and often were interrupted by visitors and telephone calls. Generally, discussions lasted from 1-3 hours. Sometimes, when time was cut short, interviewees were invited a

second time and discussions were completed over two days. The longest lasted four hours over two days. Interviewees were not always alone, because of lack of office space. Sometimes they were accompanied by a more junior colleague (in one case by a female colleague, not included in **Table I**). Occasionally a senior interviewee handed over the interview to another colleague with more experience of agriculture and nutrition. Such interviews have been recorded as a single event with the first interviewee as the respondent. In one NGO interview, four staff were present, and views recorded acknowledged some differences of opinion.

In a preliminary interview during May 2015 with a senior official of the Governor's office and a DAIL official in Kandahar, it was evident that the latter was constrained in his responses while the first official was present. The critique of agricultural policies and programmes sharpened when the former left the interview, after making only a limited contribution to the discussion, and the latter was evidently better able to express his views alone. Another interviewee commented: *'I saw you interview the DAIL director yesterday but if you interviewed his deputy, then you would see that there is difference in the answers.'*⁴

Some interviewees acknowledged the institutional constraints and the need for anonymity. One NGO official commented:

*'It may not be good for me as an institution employee to judge the capacity of government officials. Our policy actually does not allow the discussion of such topics.'*⁵

Data recording

Interviews were undertaken in Dari and Pashto, recorded, and translated and transcribed to English. Some English translations which contained grammatical or stylistic errors were corrected only when the meaning, taken out of context, was unclear. Otherwise the translators' texts have been used mostly with idiosyncrasies of style which do not obscure the meaning. This has required an element of judgement, but that has been based on experience of participating in the preliminary interviews in Kabul, Jalalabad and Kandahar City with people from international organisations, international and national NGOs, public sector and local government officials.

2.3 Analysis

All transcripts were scrutinised and key concepts identified and related to the questionnaire objectives and questions. Key topics were coded using QSR NVivo and analysed using queries, text searches and word frequencies. The node structure was refined and data were re-coded during the analysis as new themes emerged. The report records the principal themes emerging from the stakeholder interviews.

Additional data from public sources and from the preliminary interviews in Kabul, Jalalabad, Nangarhar and in Kandahar, inter alia, have been incorporated in the report, and have been clearly signalled in footnotes.

⁴ NGO, BMN

⁵ NGO, BDK

2.4 Consultation and feedback

For the purposes of data validation and stakeholder consultation, a knowledge-sharing stakeholder event was facilitated in Kabul in April 2016. The consultation was a half-day dialogue with research interview summaries presented to key agri-nutrition stakeholders in Afghanistan. The event was widely attended with participation from Kabul and the four other provinces. A full report is available.⁶ Comments from consultation participants have been used in this report and signalled as such (and indented) in the text.

2.5 Limitations

It is neither within the scope nor the intention of this report to evaluate the effectiveness of policies, programmes and projects. We present an honest reflection of the views and opinions of our respondents and identify the areas of their concern as they see it.

It is noteworthy that very little reference was made to the role of women in agriculture and nutrition. The exception was a MoWA respondent in Kabul, who expressed strong aspirations about collaboration with other organisations:

*'Gender is a joint issue between the different organizations and it is highly important that women should attend such task forces. You are in the picture that there are lots of women are malnourished, 67 per cent of women have TB, lots of women are have mental stresses, lots of women are suffering from violence, lots of women are facing lots of problems during their pregnancy. So, because of these issues we (MoWA) have to work in legal, political, health, cultural and economic sectors and we have to stay in touch with other organisations and stakeholders. We have to attend meetings and we should have a direct connection with all the ministries. We are the one Ministry to focus on women's situation in Afghanistan and we should add gender issues in all policies, plans and strategies.'*⁷

Other gaps are signalled in the conclusions. We make no attempt to argue that these views are representative of stakeholders in Kabul or from the respective provinces, nor that the respondents speak for their colleagues or represent the formal views of their organisations, or accurately represent Afghanistan as a whole.

The scope of the research did not allow us to capture the views of stakeholders in more provinces, and we were unable to conduct research below the provincial level, in districts and communities.

⁶<http://www.lansasouthasia.org/content/lansa-has-its-first-stakeholder-event-afghanistan>

⁷ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

3 The policy environment: Integration of agriculture and nutrition

This section considers the degree to which agriculture-nutrition linkages are already present in current policies, programmes, and project coordination bodies.

First, an introduction is given to governance issues in Afghanistan which affect the policy processes considered in this report, before addressing the specific sectoral issues on which this research focused.

Next, national level policies relevant to the agriculture and nutrition agenda are summarised. It then presents stakeholders' knowledge of the policy environment and their perceptions of the extent to which agriculture and nutrition are linked.

3.1 Governance of development policy: Background

Afghanistan's historic governance pattern has been characterised by the paradox of a strongly centralised state and little effective statehood in the periphery:

- 'The most salient characteristic of the state—inherited from its predecessors—is its extreme centralization' (Shurkin 2011).
- 'For most of Afghanistan's history, central government and its services barely extended beyond Kabul. In most provinces and districts; tribal traditions and influential local leaders were in control.'⁸
- 'Currently, Afghanistan has a centralised government even though the constitution provides for decentralised governance structures' (Nijat et al. 2016: iv).

Governance is complex, evolving from a highly fragmented traditional base, and there is much yet to be gained in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in terms of policy formulation and implementation. For more than 35 years, Afghanistan has suffered conflict that has affected all facets of life and all sectors of the population: from the Russian occupation in the 1980s, through the period of factional instability and the emergence of the Taliban and 'warlordism' from the 1990s, and into the new millennium. Within this continuum of conflict, the 11 September 2001 attacks ushered in an era of intervention by Western forces among others, still contested by regional power brokers: Operation Enduring Freedom was launched by the United States on 7 October 2001. The day of 5 December 2001 witnessed an agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions, which inaugurated the ongoing efforts of Afghan reconstruction.

The measures then put into place for the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan can be regarded as a 'political settlement': '... a reproducible combination of institutions and a distribution of power between organisations that achieves the minimum conditions for economic and political viability in society' (AREU 2016: 4). These arrangements of institutions and power have evolved as the main players manoeuvred for their own advantage, but many elements of this 'primary political

⁸http://www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/operations/projects/democratic_governance/asgp/

settlement' are in place today, effective to a greater or lesser degree in development programming through delivering governance, public services and national security. Following the Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy, Provincial Councils (PCs) were first elected in 2005, and Provincial Development Committees were added to the institutional architecture in 2006: 'The provincial administration, through the governors' offices or proposed Provincial Development Committees (PDCs), has been assigned the task of coordinating provincial planning activity, and elected provincial councils are to provide input into these processes' (Lister and Nixon 2006: 1). Governance structures continue to evolve. The initiation of the Afghanistan Subnational Governance Programme (ASGP) by UNDP and major donors in 2013 gave an impulse to human resources capacity building and invigoration of structures such as the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) alongside key national ministerial stakeholders, and boosted the function of the PCs, as well as the functioning of governance at the municipal level. The 2013 report noted that donor and stakeholder coordination is increasingly important to programme delivery and ASGP and GoIRA strategy, and found that UNDP/ASGP and IDLG had significantly improved donor and stakeholder coordination, and aimed to empower further the District Coordination Councils (DCCs).

The DCC policy, supposed to be established over the next two years, envisages a close partnership between the DCC and the Office of the District Governor, to ensure that development addresses prioritized needs, and among the DCC, DGO and the Office of the Provincial Governor, to ensure that provincial and district entities and priorities are appropriately aligned. As ASGP is the only national programme to support the PGO and DGO, as well as the PC and other subnational entities, support to the DCC policy and linkages between established subnational governance entities and processes is of key importance to ASGP's future plans.

(UNDP 2013: 31)

Commentators point out that governance in Afghanistan does exist but does not conform to Western expectations. For example, writing recently of the nature of governance and accountability in Nangarhar, in ways which are likely to apply more widely, 'fledgling provincial institutions... [are] yet to evolve into independent, rule-based agents of governance capable of operating with integrity, let alone checking the power of the governor's [Sherzai] own abuses of power' (Mukhopadhyay 2014: 232).

Nijat et al. (2016) have recently reviewed the current state and future of subnational governance. They make recommendations about clarifying roles and responsibilities of the parties at different levels of governance to improve efficiency, accountability and local participation. Their focus and recommendations apply particularly to the shura structure and governance perceptions pertaining to the village and District levels. This report concentrates on (inter-) sectoral relationships within and between the central and Provincial levels of government, and thus, in some ways, can be considered complementary.

There are at least two policy arenas that are important to improving agriculture and nutrition outcomes in Afghanistan. First, the importance of institutional capacity, levels of technical and financial assistance from the international community, and conditions of insecurity are commonly appreciated, if not widely known and understood. But second, to gain a comprehensive

understanding of the policy environment, it is necessary to consider the underlying elements of political economy which affect policy making processes as well as implementation and outcomes within the political settlement framework. This research focused on the first arena through key informant interviewees in Kabul and in four provincial capitals: Faisabad (Badakhshan), Bamyán City (Bamyán), Kandahar City (Kandahar) and Jalalabad (Nangarhar). It did not address the issues prevailing in the second political arena, which would have been a different exercise. Therefore, the key informant interviewees represented only a part of the policy community, the secondary actors. Principal, or leading actors, can be considered to be those who exert significant influence over policies and outcomes at primary (capital), secondary (provincial) and local (district and community) levels. They are likely to be in national and local politics, usually part of, or at least aligned to, different political, economic, military, religious and tribal factions, within the overall framework of patronage and governance of which the formal and informal (in)security institutions and the drugs economy are also a part.

The secondary actors, from whom the key informant interviewees were drawn, are more likely to be technocrats from the national and international communities, participants to some extent in policy processes, operationally active in implementing programmes and policies, but having less influence on the deployment of resources and actual policy processes and outcomes. Thus, interviewees were mainly public servants at national and provincial government level, representatives of international organisations and of national NGOs — who frequently are the service deliverers of agricultural and nutrition interventions — and universities.

There is a growing number of studies of political economy in Afghanistan, tackling different levels of political settlements and issues such as education and health services. However, in a country such as Afghanistan where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy and yet food insecurity and malnutrition rates are among the global highest, it is important that there be an elucidation of the map of agricultural and nutritional policies and stakeholders. This report is not an attempt to tackle these issues in depth, but is a contribution to the ‘who?’ and ‘how?’ of agriculture and nutrition policy through assessing the perceptions of the operational players, the ‘actors’. A better understanding of policy processes should lead to changes that can be introduced to address any deficiencies.

3.2 Agriculture and nutrition sector policies

Cross-sectoral policies have been formulated at the national level through coordination between Government ministries — MAIL, MoPH, MRRD — and relevant international organisations such as FAO.

From design and proposal, policies take time to be approved and adopted. For example, the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSANA) was being formulated in 2012, and was eventually delivered for review to the Minister of MAIL in July 2015.

The Government policy statement on food and nutrition security stated:

The commitment of the Government to supporting and promoting food and nutrition security is underpinned by Articles 13 and 14 of the Afghanistan constitution and evidenced by the development of facilitating national policies, strategies and programmes [i.e.

Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), National Agricultural Development Framework (NADF), National Nutrition Policy and Strategy (NNPS), and National Priority Programmes (NPPs)]. By endorsing pertinent international covenants and protocols (i.e., the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Millennium Development Goals and the Voluntary Guidelines for the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security), the Government has reaffirmed its obligation for food and nutrition security.⁹

AFSANA is described as ‘a high level policy and strategic document. It is a major improvement integrating nutrition and food security objectives in government development programmes... AFSANA has a coordination structure at national and provincial level. To support the coordination mechanism and implementation of the policy document, a secretariat is established in 2nd vice president’s office’.¹⁰

Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS)¹¹

The Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) has three pillars, one of which is ‘Economic and Social Development’, aiming to ‘reduce poverty, ensure sustainable development through a private-sector-led market economy, improve human development indicators, and make significant progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)’.

ANDS contains within it strategic objectives relevant to promoting agriculture and nutrition linkages. Agriculture and rural development is a strategic objective of the ANDS, and is comprised of two principal strategies: the Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development Facility (CARD-F) and the Agricultural and Rural Development Zone (ARDZ) initiatives. The former strategy, CARD-F, aims to focus on a subset of the poorest and most marginalised farmers, aiming to diversify sources of income, improve farmers’ capacity through the provision of training and skills, and orientate agriculture towards markets. ARDZ, however, focuses on large-scale agro-businesses and aims to release state-owned land into the hands of private sector agro-processing enterprises. While neither strategy intentionally focuses on agriculture-nutrition linkages, the policies do touch upon a number of pathways including raising income, lowering food prices, increased consumption from own production and post-harvesting processing.

National Priority Programmes (NPP)¹²

The National Priority Programmes (NPP) are a set of 22 specific programmes and policies, grouped into six clusters that build upon the overall strategy outlined in ANDS. Within the NPPs, the agriculture and rural development cluster contains nationwide programmes on water and natural resource management, comprehensive agriculture, rural access and strengthening local institutions. While no specific programmes address agriculture and nutrition linkages, they do touch on a number of pathways including consumption from own production, income generation and post-harvesting activities.

⁹<http://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/afg152445.pdf>, p.2

¹⁰<http://www.fao.org/3/a-at617e.pdf>, pp.24-5.

¹¹<http://mfa.gov.af/en/page/6547/afghanistan-national-development-strategy/afghanistan-national-development-strategy-and>

¹²<http://mof.gov.af/en/page/3976>

The National Solidarity Programme (NSP)¹³

The National Solidarity Programme pre-dates the NPPs but has subsequently been incorporated into them. While NSP projects are focused on infrastructure-based rural development, the aims are to directly engage communities in development, thus promoting democratic community control over development initiatives. NSP is managed by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), who contract out specific provinces and districts to implementing NGO partners. The Implementing NGOs then facilitate the communities in the establishment of democratically-elected Community Development Councils (CDCs) who submit proposals to and receive funds from the MRRD. Projects are then by the community with the aid of the implementing partner. Projects are almost exclusively infrastructure-based but can and do touch upon pathways to nutrition through agriculture by increasing access to markets and raising household incomes. The NSP and its linkages to the population through CDCs is considered to function well (Nijat et al. 2016).

National Agricultural Development Framework (NADF)¹⁴

The National Agricultural Development Framework (NADF) is developed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAIL) and is designed to function under ANDS. The framework consists of four main programmes: natural resource management; agriculture production and productivity; economic regeneration; and programme support and change management. Each programme contains a number of sub-programmes, for instance, the Agriculture Production and Productivity Programme (APP) contains sub-programmes on irrigation, cereals and industrial crops, horticulture, livestock, and Kuchi support. No programme or sub-programme within NADF specifically focuses on agriculture and nutrition linkages, although an acknowledgment of the importance of agriculture for own consumption and income generation is present throughout. Agriculture development is rendered throughout the framework as a cross-cutting issue to fight poppy production, lower urbanisation and stimulate poverty reduction and development. It does not mention nutrition, but the focus is overwhelmingly on improving agricultural practice, productivity and governance.

A farmer in Helmand can refuse to grow poppy if agricultural processing provides even one job for one family member. Families from Samangan can afford to stay at home rather than migrate to crowded cities, if their agricultural productivity is increased and their earnings grow. Women and children in Bamyan can become healthier and literate if storage facilities provide a longer and more lucrative market for their potatoes. Young men of Paktika can refuse the steady meals offered by insurgent groups, if they can afford to work at home on the farm with their fathers and mothers.

Introduction to NADF.¹⁵

MoPH Strategic Plan¹⁶

The Strategic Plan for the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) 2011-15 has been derived from ANDS, Health and Nutrition Sector Strategy (HNSS) 2008-2013 and the National Health Policy 2005-2009. Key elements are the improvement of the nutritional status of the population, access to health services, health promotion, healthy environment and community empowerment, human resource

¹³<http://mrrd.gov.af/en/page/69/215>

¹⁴<http://mail.gov.af/en/page/2233>

¹⁵<http://mail.gov.af/en/page/2233>

¹⁶<http://moph.gov.af/en/page/579>

management and development, governance of both public and private services, financing of health, and pharmaceuticals.

Coordinated by MoPH and implemented by UN and other major partners, the strategic plan aims to target the most neglected and marginalised people within Afghanistan, especially women, children and communities in underserved areas. Nutrition in the strategy is primarily framed in terms of healthy diets, food intake, food safety and tackling micronutrient deficiencies. Though cross-sectional in theory, there is little mention of agriculture, and linkages between agriculture and nutrition are not prominent.

Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS)

Considerable progress is considered to have been made in building a functional health service since 2001 (Salama and Alwan 2016). Several drivers of positive health sector outcomes have been identified that essentially concern the management and coordination of the system (Dalil et al. 2014), among which one is particularly relevant to issues of coordination: the decision to contract out to international and national non-government organisations the responsibility to implement the Basic Package of Health Services according to Ministry of Health guidelines. Characteristics which have contributed to the success of this process are ownership, donor alignment, joint decisions, managing for results, reliable aid flows and human factors, consistent with the Paris Declaration.¹⁷

BPHS has been the cornerstone of health interventions by MoPH and is credited with having made significant improvements to the health status by translating policy and strategy into practical interventions, defining health services and targeting delivery (Newbrander et al. 2014). Largely because of contextual issues, delivery is high cost and uneven across the country (Akseer et al. 2016). Commentators argue that much more remains to be done, particularly in the realm of nutrition (Varkey et al. 2015; Salama and Alwan 2016).

Its inception was inauspicious:

The World Health Organisation (WHO) led the initial drafting of an essential package of health interventions with limited input from the MoPH and little information about the country. The resulting document contained little indication of priorities or how to implement the recommended services. The major donors – the European Community, US Agency for International Development (USAID) and World Bank – communicated the need for and cited examples of a well-defined and integrated health service package

(Newbrander et al. 2014: S7).

Nutrition was one of the original seven components of BPHS. Data from the latest National Nutrition Survey (UNICEF 2014) suggest that nutritional gains have been important but marginal, and more budget and better policies for improving nutrition are required (Varkey et al. 2015). Health sector policies are focused on the treatment of severe clinical malnutrition and prevention of malnutrition through supplementation and food distribution programmes. In addition, some provinces have nutrition education programmes while other provinces regulate the private sector

¹⁷Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Paris declaration on aid effectiveness [online] Paris: OECD; 2005. Available from: http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/paris-declaration-on-aid-effectiveness_9789264098084-en

food markets. Public sector ‘therapeutic’ approaches are supported by international agencies such as UNICEF who are involved in micronutrient distribution: for example, distribution of iron and folate to adolescent girls in schools. Food-based approaches have not been prominent hitherto.

Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (ASFANA)¹⁸

The Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (ASFANA) is a set of cross-sectional policies targeting food production, economic access to food, emergency response preparation and food system stability, as also water and sanitation: ‘Food and nutrition security is a multidimensional phenomenon that concerns individuals, households, communities and the nation. Its achievement requires establishing linkages between stakeholders from various sectors such as agriculture, health, education and infrastructure, and addressing cross-cutting concerns like gender mainstreaming and climate change and environmental sustainability’ (p.7). Both food and nutrition insecurity are linked to improved productivity of agriculture, increased incomes and creation of employment.

The policy is coordinated by a number of major government ministries including MAIL, MoPH and MRRD with many other government ministries playing a contributing role within a complex policy and institutional architecture.

There are multiple actors in the FNS space in Afghanistan. They include central government ministries and agencies, decentralized and local government institutions as well as UN organizations, donor agencies, NGOs, civil society and the private sector organizations... The main players at the central government level are MAIL, MRRD, MoPH, MoLSAMD (Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled) and ANDMA (Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority). Others with direct or facilitating roles are MoCI (Ministry of Commerce and Industry), MoE (Ministry of Education), Ministry of Energy and Water (MoEW), CSO (Central Statistics Organization), Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA), Ministry of Finance (MoF) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA).¹⁹

The policy consists of strategic objectives coupled with specific targets for food production, the prevalence of hunger, and strategic grain reserves. The significance of agriculture for livelihoods and the economy is acknowledged; despite the cross-sectional nature of ASFANA, links to agriculture are only specified in relation to agricultural production.

Nutrition Action Framework (NAF)

The Nutrition Action Framework (NAF) which runs from 2012-2016 is a MoPH-lead initiative to bring together all existing nutrition-relevant policies and programmes from multiple sectors, including the health, agriculture, education, water and sanitation, economic affairs and rural development sectors. NAF adopts a multi-sector approach involving the Government and national and international partners with a target to reduce ‘stunting in children aged 0-24 months by 10 per cent (from an estimated 59 per cent to 49 per cent) by the end of 2016.’²⁰ While NAF does not contain specific policies in and of itself, it establishes a governance structure conducive to greater coordination and collaboration between sectors, including the establishment of specific secretariats

¹⁸<http://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/afg152445.pdf>, p.7

¹⁹<http://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/afg152445.pdf>, p.26

²⁰<http://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/afg152445.pdf>, p.23

within relevant ministries, a coordinating committee (see below) and a governance hierarchy through which the activities of the sectors involved are accountable to the second vice president.

Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development Facility (CARD-F)²¹

'The Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development - Facility (CARD-F) is a joint entity established under the auspices of the Agriculture & Rural Development (ARD) Cluster Ministries. It is administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD); the Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) and the Ministry of Finance (MoF). This facility is managed by Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) chaired by the MCN and CARD-F is led by an Executive Director who reports to the IMC.'²²

Funded by the British and Danish governments, CARD-F seeks to empower rural communities and strengthen their economic standing through Economic Development Packages (EDPs); especially customized packages to support critical value chains, identify bottlenecks and provide solutions.²³

The nature of CARD-F is a farm-to-market programme funded by DFID and DANIDA, aiming to stimulate the agricultural sector, food processing and value chains for agricultural products in target provinces within Afghanistan. Led by the inter-ministerial committee under the leadership of the MCN, the policy is firmly aimed at reducing poppy cultivation in target areas. The facility operates through providing economic development packages (EDPs) that target specific value chains, identifying gaps and problems and increasing productivity and efficiency. Specifically targeted are value chains for poultry, dairy, honey, vegetables, grapes and cotton. In addition, the facility provides funds for agriculture-related infrastructure projects, including irrigation projects and cold storage facilities. The overall aim is to provide jobs and growth within the agricultural sector in order to create livelihoods that can compete economically with growing poppy.

World Bank Strategy

In 2014 the World Bank launched its *Agricultural Sector Review: Revitalizing Agriculture for Economic Growth, Job Creation and Food Security* (World Bank 2014). The national strategy is the 2009 National Agriculture Development Framework (NADF) with four pillars:

- Production and productivity
- Economic regeneration
- Natural resource management
- Change management

NADF itself is based on the Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock Master Plan of 2005, the Agriculture and Rural Development Sector Strategy (2008-13), the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), and the Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD) programme. An updated version of NADF was expected by December 2013, but at the time had still not been released. 'Based on the above pillars of NADF, a number of sector-specific

²¹<http://www.cardf.gov.af/>

²²<http://mrrd.gov.af/en/page/69/7353>

²³<http://www.cardf.gov.af/>

policies, strategies, and laws have been developed, and more recently two national priority programmes (NPPs)' (World Bank 2014: 14).

A weakness of its own strategy had been 'insufficient engagement with other key donors, leading to fragmented rather than harmonized approaches to water resources management and the delivery of technical services to farmers... As a result, there are numerous ongoing donor-funded projects, some focusing on the same activities, but uncoordinated. The Bank is well positioned to provide leadership in coordinating donor interventions in the future' (World Bank 2014: 15).

Commenting on current programmes, the report states: 'A difficulty with many of these donor-supported projects is that they have not been coordinated very effectively, leading to some duplication of effort and failure to ensure the sustainability of the gains achieved. Greater coordination within a national planning framework is needed, to build on the investments already made and to partner more effectively with the private sector' (World Bank 2014: 40).

A new selective strategy for rapid agricultural growth has been developed, directed towards exploiting the most promising opportunities for 'first movers' in Afghan agriculture: irrigated wheat, intensive livestock production (milk, eggs, and poultry meat) in peri-urban areas, and horticulture (fruits, nuts, and vegetables). Estimates showed that annual agricultural GDP could be raised by 123 percent over the next 10 years — equivalent to an average annual agricultural growth rate of about 8 percent. The absorptive capacity of the agricultural sector in terms of displaced employment is based on the case of the former Soviet Union.

It is not the purpose of this paper to present a critique of the strategy but some comments on approach are pertinent.²⁴ Household nutrition is mentioned once in the strategy document, and only in connection with approaches which offer promise for supporting women's contribution to agriculture through kitchen gardens which can improve livelihoods, food security and dietary diversity (see World Bank 2014: 64). It is a highly technocratic plan of which the principal Pillar I is to target commercial value chains. The focus is on incentivising the private sector to boost output, create jobs and raise incomes within the commercial sector, one which is likely to lead to the unequal development manifest in other growing economies in the region. Nevertheless, there is hope that benefits will trickle down.²⁵

²⁴During a separate interview in Jalalabad, Nangarhar in May 2015, a DAIL official made a strong critique of the agribusiness approach to development: '*Working with the private sector does not bring benefits to the poor people and only enriches the local players and enabling them to invest in Pakistan, Iran or Dubai. Development through agribusiness cannot help the poor, who need a poverty focus.*' It was not just a problem with the USAID IDEA-NEW programme (<https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/incentives-driving-economic-alternatives-north-east-and-west-idea-new>) focusing on cash crops such as pomegranates and citrus but other donors too such as DFID and the CARD-F programme.

²⁵ Comments during a separate interview in May 2015 with a senior official of the Governor's office and a DAIL official in Kandahar included serious concerns about politicisation of CARD-F and the capture of support by less-than-needy beneficiaries. Also, management of such programmes is subject to 'intermediarism':

- Corruption in the award of contracts to implementing agencies
- Corruption in subcontracting by implementing agencies
- Nepotism in the employment of local staff, with appointments based on relationships rather than skills-based
- Elite selection of beneficiaries in the award of projects

Implementation of Pillar I investments and policies should yield widespread benefits for the poor. Because Pillar I will be targeted to irrigated and peri-urban areas where most of the poor live, many poor people should gain from greater access to rehabilitated irrigated land; from wider availability of improved crop varieties or livestock breeds; from job growth both on and off the farm; and from less costly food. Some of these benefits will trickle down to poor people living outside the Pillar I target areas. The rural people who are least likely to benefit from Pillar I are mostly those who depend on rain-fed farming in the more remote areas of the country or are nomadic herders, such as Kuchi... the prospect for significant productivity gains in these farming systems is more limited...'

(World Bank 2014: 65).

Women in Agriculture

MAIL, supported by FAO, has formulated a strategy for 2015-2020 on women in agriculture.²⁶ It argues that the role of women in the Afghan agricultural sector is a paradox: on the one hand, women are major actors in agriculture contributing more than 40 per cent of the labour force; at the same time, Afghan women are marginalised in relation to control and decisions over productive resources. The framework for empowering women's role in agriculture has three elements:

1. Institutional strengthening and individual capacity development
2. Support to reduce gap in gendered access to productive resources, with a focus on women's increased resilience for improved food security and nutrition
3. Institutionalisation of a gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

The ultimate goal is to empower Afghan women in agricultural activities by assisting them to become agents of economic change. The pathways along which such change can bring nutritional benefits to vulnerable groups have been outlined above.

3.3 Policy and project coordination fora

Clusters

Due to the high numbers of different national and international NGOs and development agencies, a number of coordinating bodies exist to foster collaboration and cooperation. One such coordinating body is the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA). Though not directly involved in policy making, one of the principal elements of the mandate of OCHA is to 'coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors',²⁷ particularly in crisis situations. In Afghanistan, these are primarily efforts to deliver emergency relief to people affected by conflict, including the unstable populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees. The multitude of government bodies, international organisations and national and international NGOs, at central and provincial levels in Afghanistan gives rise to a considerable coordination challenge for which the cluster approach fostered by OCHA is invaluable. **Table 2** shows the sectors and numbers of implementing organisations involved in the humanitarian response for the first half of 2016.

²⁶<http://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/afg156955.pdf>

²⁷<http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/coordination/overview>

Table 2

Sector	Number of partners	Implementing organisations
Emergency Shelter/ Non-Food Items	13	ACF, ACTED, CA, CAID, CARE, DRC, IOM, IRC, NRC, PIN, RI, SI, UNHCR
Food Security and Agriculture	26	ACF, ABM, AFGHANAID, ANCC, ACOO, ADA, ASAARO, CARE, CARITAS, CHA, COAR, DACAAR, DRC, FAO, IRA, IRC, MADERA, MEDAIR, NCRO, NRC, OHW, ORCD, PIN, SCI, SI, WFP, WHH
Health	18	AADA, ACTD, AHDS, DAO, EMERGENCY, HAADAF, HI, HN-TPO, IMC, JOHANNITER, MRCA, ORCD, PUAMI, SCI, SHRDO, TDH, WHO, WVI
Nutrition	3	ACF, UNICEF, WFP
Protection	32	Protection ACTD, ACTED, AFGHANAID, CFA, CHILDFUND, CIC, DRC, HAGAR, HI, HN-TPO, HNTPO, HRDA, HSOA, ICLA, IMC, IR, IRA, JOHANNITER, MEDICA, MEDICA MONDIALE, NRC, OHW, TDH, TLO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNMACCA, UNMAS, WCC, WHH, WVI
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	19	ACF, ACTED, ARCS, CAID, CARITAS, CHA, DACAAR, DRC, IMC, IRC, MEDAIR, NCA, RCDC, SCI, SI, SOLIDARITES, UNHCR, UNICEF, ZOA
Refugee and Returnees	21	ACTD, CARE, DACAAR, DRC, FAO, HN-TPO, IMC, IOM, IRC, JOHANNITER, NCA, NRC, ORCD, SOLIDARITES, TLO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNMAS, WFP, WHO

Source: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/afg_2016_hrp_mid_year_review.pdf, p.51

The strategic objectives of humanitarian response work are oriented towards relief rather than development.²⁸

1. Protection of civilians from armed conflict
2. Response to conflict-displaced refugees and vulnerable returnees
3. Acute health and natural disaster emergencies
4. Treatment and prevention of acute malnutrition
5. Context analysis and coordinated needs assessment

Food Security and Agriculture Cluster

The cluster approach tends to lead to convergence (or confusion) of development objectives and humanitarian responses, with cluster coordination activity operating primarily in the context of humanitarian action:

The Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) in Afghanistan was established in 2008, is co-led by WFP and FAO with CoAR as NGO in a co-chair role. The FSAC has had a dedicated Cluster Coordinator since October 2010. In 2011, the FSAC underwent a review

²⁸ Source: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/afg_2016_hrp_mid_year_review.pdf, pp.43-4

process which resulted in a TOR being developed which identified the FSAC's main aim to provide an action-oriented forum for bringing together national and international humanitarian partners to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance on the lives of crisis-affected population in Afghanistan. The FSAC is also operational at a sub-national level in two regions of Afghanistan, with additional subnational structures currently being established.²⁹

The FSAC is attended mainly by large international NGOs, UN agencies and large national NGOs. It prioritises the most malnourished and food insecure and in 2016 aims to reach 1.7 million people. Particular emphasis is placed upon returning refugees, internally displaced peoples and those affected by conflict and natural disasters. In addition, priority is given to the 18 most food-insecure provinces as identified through the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). While FSAC's priority is the treatment of severe acute malnutrition through the provision of emergency rations, approximately 44 per cent of recipients also receive an agriculture/livestock kit and/or an emergency livelihood support package that contains staple crop and vegetable seeds, along with a livestock protection kit.

As well as emergency response coordination and prioritisation, FSAC also contains a number of working groups directed at longer-term development including: cash and markets working group; food security and livelihoods in urban settings working group; programme quality working group; technology and innovation working group. A separate working group provides guidance on collaboration between the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster and the Nutrition Cluster. FSAC objectives and approaches are oriented mostly towards emergency support.³⁰

1. To save lives and restore the livelihoods of conflict induced IDPs, refugees and returnees
2. To save lives and restore the livelihoods of natural disaster affected people
3. To ensure access to food during lean seasons for severely food insecure people at risk of malnutrition
4. To strengthen emergency preparedness and response capabilities of FSAC partners

These are addressed through appropriate unconditional transfers (food, cash, or voucher), emergency livelihood support and appropriate protection livelihood support (agriculture/livestock inputs and livestock vaccines), contingency planning for natural disasters, and training and assessment of food security and vulnerability.

WASH and Nutrition and Health Clusters

UNICEF currently leads the Water, Sanitation and Health (WASH) and Nutrition Cluster coordination.

UNICEF provides leadership and coordination for the WASH cluster — a consortium of UN agencies, local and international NGOs that work together to ensure integrated responses to humanitarian disasters. In communities that are stricken with natural disasters, their initial basic needs are catered to through effective WASH Cluster response in critical areas such as safe drinking water and sanitation and hygienic materials. As per the most

²⁹<http://fscluster.org/afghanistan/about>

³⁰https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/afg_2016_hrp_mid_year_review.pdf, pp.45-6

recent data available, 800,000 affected persons and IDPs benefit from UNICEF WASH interventions annually in Afghanistan.³¹

The recent (2015) Performance Monitoring Report of the Nutrition Cluster highlighted the approach to nutrition aspects of humanitarian response being largely therapeutic.

The Nutrition Cluster objectives for 2015 can be summarised as:

- Enhance access to treatment of acute malnutrition in boys and girls 0-59 months, pregnant and lactating women through expansion of nutrition services and enhanced community screening for malnutrition and referral.
- Increase access to integrated preventive nutrition specific programmes such as micronutrient supplementation and promotion of infant and young child feeding and nutrition-sensitive programming linking nutrition to health, WASH, food security, education and protection programmes.
- Ensure that timely quality community- and facility-based nutrition information is made available for programme monitoring and decision making through regular nutrition surveys, rapid assessments, coverage assessments, and operational research.
- Enhance the capacity of government and partners to respond and deliver quality programmes at scale including nutrition in emergencies, assessments, contingency planning and coordination.³²

Thus, the Nutrition Cluster focuses on the treatment of severe malnutrition, prevention of malnutrition through nutrition promotion and micronutrient supplementation programmes and through increasing capacity within the existing state health infrastructure. The target recipients are young children, pregnant and lactating women. The programmes supported and coordinated by the Cluster are non-agricultural and mostly relate to nutrition promotion programmes such as Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) messages, or through state health packages such as the Basic Package of Health Services.

WHO manages the Health Cluster,³³ which is focused on the humanitarian health response in order to prevent and reduce crisis-related morbidity and mortality and provide sector coordination, and 'to enhance the accountability, predictability and effectiveness of quality humanitarian health actions in Afghanistan'. In Afghanistan's complex environment, the humanitarian mission tends to blend into the development agenda, imposing additional coordination challenges. One senior UN official commented:

'Humanitarian aid and disaster relief (led by OCHA and IOM coordinating the UN family response in Afghanistan) is separate from, and runs parallel to, regular development activities in this country. This is due to the fact that at any given time of the year, there is one or another kind of disaster affecting some part(s) of the country....I can only speak for [one UN agency], and we have emergency response built into all our

³¹<http://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/wes.html>

³²<http://nutritioncluster.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2015/10/2015-Nutrition-Cluster-CCPM-Afghanistan-2015-Final-02-Jul-2015.pdf>, p.2

³³<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/health>. It is interesting to note that access to the Health cluster contacts page is restricted: 'This contact list has been set as private by our field-level administrators. Only 'verified' Humanitarian ID users can access the contact list'.

*programme areas (Health, Nutrition, WASH, Education and Child Protection) so that we can switch back and forth in a timely, seamless and agile manner between regular and emergency programme activities.*³⁴

Government Ministries

Some ministries are also clustered: for example, the Agriculture & Rural Development (ARD) Cluster Ministries which consist of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD); the Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) and the Ministry of Finance (MoF).

The National Area-Based Development Programme, nested within MRRD, is another intra-governmental forum for coordination embracing a range of policies, strategies and organisations:

NABDP is well-aligned with national development policies and strategies as articulated in various Afghan government documents such as the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and Agricultural Rural Development Sector Strategy (ARDSS) frameworks, which emphasise creating foundations for economic and social development —particularly in the context of agriculture and rural development. In alliance with the Government of Afghanistan’s (GoA) broader agricultural and rural development strategy, NABDP’s key objective is to function as an economic regeneration programme with a focus on the development of productive rural infrastructure across Afghanistan.³⁵

Based upon the third pillar of ANDS (Social and Economic Development), NABDP addresses two thematic areas: (1) Institutions strengthened at the district level to independently address priority local needs; (2) Improved access to key services for the rural poor.

NABDP is also strategically aligned with the National Priority Programme (NPP) Four: ‘Strengthening Local Institutions’ (under the Agriculture and Rural Development Cluster) and NPP One: ‘National Water and Natural Resources Development’ (under the Agriculture and Rural Development Cluster).³⁶

Provincial, District and Village-Level Fora

In theory at least there are multiple forms of subnational governments that operate at the local, district and provincial levels. At the provincial level, Provincial Development Councils (PDCs) are the only fully elected body with the Provincial Governor and Ministry Department Heads appointed from Kabul. PDCs are seen as important within communities but most research shows they are ineffective compared to Governors and Ministerial Departments due to their lack of power over finances and lack of defined roles. In addition, informal or quasi-governmental agencies often operate in parallel with Provincial Development Committees, District Development Assemblies (DDAs), District Community Councils (DCCs), and Community Development Councils (CDCs), operating at their respective levels. Communities and interest groups are also unofficially arranged into *shura* (councils) at local levels. Some of these groups have more influence than others: for instance, CDCs are well respected by international NGOs as they are democratically elected, trained and organised

³⁴ UN AGENCY, Kabul

³⁵http://www.mrrd-nabdp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=338&Itemid=211

through the Afghan National Solidarity Programme. As a result, NGOs often use CDCs as the means through which community development programmes are managed and facilitated

ACBAR

The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) is an independent body with 151 national and international member NGOs but as a collective ‘voice’ of NGOs also lobbies government for greater NGO involvement in policy making processes.³⁶ ACBAR has a Steering Committee consisting of 15 member organisations and a General Assembly that meets twice a year. Key activities, besides advocacy, are coordination and capacity development among members.

‘We have ACBAR, and WHH is also member of ACBAR. ACBAR is a coordinating body, their main office is in Kabul, and they are active in Nangarhar as well. Most active organisations in Nangarhar have membership with ACBAR. ACBAR has monthly coordination meetings, all these NGOs are the participants of those meetings, and they share their programmes and activities with each other.’³⁷

3.4 Policies in practice

Perceptions of cross-sectoral policies

Of the seven pathways through which agriculture can impact nutrition, we found no evidence of any policies relating to five. However, we find strong evidence of policies that promote nutrition through agriculture through the food supply and agricultural income pathways. Agriculture as a source of food, though widely viewed as important by respondents, is discussed mostly in terms of food quantities and caloric content. The micronutrient content of food beyond calories is less considered.

Specific policies

We found little knowledge of specific sectoral policies addressing agriculture and nutrition linkages. Though respondents suggested such policies may exist, few respondents could name specific policies. Respondents did however have a working knowledge of various general national policies which have some relevance to the agriculture and nutrition agenda.

Respondents’ perceptions were that there was a lack of cross-sectoral policies, which was widely attributed to lack of coordination between sectors. ‘Little or no coordination between ministries’ was frequently cited as the primary reason why no agriculture-nutrition policies were in place.

‘I have worked in MoPH for about 11 years; I haven’t seen anyone from the agriculture sector participate in the policy making workshops or meetings in here. To be honest, we don’t know about their policies and they don’t know about ours.’³⁸

‘Until now there is no coordination between nutrition department of MoPH and MAIL. They don’t have a joint nutrition policy [through which] MAIL could work and improve those agricultural products which is useful for nutrition of people. Such a policy doesn’t exist.’³⁹

‘Every government sector tries to make its strategic programmes based on their own principles and regulations.’⁴⁰

³⁶<http://www.acbar.org/>

³⁷ NGO, NGH

³⁸ NGO, KDH

³⁹ NGO, KDH

*'While making agriculture policies, it is very important that they invite specialist from [the] health sector. But unfortunately, the agriculture sector only distributes seeds and works on [the] irrigation systems. They don't consider the issue of nutrition such as what useful crops have to be cultivated to improve the nutrition of [the] people. They don't consider these things in their policies.'*⁴¹

*'Nutrition is not a significant consideration in the agriculture sector because there is no coordination between DAIL and nutrition department of DoPH.'*⁴²

Awareness of food security and nutrition

The concepts of food security and nutrition are prevalent in the language of NGOs, regardless of the issues that they work on. Whether projects are focused on education, agriculture, water and sanitation or infrastructure, projects are often framed in terms of food security. One NGO worker commented:

*'Every NGO claims that they are working on food security.'*⁴³

There are signs that increased collaboration between the agricultural and nutrition sectors is a concern. All organisations generally agreed on the need for more collaboration and in some instances, early collaborations had begun.

*'Four months ago we had a workshop in the nutrition department of DoPH, in that workshop we decided to share our information with DAIL so that both DAIL and DoPH can make a nutrition policy together. Up to now we haven't formulated a joint policy together but now they have a plan to make such policies with each other's help.'*⁴⁴

*'Before [DAIL] used to deal with increasing agricultural production, now they focus more on food diversification. For example, in places where AKF agricultural programmes are implemented, they, along with increasing wheat production, try to promote fruits and vegetables and other nutritious foods.'*⁴⁵

A comment made at the stakeholder consultation in Kabul in April 2016 reinforced the lack of a precise focus on actual challenges for food security and nutrition policies.

'In Afghanistan mostly the stakeholders and NGOs are working on food security but diversity of food is really much more important. AKF had a survey and the result was that 90 per cent of people are unable to access diverse foods in the northern areas of Afghanistan. For example, some people are producing eggs and while selling eggs they buy cake instead, and they have no knowledge of the nutrition in just consuming eggs and cakes.' NGO.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ NGO, BDK

⁴¹ NGO, KDH

⁴² NGO, KDH

⁴³ NGO, BMN

⁴⁴ NGO, KDH

⁴⁵ NGO, BDK

⁴⁶<http://www.lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/LANSA%20-%20AREU%20stakeholder%20event%20%40%20Kabul.%20April%2025%2C%202016.pdf>, p.24

Policies within the agricultural sector

Production orientation

Approaches within the agricultural sector were perceived to be ‘productivist’, and focused upon three objectives: increasing agricultural production; providing jobs and economic growth; and addressing the need to reduce dependence on imported foods (often considered to be of low phytosanitary quality). An additional policy consideration for some donors and sections of government was patterns of rural development that will reduce dependence on narcotics (viz., CARD-F and the Kandahar Food Zone Program).⁴⁷ The nutritional quality of foods produced, as well as alternative pathways between agriculture and nutrition, was considered to be lacking in emphasis, while pathways relating to agriculture and gender were conspicuously absent.

As one NGO observer put it:

‘Our agriculture department, when it makes programmes, mainly focuses on increasing agricultural production. But the possible effects that increasing agricultural production have on improving nutrition, as in nutritional value of the food, is given less consideration.’⁴⁸

Agriculture as a source of income and employment was the pathway most frequently discussed by informants. Overall, there was a good understanding of the importance of agriculture for the national economy as a whole, and for poverty reduction in particular. While the income pathway is an essential component of agriculture-nutrition linkages, the link between income and nutrition was rarely made.

‘The agriculture sector doesn’t focus much on nutrition. What they focus on in the agriculture sector is creating jobs for people and getting income from that. These issues have an indirect role for nutrition. I have seen many agriculture projects here, but they don’t want to find out what the problem of the people is and what their demands are. When people cultivate their lands they just want to get income out of it.’⁴⁹

Support services

Agricultural extension services relate mostly to the distribution of seeds and fertilizers, and these programmes are typically scattered, irregular and were said not to reach remote regions.

‘Also [implementing NGOs] distribute improved seeds for the farmers, to encourage them to use improved seeds in agriculture. The third is the issue of fertilizer. Both DAIL and other organisations teach farmers how to use fertilizers for improvement of their land. They also teach them how to use improved fertilizers and natural fertilizers in order to avoid food poisoning. These programmes are not regular, to allow farmers to practice these things and convey this information to all farmers. They don’t have such a regular programme. Their programming is scattered.’⁵⁰

⁴⁷ ‘The United States Agency for International Development’s Kandahar Food Zone Program (KFZ) is helping rural farmers in seven Kandahar districts to earn legitimate incomes by identifying and addressing the root causes and sources of instability that lead to opium poppy cultivation. The seven districts include Arghistan, Maiwand, Panjwayi, Shahwali Kot, Zharai, Takhta Pul and Kandahar City. The program also builds the ability of the Ministry of Counter Narcotics to manage its own alternative livelihoods programs, as well as create licit economic opportunities by providing small grants for irrigation canals and training for local farmers on alternative livelihoods.’

<https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/kandahar-food-zone-program-kfz>

In the opinion of a former Governor of Kandahar in May 2016, ‘Food Zone Kandahar has not worked... 30 raisin stores were built in Kandahar City – not the rural areas where they are needed. The project probably stemmed from a response to personal requests? They were built of concrete rather than the traditional adobe, so tended to serve as ovens rather than storehouses. They were a complete failure and are now used by insurgents.’

⁴⁸ NGO, BDK

⁴⁹ NGO, KDH

⁵⁰ NGO, BMN

Macro policies

There was a tendency within the agriculture sector to also look at food security at a macro level — based upon concerns about the national food supply as well as unease, as noted above, about Afghanistan’s reliance on foreign imports. As a government official in Kandahar summarised: *‘Here in Kandahar our objective is to increase production so that people can easily get access to food products; when they have good access to food products, the problem of malnutrition will decrease. The agriculture sector has the responsibility to directly work to increase agriculture products and find markets for it ... if there is no improvement in the agriculture sector and if people don’t have access to enough food products, we can’t solve the problem of malnutrition.’*⁵¹

The desire for self-sufficiency in food is evident throughout conversations and across the provinces. The general unease about reliance on foreign imports is tied to fears that imported foods are expired, unsafe or unfit for consumption; are the result of meddling in markets by neighbouring countries who arbitrarily manage border controls; and that low-priced imports distort the domestic market, reducing economic incentives for Afghan farmers to invest in increasing production, and for the private sector to invest in agribusiness. (I)NGO and government officials alike commented: *‘Now all the products that are imported from other countries are all labelled ‘JUST FOR EXPORT’ and it shows that our neighbours are just sending poison for us to eat. Vegetables, drinks, medicines and all the products come from other countries to Afghanistan but all they labelled ‘JUST FOR EXPORT’. Because of this we are facing lots of problems related to nutrition, we are dependent on our neighbours.’*⁵²

*‘The chickens that are imported, they are expired to the point where even their bones have changed to the colour black. These are the expired products; foods are rotten from the inside. If you peel the first few layers off, you would see that the inside colour is different.’*⁵³

*‘Unfortunately here in Afghanistan, we don’t have quality control in controlling the food that has been exported from other countries... There are expired goods that came from Pakistan and Iran. How is it impossible to control the foods that are being imported in Afghanistan? There are some people who are interested in the benefits of Pakistan but do not bother to control the foods Pakistan exported to Afghanistan. There are also some people who are working for Iran that notices Iranians are in control of exporting their products in Afghanistan.’*⁵⁴

*‘We don’t give value to the farmer, an individual of our own country, but give a lot of value to products of foreigners. For example, this year, farmers planted potatoes and the outcome was very good. They stored the potatoes in cold rooms. All of a sudden, Pakistani potatoes were imported; our farmers were excluded from the market. This year, they may not even plant potatoes or store them.’*⁵⁵

One central Ministry official blamed another central Ministry for failing to exercise adequate controls:

‘MoPH is responsible for checking and testing all the imported products according to their quality and expiration date but there is no control on anything, there is huge administrative corruption and we are really

⁵¹ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

⁵² CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

⁵³ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

⁵⁴ NGO, BDK

⁵⁵ UN AGENCY, BDK

*having lots of problems... The blame goes to Kabul, to the norm and standards directorate of MoPH because they should consider all the products but they don't.*⁵⁶

Import substitution was expected to lead to a more vibrant agricultural economy as well as better health outcomes, according to one NGO respondent:

*'For example those who import biscuits from Iran, they don't do research to see how this biscuit was made and what products they used in it. We can make this biscuit inside Afghanistan with a better quality with our own products. Similarly all the milk, yogurt, and cheese that we import from Iran and Pakistan, we can produce it in our own country. But for this we need a policy and mechanism, and MAIL to play a good role in it. If they have a budget they can build good research centres.'*⁵⁷

Pro-nutrition approaches

Although within the agricultural sector there are few government policies that address agriculture-nutrition linkages, a wide variety of NGOs had agricultural projects and policies that aim to leverage agriculture for food security and nutrition. As one NGO worker in Nangarhar stated:

*'We consider nutrition in most of our agriculture projects; food security is also included in it... For example, we have made vegetable demo-plots to increase cultivation of vegetables because vegetables are a useful source that can decrease the problem of malnutrition. Besides that, we build fishery farms and poultry farms; we have built at least 400 farms in five different districts for women. Also we have distributed 220 goats for poor and malnutrition-affected women. Besides these, we have distributed improved vegetable and corn seeds to poor farmers. We have always considered nutrition in our agricultural programmes.'*⁵⁸

Among NGOs, policies and projects mainly focus around one of three activities: distribution of improved seeds and seed varieties; value chains and improving access to markets; and creating home gardens, vegetable patches and greenhouses.

*'If you go to remote districts of Badakhshan so you can see vegetables and fruits over there, the people are now aware of the benefits. There were some places which people didn't know what an onion is. But now they have different kinds of vegetables like onion, potato, turnip and lots of other products. I can see all these things and it is like a green light that shows that we are developing.'*⁵⁹

*'We are working in the value chain section. We have built aviculture farms for those families who are affected by malnutrition; we have built a value chain programme for them. They can sell the eggs in the shops located in their village and when they have extra eggs they can sell them in the district and city. Besides that we have value chain programmes of fisheries, vegetables, and improved seeds.'*⁶⁰

*'They have implemented several agriculture projects, for example they have done lots of work on building fruit gardens and the promotion of improved seeds. They want to promote those seeds that have resistance to diseases and they distribute those seeds for the farmers. Similarly, they have implemented several other agriculture projects here in Kandahar Province.'*⁶¹

⁵⁶ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

⁵⁷ NGO, NGH

⁵⁸ NGO, NGH

⁵⁹ UN AGENCY, BDK

⁶⁰ NGO, NGH

⁶¹ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

Policies within health sector

Treatment of malnutrition

There was a view held by many interviewees that the Ministry of Public Health is primarily concerned with clinical diagnosis and treatment of malnutrition. This therapeutic approach was also evident within the sub-departments of nutrition at the provincial level. NGOs are also involved in food fortification.

*'In the past, there were some NGOs that enrich the flour with useful minerals and distribute it to malnutrition-affected children. Through WFP, we have a programme at district levels that distribute enriched flour and enriched oil to the families affected with malnutrition. They also distributed ready-made food which was useful for the treatment of children who are affected by malnutrition. Those programmes were useful to cure malnutrition.'*⁶²

Agriculture and food-based approaches were less widely acknowledged: there was the perception of a lack of broad, cross-sectional programmes for agriculture and nutrition. As one DoPH official stated:

*'Our responsibility as DoPH is neither to distribute improved seeds to farmers nor to distribute food products for poor people but to enhance the people's awareness and organise educational programmes for them and give them training about health issues. Nutrition is not our main purpose in here; our main focus is on health. It is the responsibility of DoPH to cure all malnutrition-affected patients. We admit those patients who have intensive malnutrition in hospitals and we cure them there, but those patients who have average malnutrition problems, we cure them here.'*⁶³

*'I think no significant work has been done about nutrition by MoPH. It is almost three years since they started working on nutrition, and now MoPH has a separate department for nutrition. Now donors also tend to provide funds for nutrition projects. Till now the government and donors didn't allocate separate funds for nutrition sector, which was also a reason that the nutrition sector was very weak in Afghanistan. They only worked on treatment of malnutrition. This is a big problem in that the main focus of government and other organisations is on treatment of malnutrition and they didn't work much on the nutrition sector.'*⁶⁴

Like the government departments, many health-sector NGOs also are focused on hunger, food security and the treatment of severe undernutrition, rather than dietary quality.

*'All the NGOs which work for development haven't evaluated nutrition based on health and no-one has focused on the quality of food yet. They are just working on increasing food quantity.'*⁶⁵

On the BPHS, the nutrition focus was perceived to be primarily curative.

'The government have a programme by the name of BPHS. They implement this programme in clinics and work on the health of children, vaccination and nutrition. BPHS has 7 components; one of these components is about treatment of malnutrition. First, they check the children if they have malnutrition. They try to find out what they eat, and then help them, and do treatment. In some provinces, they also distribute products for

⁶² NGO, BDK

⁶³ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BDK

⁶⁴ NGO, KDH

⁶⁵ NGO, KBL

these patients to improve their nutrition problem. BPHS is either a one-year or two-year projects in all the provinces, which are supported by SDC, UNICEF, and WFP.⁶⁶

Interviewees commented on the delivery of treatment through existing state (although often NGO-run) infrastructure such as clinics and hospitals, with lower-severity malnutrition cases dealt with via in-home supplementary feeding programmes.

*'The BPHS are responsible for serving healthy products in Afghanistan, we make these products with them and then they distribute the products for children through their clinics. When the children come to the clinic, first of all, they should diagnose the level of malnutrition in them. This can be intensive, chronic, weak or normal. Then according to the measurement of malnutrition that the children have, the doctors will decide which medicine they should give to the patient and for how long, which is for three months, six months or a one year period. They get the medicine from UNICEF through a proposal, then UNICEF makes a contract with the other companies and distributes these products for them. It is distributed in two ways; one way is through central and provincial hospitals and the other is through clinics.'*⁶⁷

*'We have nutrition programmes. We divided the programme into two parts. First, if one has medical problems, we hospitalise them and take medical and nutritional measures. The second is by screening the patients. They do not necessarily need to be hospitalised. We send them from the provincial level to community-based supplementary feeding. We have nutrition programmes there that are only for children in the first and second degree or those that can be fed within the house. We only hospitalise those who need serious treatment or are in a serious malnutrition condition. Regardless of whether they have medical problems or not, if the person is in a state of severe malnutrition, we have proper criteria for them. Based on the guideline of both the Ministry of Public Health and specialisation program, we hospitalise those with severe malnutrition condition, improve their nutrition intake, and treat them.'*⁶⁸

Food distribution

Food distribution, primarily implemented via WFP and UNICEF, is also the responsibility of the Ministry and Departments of Health. Such programmes can be supplementary feeding programmes for at-risk groups, for example pregnant women, or the distribution of micronutrient-fortified foods.

*'We deliver the food to people while WFP helps us by providing food. KSFP is a targeted supplementary feeding programme. In this programme, we check and measure the arms of the women. We cover those pregnant women whose arms are less than 23 cm and lactating women who have children older than six months. In this project we deliver them complete healthy food; wheat, flour, salt, oil, and vitamin A.'*⁶⁹

*'We have a contract with WFP and we receive food products from them. We distribute these food products to children below 5, pregnant women, and women that are affected by malnutrition, to solve their nutrition problems and rescue them from malnutrition. The food products we distribute to them are standard and approved by both WFP and MoPH. Most of these products are milk and other foods, which are useful for malnutrition problems, and we cure the malnutrition patients by these food products.'*⁷⁰

⁶⁶ NGO, KDH

⁶⁷ UN AGENCY, BDK

⁶⁸ NGO, NGH

⁶⁹ NGO, BDK

⁷⁰ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BDK

The distribution of food is often in the form of standardised fortified foods, in particular the Ready-To-Use Foods (RTUF) of the ‘Plumpy’ range used by WFP in emergency interventions and in longer-term malnutrition prevention programmes.

‘There is distribution of micronutrient or nutritious food and some other products like Plumpy-Doz or Plumpy-Nut or F100 and F75 milks, which are called milk but combine some nutritious components which can be used in hospitals and specific units. We can’t find them in bazaars and homes, but doctors and specialists distribute them in specific cases and doses for children; children severely affected by malnutrition, they also receive the nutritious medicine.’⁷¹

The therapeutic approach was criticised for its short-termism and the common subsequent withdrawal of emergency services, without responding to the long-term needs.

‘WFP have done lots of work in the nutrition section in here. They distributed food products for poor people in this province. These sorts of works are not very helpful because their projects are short-term and after sometime they stop their aid. Instead of this type of help, they should implement more useful projects in here. We have lots of arable lands, water, and human resource in here. Instead of distributing food products they should improve the agriculture sector here and teach people how to produce food products; that type of project will be more effective.’⁷²

Education programmes

Interviewees commented that education and awareness programmes are present in several of the provinces. Training generally revolves around teaching mothers about child nutrition and encouraging the diversification of diets.

‘We have a social awareness programme for the mothers. We show them how a mother should feed their children, what kind of food should they use, and what kind of food can be given in lieu of milk to their children.’⁷³

‘DoPH has a nutrition awareness programme by the name NERS. They go to the villages to teach people how to cook, and how to use products enriched with protein in their daily diets. Also, they teach them which products are useful for nutrition and give them information about the importance of nutrition.’⁷⁴

‘ADA has some projects in different districts. In our society most women do the cooking at home; therefore ADA has a project on nutrition. They go to different villages and give training about nutrition for women. They enhance their awareness about the importance of nutrition and what products are useful for improvement of nutrition.’⁷⁵

Regulation

The Department of Public Health also see themselves as a monitoring and regulatory body, coordinating the activities of NGOs as well as of the private sector.

‘Our programmes are mostly in accordance with the guidelines and policies of MoPH. And we do our work based on those policies. Within MoPH we have PND (Public Nutrition Department). The main objective of PND is the control and monitoring of all food products for people. It is not only to control salt and flour

⁷¹ UN AGENCY, BDK

⁷² NGO, KDH

⁷³ NGO, BDK

⁷⁴ UNIVERSITY, KDH

⁷⁵ NGO, KDH

factories, but there are lots of other food products that are made here, but the micronutrients in those products are not complete. This is the duty of PND to control the quality of these products.⁷⁶

Policies involving the private sector

Agricultural development initiatives

Private sector activities typically involve agribusinesses such as industrial-scale livestock farming or greenhouse projects, distribution of farming inputs such as improved seeds and fertilisers, post-harvest processing including milk pasteurisation and manufacturing of dairy products, juice manufacturing and micronutrient fortification. Some support has been given by government departments for this work. For example, DAIL in Nangarhar provided support for livestock farming and in Kandahar supported the building of greenhouses and dairy farms.

*'DAIL has a programme to provide facilities for the private sector, in order to enable the private sector to have better activities in agriculture and livestock sector. The private sector has done significant work in agriculture and livestock sector. For example, we can name the aviculture projects of Habib Hassam. DAIL has given 116 acres of land to Habib Hassam Company. Now there are 180,000 chickens in Habib Hassam farms and they produce 120,000 eggs daily to sell in the market. Also there are several other organisations and private sector companies that work in the agriculture and livestock sector.'*⁷⁷

*'The private sector has done lots of important work here. For example, they produce several vegetables like cucumber, tomato, etc., they built many greenhouses in here. Several dairy farms, aviculture farms are built by the private sector here in Kandahar.'*⁷⁸

Likewise, a respondent reported that MAIL, in collaboration with FAO, provided support for the establishment of companies producing and supplying improved wheat seeds in Badakshan:

*'The private sector with the help of MAIL and FAO has formed two seed companies in wheat. These two companies have an enormous role in wheat production; it helps create jobs and has helped take the load off the government's shoulders too. The private firms should compete with each other... The private sector is active and now they have documents/papers and professionals that we did not have before so the private sector is good compared to how we were, back in the old days.'*⁷⁹

Food fortification

While policies within the agricultural sector have focused on production within the private sector, private enterprise within the health sector has focused on micronutrient fortification, especially iodine fortification of salt and mineral fortification of flour. These programmes have involved MoPH with the aid of UNICEF.

*'I will give an example: our department had a project with UNICEF, and their aim was to include iodine into salt. At the beginning of the project they were giving iodine to the salt factories for free, and were encouraging them to include iodine in salt. But now they still provide iodine for the salt factories. They provide iodine for their entire year and in return they receive money. We want all our projects to be like this.'*⁸⁰

Such programmes are widespread across Afghanistan.

⁷⁶ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, NGH

⁷⁷ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, NGH

⁷⁸ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

⁷⁹ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BDK

⁸⁰ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

*'Yes there are some companies in Afghanistan that enrich the salt with iodine. We have almost 30 salt factories across the country and there are also some factories that enrich flour with minerals and vitamins.'*⁸¹

Sectoral dialogue and linkages

While there is clearly some government involvement in programmes aimed at stimulating the private sector, most projects appear to be either independent projects or established through direct collaboration and support of NGOs.

*'The private sector has an important role. The majority of problems we face right now are because of the lack of a private sector. Recently several NGOs gave support to these private businesses and somehow these businesses improved but, because there was no support from the government side, again these businesses collapsed. If we can improve our private sector it will have a positive impact on the improvement of food security and nutrition.'*⁸²

Overall, there is a widespread view that more government involvement and communication is required with the private sector.

*'Unfortunately, we rarely have such dialogues [between government and the private sector]. I can only tell you about two events. There is a production network (anjomantawli) that collects dairy products from all other villages and after simple processing they sell in Bamyar city. Some organisations have joint dialogues with them. For example, DCA organised a workshop for these networks, on how to have good hygiene while processing dairy products. I don't think that the government has such meetings with these sorts of businesses to financially help these networks.'*⁸³

Generally, respondents were highly supportive of private sector involvement, but were aware of the need for further investment in the sector to expand the range of influence into remote districts, with most existing private sector projects currently operating at the provincial level.

*'USAID has organised some private sector activities and gave some projects for them which are very sustainable. But they don't have many clients so we want to create a linkage between farmers and them. We asked the interested farmers to come with us and we created a linkage between them and the private sector.'*⁸⁴

*'In Nangarhar Province we have a population of 3.15 million. One dairy factory is not enough for 3.15 million people, thus malnutrition can't be easily removed from this province. I feel sorry for government officials as one dairy factory is not sufficient enough to remove malnutrition for about 3.15 million people. It is like to throwing a stone in the ocean. We need different projects here. We should have different machineries and big factories where people can work and an agriculture transport system.'*⁸⁵

⁸¹ NGO, BDK

⁸² NGO, NGH

⁸³ NGO, BMN

⁸⁴ NGO, KBL

⁸⁵ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, NGH

Import-export trade

As suggested above, the private sector is also perceived as key for reducing the dependence on agricultural imports.

*'Another issue is that our private sector developed a lot, but still we are dependent on foreign imports; for example, we produce chickens here but still we import eggs, vaccines, and birdseed (DANA) from abroad. In other countries, within 40 days a chicken gains 2 kilograms. But in our farms within 40 days a chicken gains 1 kg and maybe 1 kg and 200 grams. These low qualities can affect the market for national products and these things can affect the activities of our private sector.'*⁸⁶

*'The government must control the private sector and make sure they don't import low-quality products. Right now the private sector imports milk powder for children, which has the picture of fat and healthy children on it, but in fact this milk powder is like a poison for children and causes malnutrition in children. It is very important that government should check the quality of products imported by the private sector. The private sector imports snacks and biscuits for children, which are low quality and harmful for health, and if children use these products they will cause stunting in children.'*⁸⁷

Difficulties cited concerning neighbouring states (Pakistan principally, but also Iran) concerned trade imbalances and security issues.⁸⁸ Imports of foodstuffs came additionally from a range of other countries.

Private sector incentives

However, the framework of incentives for the private sector to deliver on public objectives is weak, according to one NGO respondent:

*'Private sector firms have activities in nutrition, but it's not for free. For example, most of the companies bring various food like Cerelac, milk from Iran, Pakistan, France, India, Thailand, and other nutritious food from various places... Sometimes some companies import nutritious foods that are expired and or close to expiration. They know that they can no longer sell it in the market so they send them to some clinics and hospitals. They say your usage is high, so you take them, it will expire with us anyways, so you use them.'*⁸⁹

And a provincial government official commented:

*'Unfortunately, the private sector is weak. I say so because they don't have an idea about their personal and social responsibilities. All of their attention is towards their personal responsibility and they don't think about social responsibilities. If a sector is thinking about their social responsibilities then it wouldn't fuel a low quality. They have been committing corruption by importing the lowest quality of products. The products that are sold in Afghanistan are from the cheapest quality.'*⁹⁰

⁸⁶NGO, NGH

⁸⁷UNIVERSITY, KDH

⁸⁸During a separate interview in Jalalabad, Nangarhar in May 2015 with the Medical Director and the Head of PhD studies at the MoPH hospital in Jalalabad who also worked for Health Net Transpsychosocial Organization (HNTPO), implementing organisation for the Therapeutic Feeding Unit, commented that *'Pakistan is not honest and trustworthy.'* In an interview, also in May 2015, a member of the Nangarhar Provincial Council, using a term in English, commented that agribusiness between Nangarhar and Pakistan is governed by an *'agrimafia'*. This is supported by an AREU report: see Minoia, G., Mumtaz, W. and Pain, A. (2014). *The social life of the onion: the informal regulation of the onion market in Nangarhar, Afghanistan*. Kabul, Afghanistan, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU).

⁸⁹ NGO, NGH

⁹⁰ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

Cross-sectoral policies: infrastructure and investment

Respondents were asked about the linkages with other sectors in which investment is necessary to enable development in agriculture and nutrition. Lack of investment in infrastructure was widely seen as a major challenge to agriculture and nutrition. MRRD were reported to be involved in infrastructure projects such as road building and irrigation, and their work was generally received positively. However, there was a common perception among respondents that projects are too few to meet the significant challenges, and that new technologies are not sufficiently utilised, particularly for energy.

According to MRRD:

‘Every day, the updated technologies come into the market. For example, we have electric water pumps, and people use them for irrigation. Those water pumps need electricity and energy but if we use generators and public electricity, the cost will be too much. So considering the economic situation of the people, we can see that they are not capable of paying the electricity expenses. Therefore, we use solar water pumps that use the energy from the sun, and it doesn’t have any extra expenses thus, we must use these new technologies. In some parts of Afghanistan, the water is very salty. We must use the filters that use the sun’s energy and can filter the water and make it potable water.’⁹¹

‘We particularly as MRRD have prioritised irrigation infrastructure as an area for us in the years to come in order to support the agriculture sector in more sustainable manner that increases productivity... we are looking into the physical infrastructure in enhancing the value chain by connecting the agri-food producers to the small or medium enterprises or entrepreneurs in domestic markets, help them to market, and to help them technically to promote their products. These are the two particular areas that we support from our position as MRRD.’⁹²

While roads and irrigation projects are seen as the most common investments in infrastructure, the need for greater investment in food value chains is also recognised. While food processing industries exist, they are too few to meet demand. Respondents cited the lack of domestic energy infrastructure being a root cause of lack of value chain development. *‘... in Nangarhar Province we must have dams so that more people can work in agriculture sector. They should make an electricity dam... but nothing has been done in this regard yet.’⁹³*

Multiple sources within Bamyan Province stated that lack of reliable electricity has prevented the building of dairy processing industries and of factories to manufacture iodised salt.

‘The challenges for such networks are the lack of electricity; this is a very big problem. In 2011 AKF wanted to build a dairy factory in Bamyan Province. The first thing that they needed for the factory was electricity. But unfortunately we don’t have electricity.’⁹⁴

‘We don’t have any factory in Bamyan. It is because these factories are mostly private, and the reason that in Bamyan we don’t have such factories is two things. First, people here are mostly poor. And secondly, we don’t have electricity in Bamyan. Bamyan should be exporter of electricity to other provinces; unfortunately it

⁹¹ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

⁹² CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

⁹³ PDC, NGH

⁹⁴ NGO, BMN

doesn't have electricity in the city. We don't have electricity for ourselves, so how can we provide electricity for private factories?'⁹⁵

In the stakeholder consultation on Kabul in 2016, a further comment relevant to infrastructure development was made:

'Establishment of some cold storages is necessary because Pakistani traders buy Afghan agricultural products at a very low price and they store it in Pakistan. After the season they sell Afghan products back to Afghans with a 300 per cent higher margin of price, than what they bought initially. Spending money and investing on the establishment of cold storages for storing agricultural produces, instead of building fancy wedding halls in Kabul, is the need of the hour in Afghanistan. A few cold storages in all provinces of the country could help our farmers financially and also the markets could be improved. All types of agricultural products are available in Afghanistan, but unfortunately the country is forced to trade and buy back its own produces from Pakistan due to lack of infrastructural support for storage.'

NGO.⁹⁶

Another consultation participant commented favourably:

'... in Nangarhar province a new packaging system has been established and there are plans to establish the cold storages in each province with the 30 capacity of 5000 metric tonnes of agricultural products. This would help to develop the agricultural system across our country, immensely.'

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT.⁹⁷

Civil society

Discussions about the role of civil society in promoting agriculture and nutrition were not fruitful. Respondents commented that civil society organisations are primarily involved in politics. A United Nations official stated:

*'Civil society raises concerns as to why police die or why ISIS is here, and why our road is not constructed. In nutrition I do not think they have taken any action.'*⁹⁸

And a Ministry official from Kabul noted:

*'The civil society prioritises politics, not food security. They constantly talk about politics, they never talk about food security. In most cases the civil society representative bodies, either individuals or organisations, often talk about elections. They talk about women's rights. They talk about politics; they talk about decisions of government. But I have rarely heard anything about food security from them.'*⁹⁹

Another central Ministry official commented with cynicism:

*'The civil society that we have is a weak civil society. Civil society hasn't worked for the people well. They have just worked for their personal benefit.'*¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

⁹⁶ <http://www.lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/LANSA%20-%20AREU%20stakeholder%20event%20%40%20Kabul.%20April%2025%2C%202016.pdf>, p.29.

⁹⁷ <http://www.lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/LANSA%20-%20AREU%20stakeholder%20event%20%40%20Kabul.%20April%2025%2C%202016.pdf>, pp.29-30.

⁹⁸ UN AGENCY, BDK

⁹⁹ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

¹⁰⁰ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

Moreover, civil society faces resources constraints similar to other sectors, according to a provincial-level NGO official.

*'The main problem for civil society is that they don't have funds. They have plans, they can make programmes and proposals, but the main problem is to find the funds. Donors have the funds and it is up to them to whom they give the funds and to whom they don't give them.'*¹⁰¹

3.5 Policy formulation

The governance strategy in Afghanistan combines the technical capabilities of a vertical structure with a system of consultation with provincial-level governments. In theory, data are collected at the district level, aggregated at the provincial level and then fed into the policy making process at the central level. Policy is then formulated in Kabul by Government Ministries and cross-sectoral working groups and clusters — with input from Provincial Department heads. Policies are then disseminated in the form of plans and strategies to the provinces. Respondents cited few examples where this policy making process exists in reality.

Inter-sectoral coordination at the centre

There was significant evidence of horizontal coordination at the central level. Policy coordination between sectors is largely considered to occur between Ministries and within sector clusters.

*'The Ministry of Agriculture has its policies and strategies in the area of agriculture. Overall policies and all these links [to nutrition] are established by the Ministries and then are shared with their stakeholders or technical and financial co-workers. Therefore, organisations and institutions working in Afghanistan in the area of nutrition and agriculture are involved in policy making. Policies are made jointly but under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture. These policies are final documents for the implementation of all agricultural programmes throughout the country.'*¹⁰²

*'Within MoPH we have a Public Nutrition Department that makes a joint nutrition policy for all over Afghanistan. Organisations like UNDP, UNICEF and other organisations also review those policies. After every few years they make a guideline book and review those policies. The Minister of Public Health passes that policy and then they send those guidelines to all Public Nutrition Departments in the provinces. And mostly these organisations are cohesive with that. They implement this national nutrition strategy for the people of Afghanistan.'*¹⁰³

*'There is a national nutrition committee at ministry level; MAIL, MoPH, MRRD, MOC, WFP, and UNICEF are in that committee. They have their coordination meetings. But at the provincial level we don't have such committees or coordination meetings.'*¹⁰⁴

The UN cluster system was frequently cited as an important coordination mechanism.

*We have a cluster by the name of FSAC (Food Security & Agriculture Cluster), within this cluster are FAO and all the organisations that work in the agriculture sector; they indirectly work in the nutrition sector and jointly we work in this sector. In every project we implement, the MAIL, MRRD and other organisations cooperate with us and we consider nutrition in our agricultural projects as well.'*¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ NGO, NGH

¹⁰² NGO, BDK

¹⁰³ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, NGH

¹⁰⁴ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹⁰⁵ NGO, NGH

*'We have different clusters; many NGOs are members of those clusters and they have coordination with government. For example, we have the WASH cluster, nutrition cluster, protection cluster, and we have separate policies for these. And mainly our policies are according to the government policies. Mostly NGOs don't have their own policies and if they do, they have to be in accordance with government policies. As we see, the government is very weak and they don't do a lot of work; it's NGOs that do everything but still their programmes are in accordance with the government policies.'*¹⁰⁶

*'The donors have divided into a few clusters; one of them is the Food Security cluster. All NGOs have coordination meetings monthly, which are for discussing their tasks and responsibilities and they share their experiences. They receive funds by their clusters.'*¹⁰⁷

Evidence was gathered that on occasions policy formulation was inclusive. At the Kabul stakeholder consultation in April 2016, it was reported:

'... regarding the assessment of the policies in Afghanistan – the fact that they are prepared by foreign experts and not Afghans themselves. The participant stated that he has witnessed the participation of provincial committee members from DAIL, DOPH and DRRD as well as some national and international NGOs coming together to formulate policies for Afghanistan. He also insisted that most of surveys for the research undertaken for policy formulation are undertaken by local persons in local areas under the supervision of the area coordinators. However, he did agree that there are several issues with the entire policy formulation process as pointed out by the research findings...

'About coordination, there are different coordination bodies in all provinces that are active and have weekly and monthly coordination meetings. There are some problems and gaps in the monitoring system, but the problem of nutrition is not only in Afghanistan but also in the entire South Asian region. So the findings of LANSAs research programme in Afghanistan and other South Asian countries must be accepted positively.'

NGO.¹⁰⁸

Centralisation

Perceptions of the origins of policies were relatively homogeneous. In a nutshell, the predominant view across all interviews was that policies are made in Kabul, usually with the assistance of, or by, international donor organisations, sometimes copied from other countries, without local knowledge or input. Vertical consultation on policies between the centre and the provinces was not the norm reported by most respondents, although greater provincial participation was reported in project planning and implementation.

All respondents at provincial levels reported that policies were made in Kabul, though some provincial respondents reported that plans and strategies were occasionally developed at the provincial level. Attitudes towards this centralisation were mixed. Some respondents were satisfied with the level of engagement between provincial and central levels.

¹⁰⁶ NGO, NGH

¹⁰⁷ NGO, KBL

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/LANSA%20-%20AREU%20stakeholder%20event%20%40%20Kabul.%20April%2025%2C%202016.pdf>, p. 30.

*'Most of the policies are made in Kabul, but sometimes they make policies here in the provinces as well, because here they can better identify the problems of people, understand what are the main needs of people. Most of the time they collect the information from provinces and send it to Kabul. There they can formulate a policy based on these collected information.'*¹⁰⁹

*'... at the MoPH level, when they make a policy, they formulate it according to the national development policy of Afghanistan. For its implementation, they get the views of provincial officials, NGOs and other organisations that work in this sector. Before implementing these policies they organise meetings, invite other organisations and ask for their views and opinions.'*¹¹⁰

*'Most of the policies are made in the capital. Here in the provinces we have government Departments. While making a policy they invite the Directors of these Departments to Kabul and discuss the policies with them and ask for their advice and recommendations.'*¹¹¹

*'There was a guideline about malnutrition. They organised a 2-week workshop in Kabul regarding that. We participated in that workshop and now we are working to make a plan for its implementation.'*¹¹²

Other respondents differentiated between centralised policy making and a more consultative planning process: plans and specific projects are passed down through Ministries to Provincial Departments.

*'They don't invite people from the provinces to give their views in the policymaking process. But for implementation of these policies, they do ask the views and suggestion of provinces. For example when they make a policy for malnutrition, they don't ask our views on it. But when they want to implement those policies, they invite us and ask for our views and opinions.'*¹¹³

From a Departmental official in Bamyan:

*'People say drop by drop a river is created but our mentality is that the entire river rains down on us. When we make policies, we should start from the smallest points and go to medium and then gather it altogether but that is not how they do it... They do not send policies, they send plans for us to follow.'*¹¹⁴

The majority of respondents however, considered that policy making was *de facto* significantly over-centralised:

*'Generally, they don't invite provincial officials and people's representatives in the policymaking process but sometimes, maybe, they invite officials from provinces. But most of the time policies are made in Kabul behind the guarded walls.'*¹¹⁵

*'Nutrition policies are formulated at ministry level, there is no such meeting to invite from provincial levels to attend policy making process and give our point of view. As I said, the policies are made at the top levels.'*¹¹⁶

*'There are no such policy principles at the provincial level. When making plans, they invite us in some workshops which are mostly coordination workshops. We can only give comments but we can't be involved in policy-making.'*¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁹ NGO, KDH

¹¹⁰ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

¹¹¹ NGO, NGH

¹¹² NGO, BDK

¹¹³ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

¹¹⁴ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹¹⁵ UNIVERSITY, KDH

¹¹⁶ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

Lack of capacity was implicated as a cause of the imperfections in policy making processes.

*'There is a group of policymakers in the capital that formulates policies, strategies, and national plans. I think it is better to make policies from bottom to top. They should collect data from villages, districts and provinces and make a policy according to that. But the problem in here is the lack of capacity. If you go to a Ministry in Afghanistan they don't even know how to write; then how do you expect them to make a policy?'*¹¹⁸

*'I think the most important thing is capacity building, if there is a lack of capacity in government... if government wants to make a policy they should not only allow the 10 or 20 people in the Ministry who have good education skills to formulate the policy, but they should allow people from provinces and districts to join the policy making process. That policy will be much more applicable than a policy which is made in Kabul. Mostly those policies are not applicable in remote provinces and districts.'*¹¹⁹

An NGO respondent from Bamyan noted:

*'They [Provincial Departments] are lacking in terms of budget and staff capacity. They complain about a shortage of budget and how the central government does not support their ideas, so they put the ball in the NGOs court. They said that if the NGOs are involved, it's their responsibility to focus on that area.'*¹²⁰

Frustration with the lack of consultation could be expressed in strong terms.

*'Once the policy is made in Kabul, nobody has the right to either object or suggest anything. For example, if they say that the colour of milk is black and you write and say no it's white, they will grab you and tell you that you are not obeying laws. They will tell you that it's what the policy states so we should not create something new.'*¹²¹

Donor-driven policy

International donors were said to influence policy significantly because the Government of Afghanistan was said to lack financial independence and technical capacity. For instance, NGO staff commented:

*'The donors provide the funds; through their funding power they make policy makers accept their wishes and desires.'*¹²²

*'When policy makers are making a policy, they are using 80 per cent of the idea of [the] advisors, who are the representatives of donors, WB, FAO and AKF. I don't know exactly... but I think during the making of a policy, 20 per cent of Afghans are in-charge; they are the ones who have gained their Masters degrees or PhDs. But 80 per cent of it, the foreigners are in-charge.'*¹²³

And Provincial DoPH officials noted:

*'Most of the work in Afghanistan has been done through foreign aid. For example, WFP, UNICEF and others who provide aid for Afghanistan, they are just coordinators; they don't have funds themselves. Rich people from America and Europe provide aid through these organisations and NGOs. Generally, all the work done by MoPH is from foreign aid as the Government of Afghanistan doesn't have its own budget.'*¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ NGO, BDK

¹¹⁸ NGO, KDH

¹¹⁹ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹²⁰ NGO, BMN

¹²¹ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹²² NGO, BMN

¹²³ NGO KABUL

¹²⁴ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BDK

‘According to my experience, from our sector they mostly listen to donors and consider their wishes and conditions, because donors have a budget and they fund all the projects; without their funds no projects can be implemented. That is why they mostly listen to the donors.’¹²⁵

The issue of over-reliance on foreign donors was a source of contention in many interviews, raising questions not only about appropriateness of interventions but also of sustainability.¹²⁶ As one Department of Health official put it:

‘The work that DoPH is doing in here is temporary. If other organisations stop providing help to this Department, they will not be able to continue providing their services as they will not be able to do anything alone.’¹²⁷

The point was reiterated at the stakeholder consultation in Kabul in April 2016.

‘Afghanistan has lots of policies and mostly civil society in Afghanistan is always working on the reform and development of new policies. A participant expressed his agreement to the point that policies are not tailor made to specific areas and are mostly created by the foreign experts based on their own knowledge from their countries with very little or no knowledge of Afghanistan... as project implementer, there is always a need to follow the donor strategy because they are paying the fund and they need what they desire to be implemented. Project implementers cannot do anything which is against the demands of the donors since they pay us.’

NGO.¹²⁸

Similarly, another participant was said to have stated that the problem was not a lack of policy, but a lack of policy dialogue between Kabul and the provinces.

‘... the Government of Afghanistan has lots of policies, but these policies are not well communicated to the provincial levels. This participant agreed that the reasons for the research findings lies mainly in this problem of the fact that people at the provincial levels do not have good knowledge of the policies because the policies made in Kabul are not well communicated to the provinces. It is pertinent to ensure that the policies in Afghanistan are communicated and feedback is received from the local levels, so that implementation processes can be strengthened across the country.’

UN AGENCY.¹²⁹

Policy relevance

Over-centralisation and dependence on foreign advisors and donor organisations were perceived to lead to national policies adopted or adapted from other countries that can be inappropriate for the Afghan context.

‘The sources for all the health policies come from WHO. They get the information from them. They conduct research all over the world, they bring the policies from other countries such as African countries to

¹²⁵PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

¹²⁶ In a separate interview in May 2015 a DoPH official in Kandahar acknowledged that ‘It is annoying that the local advice is not heeded. Projects do not address the priorities of the local people and are not sustainable’. However, ‘problems are not so much with the donors eg USAID, DFID, Canadians, GIZ, but with the implementing organisations. Some programs are OK, some are not.’

¹²⁷PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BDK

¹²⁸<http://www.lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/LANSA%20-%20AREU%20stakeholder%20event%20%40%20Kabul.%20April%2025%2C%202016.pdf>, p.24

¹²⁹<http://www.lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/LANSA%20-%20AREU%20stakeholder%20event%20%40%20Kabul.%20April%2025%2C%202016.pdf>, p. 33.

*Afghanistan and implement them here. After their research from all over the world, they make a guideline and give it to MoPH and they make their policies according to that. WHO makes different policies for all developed and underdeveloped countries.*¹³⁰

Respondents from three different provinces pointed to policies that have been copied from other countries with little to no adaption to the local context:

*'I think most of the policies are copied here in Afghanistan. They copy the policies from other countries and apply them here - despite many differences between two countries still they copy policies from other countries.'*¹³¹

*'I have received a policy about poultry which was made by cutting and pasting. We need to make policies to solve our problems... If we make a policy by cutting and pasting, then the policy is useless for us. We need to do research and know what our people need, what are their problems, and we can even call experts to join a workshop and work on it in order to establish a policy. We have a National Poultry Policy which is totally useless in Afghanistan because the policy is copied from Zimbabwe and our system, climate, population and markets are different from Zimbabwe.'*¹³²

*'Foreigners here make most of the policies and they don't usually make a policy based on accurate data and information. In the past, we had several agricultural research centres in every province, but now we don't have any. They bring seeds from other areas for cultivation here. Can we cultivate a cucumber seed from Iran here? We can't because our climate is different, everything is different here. Most of the policies here are 'copy and paste'. They copy policies from other countries and implement them here, which is not effective.'*¹³³

Physical remoteness and hardship in some contexts is a factor which impedes staff working in the provinces. A Provincial Ministry official commented:

*'In Bamyan we rarely find individuals with a high level of capacity. Because Bamyan is a remote area, professional staff hardly agree to come here for work. Only people with less capacity come to work here.'*¹³⁴

Despite complaints about copying policies from other countries where local realities are different, there was a perception that modelling policies on the experiences of other countries can be useful if the country of origin is similar or the policy is adjusted for the Afghan context.

*'I think most of the policies are copied here in Afghanistan. They copy the policies from other countries and apply them here, despite many differences between two countries but still they copy policies from other countries. We can copy policies from Pakistan, Bangladesh or other countries which have similarities with Afghanistan. But we can't copy policies from European countries at all, because there are lots of differences.'*¹³⁵

*'In Bangladesh a cooperative has started the collection of milk in order to produce dairy products; it was started with a small capacity but later it was developed and improved. We have copied the programme and it was very successful here.'*¹³⁶

¹³⁰ NGO, BDK

¹³¹ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹³²UNIVERSITY, NGH

¹³³ NGO, KDH

¹³⁴ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹³⁵ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹³⁶ NGO, KDH

Contextualisation

However, there was a strongly-held view that policy making was centralised in Kabul and did not take into account provincial perceptions. There was a widespread view that policy makers were out of touch with the context, either because they are foreigners and unfamiliar with Afghanistan, or because policies are made in Kabul with little to no understanding of the reality of the provinces and districts. Taking into account local realities would lead to better policies.

*'Most of the policies that are made in the capital are not applicable. I think that we should make policies at the district and villages level. The social and economic situation of people has to be considered in the policies. The policies that are made at the district and provincial level will be more effective and successful.'*¹³⁷

*'For example in Bamyan, we only have one growing season but in Jalalabad we have three. If the policy is made in Kabul and not contextualised well, then it will not work. We may require external support to develop a concrete document that works in different context. These strategies and policies that do not work are mostly made in Kabul by some expert from another country. The policies should be made bottom to top.'*¹³⁸

*'Some of the policies are made in the capital, but when we want to apply it here, it is very difficult to apply. Therefore policies have to be made from bottom to top. Secondly, the needs of every province is different, they should consider each province and make separate policies according to their situation. Thirdly, the ability of government and other organisations is very important in a policy. It is better if they look at their abilities and make policies accordingly.'*¹³⁹

*'In every village we have different shuras. They should ask the people's need from the shuras, and on that basis they should build their policies. If they survey 10 to 20 villages in every district, they will get a good result out of their policies.'*¹⁴⁰

Cynicism

The remoteness of policy making from the provinces not only caused a lack of effectiveness but also cynicism among interviewees.

*'It is easy to make a policy; we can see that policymakers come in AC cars and live in beautiful houses in Kabul. But their policies are not effective; see after 13 years, still the survey shows that 41 per cent of our children are affected by malnutrition.'*¹⁴¹

*'It's simple. It has a path. For example, first of all, some experts come together in Kabul and have meetings and workshops for a few days. They visit Serena Hotel, Safi Landmark Hotel, and Intercontinental Hotel and fill their pockets. Then they make a draft, read it, approve it, and they say the policy is made. The minister as well signs it without reading it, and [the President] as well signs it without reading it. Then they distribute it. It's sent here.'*¹⁴²

Those who make policies, they come in bulletproof cars and they make policies behind the guarded walls. They don't know about the situation of Helmand and about the agriculture and gardens there. Most policymakers come from abroad to the airport and from there, they go to their offices. How do you expect

¹³⁷ NGO, NGH

¹³⁸ NGO, BMN

¹³⁹ NGO, BMN

¹⁴⁰ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹⁴¹ NGO, KDH

¹⁴² UN AGENCY, BDK

them to know about [the] situation of Afghanistan? I haven't seen any policymakers go to the field to find out the problems of the people.'¹⁴³

There was disappointment about the lack of practical collaboration and coordination from one Kabul Ministry official who visited a rural area, and disillusion about some coordination efforts:

*'I have attended in a programme and I thought that there will be lots of authorities but when I went there, I saw that all the participants were farmers and field workers.'*¹⁴⁴

*'We don't have any coordination with Government Directorates or NGOs here. We only participate in workshops where they pay us an amount of money. Our officials are working but whenever they arrive in their offices every morning, they only sit behind their desks, rest, and do nothing. I know that people attend the same workshop for more than 50 times as they get \$50 a day just by being in a workshop. They don't care what they learn in the workshop because they care about the money most.'*¹⁴⁵

Research-led policy making

The role of data and evidence in contributing to policy formulation highlights the contrast between the theoretical policy making process and reality seen throughout the interview process. There are data collection systems that are — at least theoretically — in place and are well-designed, and should inform policy making by feeding into policy initiatives and revisions, and serve for evaluating the effectiveness of such policies.

One DAIL official explained the process:

*'MAIL formulates all the policies based on the four principal programmes. They start formulating their policies from villages and districts. First they conduct several surveys and collect information about the problems and needs of the people. Based on the survey results, they make a proposal, they sort and prioritize the problems and then they make a complete plan or policy. Then they send the policy to the Ministry of Finance to get the budget for its implementation.'*¹⁴⁶

A respondent from MoWA expressed confidence in the system:

*'I think all the organisations which are working on food security and nutrition are using results of research studies and all their activities are based on researches...MAIL and FAO had a presentation regarding food security and all their data were based on research, they wanted to make their strategic plan based on research data.'*¹⁴⁷

Such views are not limited to government officials. Endorsement was found also amongst NGOs.

*'Before making a policy, they conduct research and surveys. They collect information about the situation of the agriculture system. First they want to know what products can be cultivated in this area. After that, the related ministries like MAIL and MoPH organise a meeting and they consider the situation of malnutrition in the provinces. Based on this information they formulate a policy.'*¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ NGO, KDH

¹⁴⁴ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

¹⁴⁵ UNIVERSITY, NGH

¹⁴⁶ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

¹⁴⁷ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

¹⁴⁸ NGO, KDH

Under the circumstances, research methods are weak, and data and evidence are either inaccurate or missing for many areas. Security concerns were cited as the main reason for the distance from local realities: policy makers rarely visit or get to know the local areas over which they make policy. *'They try their best but there are some problems, maybe security problems, or the people who work with them can't get the exact information. They can't go to some places because of the security problem and the people they have hired don't give the right information to the policy makers. So the problem they face is because they don't get the information properly.'*¹⁴⁹

*'It depends on the security situation because surveys need close monitoring. If the situation is good the survey team and the monitoring team will work closely and make reports of their activity. If the security situation isn't good and monitors and supervisors cannot go to the field then the accuracy goes down.'*¹⁵⁰

In fact, lack of security was said to affect every stage of the policy making process from the collection of survey data through the implementation of projects to the monitoring and evaluation of projects.

*'In the policies their aim is to annihilate poverty and hunger from the country, but when they want to implement their programmes, they face security issues, and several other issues which constrain the implementation of their programmes. Though we can say that they give priority in their policies but due to some problem they can't implement it.'*¹⁵¹

Conflicts of interest

Apart from national surveys — seen as infrequent, incomplete and unreliable — much of the data collection is done by NGOs and implementing partners when seeking contracts and tenders or evaluating programmes. As a result, there are concerns over conflicts of interest.

*'Sometimes the data that some of the organisations produce are not accurate. They exaggerate and they do not tell the truth. If we go deep into this, we will see that there is a difference. Sometimes, when people get good results, they still won't show the actual data. Instead, they show weak data because they think that if they do so, they will have more funds. There are actually many incidents of this. The best way to get good data is for a third party to conduct the research.'*¹⁵²

As well as concerns over the quality of data, the use of data is also an issue of contention, with many respondents frustrated that data collected do not get used to formulate policy.

*'Our policy makers don't use the research knowledge; they don't pay attention to the surveys conducted in the areas and it is also a cause of the failure of all the policies made so far. ...I don't know why they don't use it. They do have the capacity to understand the research knowledge but they don't use it. Some of the policy makers may use the research knowledge but most of them don't, because there is not any monitoring and evaluation mechanism to control them.'*¹⁵³

'The government or policy makers don't feel they have the resources to do it so they don't take on some of the research recommendations that are coming about research. If a researcher comes and says 'we need to have ten health workers in a health facility not the two you have now ... it is good research, it is a good

¹⁴⁹ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

¹⁵⁰ NGO, KBL

¹⁵¹ NGO, KDH

¹⁵² NGO, BMN

¹⁵³ NGO, KDH

*recommendation but the policy makers might not take it to reflect their document because they don't have the resources or capacity, or they just will not listen to it even though the research is good.*¹⁵⁴

Stimulating the academic sector, especially technical agricultural research institutes, was seen as important. Some organisations do engage in agricultural research (as do some private sector companies) but respondents from universities felt their research was not incorporated into the policy making process. There was frustration that local innovations and research are not being used and there is no system to incorporate knowledge generated from national universities.

*'I myself started research on poultry. I found that we lost too much of our chickens in the summer. After the research, I found that the chicken's sweat glands don't work in the summer because they become stressed in the hot weather... Nobody from the government paid attention to my research but I do it here for my own poultry farm and it is useful.'*¹⁵⁵

*'We need external support to provide funds for the research programmes. Only giving funds is not sufficient, they should provide technical help as well. Because research is very weak in Afghanistan, our specialist researchers are very weak. We need support to develop this section... The policymakers also need to know how to use research results in their policies.'*¹⁵⁶

Research quality

Questions were raised about both the lack of research and the quality of data collected when research is conducted, and the lack of oversight of the research process.¹⁵⁷

*'Some surveyors fill the checklists themselves instead of going to the field to fill the checklist. A survey has to be accurate and surveyors must go to each area to fill the survey checklists; they should go to schools, homes, villages, to talk with people and fill the survey form with them. But unfortunately, in Afghanistan, sometimes they formulate surveys in the cities and fill it there without actual research.'*¹⁵⁸

*'Sometimes the surveyor will fill survey forms inside a room without actually going to the field and without finding people's needs. It should not be that way; the surveys have to be accurate. Both policymakers and donors should sit together and jointly make policies and programmes according to the people's needs.'*¹⁵⁹

*'The main problem is that data are not accurate, surveyors don't collect accurate data, and the reason for that is obvious, there are security issues and a lack of supervisory attention to control their surveyor and whether they actually go to the field or not. The organisations that conduct research don't control their staff to see if they really go to the field to collect data or not. They don't have a system to check whether data are accurate or not.'*¹⁶⁰

The implications for policy making were expressed succinctly:

'Why are their policies not effective? Because they don't conduct any research and surveys and they don't make policies based on research. I know the importance of research. Information is power; all the policies

¹⁵⁴ UN AGENCY, KBL

¹⁵⁵ UNIVERSITY, NGH

¹⁵⁶ NGO, BMN

¹⁵⁷ During a previous interview that preceded this research, an official of a humanitarian organisation who had previously worked with an international NGO commented that when conducting research, he had issued his enumerators with tablets which, unknown to them, recorded GPS data and the timing of interviews. It turned out that 30% of surveys were completed in the office. 'All data collection is tainted by this issue'.

¹⁵⁸ UNIVERSITY, KDH

¹⁵⁹ NGO, NGH

¹⁶⁰ UNIVERSITY, KDH

*should be based on accurate information. In this country we don't have accurate data. As I mentioned before, we can solve this problem if we have a strategic plan and we make our policies based on accurate information.*¹⁶¹

3.6 Policy implementation: Project planning and monitoring

Interviewees were asked to express their views on, and experience of, the practical outworking of policy and project implementation.

There is a degree to which the implementation of plans and projects occurs in 'silos'. Few projects in agriculture and nutrition are directly implemented by the government but are contracted out to implementing partners who are national or international NGOs. These should be coordinated by the provincial government. Some projects originate with donor agencies and bilateral organisations and are implemented by large international NGOs and consultancy firms. Respondents reported their impressions that such international organisations notify — but generally do not collaborate with — provincial departments. Rather, such organisations and UN agencies report to their head offices in Kabul and operate according to projects and policies designed in collaboration with central government Ministries.

CARD-F, financed by DFID and DANIDA, is an example of an agriculture programme which is — unusually — actually integrated into the activity of four Ministries, who manage the implementing agencies.¹⁶²

Governance: Coordination constraints

Significant obstructions affect the policy and planning governance model from working adequately. Firstly, as noted above, policy makers in Kabul are remote from the reality of the provinces, and the mechanisms for data collection and consultation with provincial actors are insufficient.

Secondly, the heavy reliance on NGO implementing partners results in a form of parallel governance through which international NGOs and development agencies operate their own centralised policy making process. Smaller NGOs, however, are more closely integrated with provinces. The effect is to sustain two management 'silos': one where major NGOs take policy direction from central offices in Kabul and another where government Ministries issue strategic plans to provincial departments, implemented through smaller NGOs, with little interaction between the two. One Ministry official in Kabul commented:

*'You know, either policy gets developed only on the government side and non-government actors are not involved, or very often this happens to be on the non-government side and the government is not involved.'*¹⁶³

A respondent from the provincial office of a major international NGO commented on the different management and information systems:

*'We [in the province] only have communication with our main office.'*¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ NGO, KDH

¹⁶² <http://www.cardf.gov.af/>

¹⁶³ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

¹⁶⁴ NGO, BDK

From the regional office of a UN agency it was reported that:

*'Policies are made in Kabul and in Ministries but the policies of UN organizations are made in head offices; as far as I know about policies of UNICEF, they have general formulas and make policies with them.'*¹⁶⁵

On the role of smaller NGOs, one regional DAIL official commented:

*'They sometimes talk about parallel governance and in this case it is like that. The organisations (NGOs) have their own policies. ... For example they have written a proposal and when they get funds from a donor, in the implementation part they will face various challenges. It is because they haven't coordinated it with the relevant sectors. Sometimes they do ask us for our comments during their proposal writing but the ones that haven't, obviously faced problems.'*¹⁶⁶

Nevertheless, there was evidence of horizontal coordination within the provincial level— and from the provinces upwards to the centre— because NGO activities are related to central government Ministries and NGOs are granted permissions at the provincial level. As one Provincial Department of Agriculture official stated:

*'The NGOs are in contact with Kabul as they take their projects there. Kabul knows about their activities; without Kabul's permission, they cannot start working here. They take their permits from Kabul, Kabul contacts us, and we allow them to start their work.'*¹⁶⁷

Provincial governments therefore play the role of a coordinating body, subcontracting official Ministry policies and projects and preventing project duplication and conflict between NGOs. As a Provincial Department of Health official explained:

*'The government plays a controller and moderator role here in Kandahar Province. All the projects are implemented by the national and international organisations, they are the ones who use resources and they do whatever they wish.'*¹⁶⁸

Although coordination between sectors at the central level was generally viewed as good, the coordination between sectors at the provincial level was viewed less positively.

*'Our main problem is that we don't have coordination among DAIL and DoPH, maybe they have some programmes like that but we are not aware of that, and similarly DAIL may not be aware of the nutrition programmes in DoPH.'*¹⁶⁹

*'There is a national nutrition committee at ministry level; MAIL, MoPH, MRRD, MOC, WFP, and UNICEF are in that committee. They have their coordination meetings. But at the provincial level we don't have such committees or coordination meetings.'*¹⁷⁰

*'Related departments in all the provinces can call a monthly meeting with all NGOs and discuss about their related sector; but unfortunately there is a gap in terms of this coordination.'*¹⁷¹

Modern IT is used for internal management by many implementing organisations.

¹⁶⁵ UN AGENCY, BDK

¹⁶⁶ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BDK

¹⁶⁷ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹⁶⁸ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

¹⁶⁹ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹⁷⁰ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹⁷¹ NGO, KBL

*'We use sources from the internet while making our policies; we get our primary data for making a policy from internet. Also we do read similar policies from other organisations and we use them in our own policies. It is very important to make our policies according to the facilities we have. All our employees analyse this and according to those facilities and needs, we make a policy.'*¹⁷²

Communication systems between organisations appear to consist of an ad hoc array of media: use of telephones prevails, especially mobiles. Email contact was said to be common among NGOs but less so with government organisations. An official of a UN organisation summarised the patterns of inter-organisational communication:

*'Mostly we communicate through emails and invitation letters; for example, when there is a monthly meeting in the health sector, the Health Department itself sends us an email, we participate in the meeting. After termination of the meeting, they send us the material of the meeting through the internet (email). NGOs and UN organisations usually communicate through software, especially email, and rarely through the telephone. Governmental organisations mostly communicate through documents, like their invitation letters are hard copies; they use hardware and most of their documents are hard; still there are pen, paper and documents in the government system but NGOs and UN organs are using software and their communication system is through email.'*¹⁷³

Use of such media was endorsed by other respondents:

*'Especially with government organs we cannot contact through email. Even if we contact any government organs through email we need to have a meeting as well so that we can ask them for whatever needs we have. Mostly we can contact them through face-to-face meetings. But if we want to contact other international organisations, we can use email to exchange information with each other.'*¹⁷⁴

Others emphasised that official business with government often adhered to use of hard copy and ordinary mail:

*'NGOs mostly use e-mail but government stakeholders use written documents.'*¹⁷⁵

*'Government offices usually connect through documents. And in non-governmental institutions, documents are not used as much; they communicate more through e-mail and phone.'*¹⁷⁶

*'On formal occasions, we contact each other through written documents, but in normal circumstances like coordinating with each other and sharing information, we use emails and internet.'*¹⁷⁷

Dissemination of knowledge was only part of communication, and face-to-face meetings such as Sectoral Working Groups and workshops were also cited as important media for information and exchange:

*'There are two things, one is to send policies to them via email or written document, and second is to explain the policies for them so that they can better implement those policies.'*¹⁷⁸

¹⁷² NGO, NGH

¹⁷³ UN AGENCY, BDK

¹⁷⁴ NGO, BMN

¹⁷⁵ NGO, BMN

¹⁷⁶ NGO, BDK

¹⁷⁷ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

¹⁷⁸ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BDK

There was evidence of generational differences in use of communication media:

*'Because many young people graduate from universities and they have access to computers and internet, their knowledge has increased and they know English as well. Internet is also a good instrument, when someone wants any information they can use the internet.'*¹⁷⁹

Use of ITC appears to be spreading:

*'Previously we had only telephone and satellite which weren't working everywhere but now thank God, internet is working in almost all places. We can contact our provincial departments through internet and we can share our activities. There are some telecommunication tools and video conferences as well.'*¹⁸⁰

There was no mention of web-based communication or file-sharing applications within and between organisations. Use of mass media to communicate with the public was also limited. From a university, one respondent commented:

*'Actually 95 per cent of our people have TVs in the city while only 5 per cent of our people watch TV in the villages. Public awareness programmes via TV channels won't help our rural people. If we hold workshops, we need much budget to pay for their transportation and accommodation. The newspaper system has gone from our system because most of our people are uneducated.'*¹⁸¹

An example from Bamyan emphasises the constraints to public communication:

*'One of the main problems that we have in Bamyan is that our national radio doesn't work over 4 to 5 km from the centre of Bamyan. Even the national television of Bamyan is very weak. People don't usually use any media here.'*¹⁸²

Policy awareness

While awareness existed of broad, national level development strategies, knowledge of the details of policies was conspicuously absent from interviews. One illustration named by a provincial official was an exception:

*'They call it NADF (National Agricultural Development Framework) which is available in our website in three languages: Dari, Pashto and English. It is aligned with ANDS.'*¹⁸³

Otherwise, awareness of policies seemed to exist only in theory and only at national levels.

According to one NGO informant in Bamyan:

*'You won't find [in government departments] specific policies on agriculture that were passed by Parliament... If they have some policies, they are not updated and it is not useful for the current situation.'*¹⁸⁴

As a result, provincial departments were said to be often unaware of policies made above them within the same Ministry. As one INGO respondent based in Kabul put it:

*'The staff of MAIL aren't aware of the policies which are made by MAIL itself so, when someone isn't aware of the policy, how will they implement it?'*¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁹ NGO, NGH

¹⁸⁰ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

¹⁸¹ UNIVERSITY, NGH

¹⁸² NGO, BMN

¹⁸³ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BDK

¹⁸⁴ NGO, BMN

At the provincial level, staff in government departments were typically unable to name specific policies, and NGO partners were unaware of their existence. Low levels of intersectoral policy awareness can be attributed, in part, to poor communication between sectors. For instance, one Health Ministry informant commented on the agriculture sector:

*'I don't have information, maybe there is a principal policy for agriculture development but I haven't seen any. I have seen ANDS (Afghanistan National Development Strategy) policy. Agricultural development is mentioned there. But I haven't seen any policy about agricultural development. Maybe such policies do exist but we don't know about them because no one has shared them with us.'*¹⁸⁶

One Provincial government official commented:

*'They do not send policies, they send plans for us to follow; these are mentioned in the three-year plan of MAIL... I will check and give you the hard copy of it if I find one...'*¹⁸⁷

The same lack of policy awareness existed within NGOs that work directly with provincial departments. While some larger NGOs who collaborate with national level Ministries have a good understanding of the policy situation, those NGOs that are implementing partners, or whose activities are coordinated by the provincial government, confine their activities to specific projects in specific areas, and their level of policy awareness is limited. Evidently there was no information available through easily accessed knowledge systems:

*'Every government office has their own policies. But we haven't read any policy on this. Several times when we contacted those offices they said that we have policies even at district level. But unfortunately, we don't have direct access to agricultural and food security policies. We don't exactly know if they have such policies, or if they refer to provincial development plans as policies.'*¹⁸⁸

Through the interviews, little information was gathered about knowledge management. Lack of communication and public awareness were referred to in the stakeholder consultation in Kabul in April 2016. Two suggestions were made by one participant:

'The first suggestion was about the establishment of a network for sharing information about nutrition and development systems for the country and also at the South Asian regional level. The second suggestion was regarding the sharing of information within Afghanistan. He particularly emphasised the need for the agriculture and public health departments – both departments being involved in nutrition systems and policies to undertake to review the policies and also share data regarding access to food for women and girls. He highlighted that developing an understanding regarding this data is important for all actors in the field, including other organisations and NGOs.'

NGO.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ NGO, KBL

¹⁸⁶ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

¹⁸⁷ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹⁸⁸ NGO, BMN

¹⁸⁹ <http://www.lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/LANSA%20-%20AREU%20stakeholder%20event%20%40%20Kabul.%20April%2025%2C%202016.pdf>, p.23

Another participant made the following suggestions:

- *'Policies should be in local languages and very short and should be understandable to local farmers. All the challenges and problems regarding agriculture should be addressed in the policies...'*
- *Media should be involved in such agriculture and nutrition programmes...'*
- *People should know about the nutritious food via public awareness programmes through media channels...'*
- *Educational programmes should be added in education courses through Afghanistan's Ministry of Education.'*

UN AGENCY.¹⁹⁰

A third participant commented:

'... concerning the effective use of media that while nutrition is related to food security and food diversity, there are several TV channels that have cooking programmes which have no food value. For eg. instead of showing how to cook kebabs on such TV shows, TV channels must take some social responsibility and hire a nutrition officer to ensure that the food shows present some knowledge and learning on nutrition to the common people.'

NGO.¹⁹¹

A fourth emphasised the challenge in the mass media:

'... the media is playing a negative role regarding nutrition in Afghanistan. Ingredients of energy drinks are always listed on their packets which are imported to Afghanistan. It is clear that they have no nutritious value and are in fact really dangerous for health. However, all the youngsters are convinced by TV channels and they are using and consuming these energy drinks.'

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT.¹⁹²

Other participants endorsed the note of caution:

'... the media in Afghanistan is free and work for profit. One shouldn't expect from the media to work against any profit motives. They are full profitable organisations and are working for their own profits. The TV channels have their own agendas and produce programmes that can benefit them rather than for public good. It is important that one realises that this will be the reality of the media sector.'

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.¹⁹³

'... in a health show on national television, a doctor was promoting Nestle Milk Powder. It was a clear indication that the motive was supporting profits for Nestle and not improving nutritional knowledge. This must not be allowed.'

UN AGENCY.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰<http://www.lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/LANSA%20-%20AREU%20stakeholder%20event%20%40%20Kabul.%20April%2025%2C%202016.pdf>, p. 34.

¹⁹¹<http://www.lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/LANSA%20-%20AREU%20stakeholder%20event%20%40%20Kabul.%20April%2025%2C%202016.pdf>, p. 35.

¹⁹²<http://www.lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/LANSA%20-%20AREU%20stakeholder%20event%20%40%20Kabul.%20April%2025%2C%202016.pdf>, p. 35.

¹⁹³<http://www.lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/LANSA%20-%20AREU%20stakeholder%20event%20%40%20Kabul.%20April%2025%2C%202016.pdf>, p.35.

Project coordination and implementation

Provincial level project coordination and implementation

Despite the heavy top-down nature of policy making in Afghanistan, the actual projects often originate from the bottom. With the exception of those projects implemented from Kabul through NGO ‘parallel governance’ channels, projects are often proposed at the provincial level, sent up to Kabul for approval, and then implemented at the local level within a complex bureaucratic system.

As one DAIL official explained:

‘[In the past] everyone had their own plans and started their work even without the coordination of the relevant ministries before but now, plans are made on the provincial level with the coordination of the DOF, Governor’s office, and of the experts. The project is reviewed a few times in the PDC [Provincial Development Committee] to check whether this has already been done and that no other stakeholders should be working on the similar thing in the same area. Once finalised, the PDC signs it and sends it to the Governor but then again, it goes through the relevant Departments and afterwards to the relevant Ministries. One of the documents goes to the Ministry of Finance where it will be forwarded to the relevant Ministry but unfortunately, due to lack of budget, the projects cannot simply be approved by the relevant Ministries. If we propose 100 projects, only 4 will be approved and that is the problem here.’¹⁹⁵

Within this system the role of the Provincial Governor was said to be crucial. While each department has vertical line responsibility to its central Ministry, the Governor’s office was said to be an essential vertical link between diverse provincial level activities, and between the province and central government activities. The office is the source of legitimacy for the Provincial Development Committees, and is the mechanism by which PDC decisions can be implemented.

‘The Provincial Governor communicates with IDLG and other governmental offices. In our case, we only communicate with our headquarters and other offices.’¹⁹⁶

‘We [the PDC] are directly in contact with Governor’s office. The Provincial [Governor’s] office has their own different sections like political, social, and executive sections. If the people face problems in any of these sections, we directly contact the provincial office and ask them to help solve our problems.’¹⁹⁷

The PDCs are the most significant hubs at which communication and coordination between provincial-level sectors and development actors occur. Often meeting monthly, these Committees involve stakeholders in the development sector from NGOs, government Departments and donor organisations, and are generally multi-sectoral. Crucially for integrated agriculture and nutrition projects, this is the only regular and official point of contact between these two sectors at the provincial level.

‘Provincial Departments are related to the government and I mentioned before that they have working coordination meetings, which are at the provincial level. It is called the Provincial Development Committee meeting, which is held once a month. All the stakeholders, Provincial Departments, NGOs, and donors participate in these meetings and they share their ideas. For example, NGOs who are involved in the health

¹⁹⁴ <http://www.lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/LANSA%20-%20AREU%20stakeholder%20event%20%40%20Kabul.%20April%2025%2C%202016.pdf>, p.35.

¹⁹⁵ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

¹⁹⁶ NGO, BDK

¹⁹⁷ PDC, NGH

sector share their information and reports with DoPH and NGOs who are involved in the agriculture sector, share their information with DAIL.¹⁹⁸

All respondents who attended PDC meetings held them in high regard as a communication and coordination hub, especially compared to the situation before PDCs operated.

*'Compared to previous years, now there is more coordination ... we have our PDC meeting and before we implement our projects we present them there. Let me give you an example: recently we wanted to implement a project in Kama District; before we implemented our project we shared our plans with DAIL. They told us that they already had similar project there and we should implement our project somewhere else. And that prevented the duplication of our project.'*¹⁹⁹

PDCs are forums to coordinate but also focus on the biggest projects operating in the region such as large-scale development and construction projects.

*'The agenda is mostly developmental and constructional...for example, the policies and strategies are not discussed about capacity building of education. The main point of discussion is constructional issues like about construction of roads, electricity lines, division of food and construction of schools. Most construction issues are discussed here. I said many times that the agenda should include other issues as well; for example, there should be some discussion about capacity building of the governmental staff.'*²⁰⁰

As PDCs are often heavily focused on major development projects and infrastructure, NGOs frequently coordinate amongst themselves in provincial level Sector Working Groups (SWGs).

*'There are PDC meetings at a provincial level; all the organisations participate in these meetings. Beside this, there are SWG meetings. Every month they organise these coordination meetings and exchange information there. They know which NGO works in which area. These organisations provide their working reports in these meetings; also they share this information through emails.'*²⁰¹

*'These PDC and SWG meetings always help us to prevent the duplication of our projects ... Still, we can't say that there is 100 per cent coordination among NGOs. As compared to previous times it has improved but still we need more coordination among organisations.'*²⁰²

The Sectoral Working Groups are also where NGOs collaborate with the respective government Departments, who then liaise with Kabul via their line Ministry.

*'Each of the NGOs working in Badakhshan has sectors that are related with them. We have monthly meetings with the agriculture sector, we have coordination with them... In taking a project, we first register it in the Economy Department, then the related sector is going to justify it. The Agriculture Department should know what we're doing so that the duplication of duties will be avoided. In addition, our works shouldn't be same as other NGOs, so for this reason, we need to contact them before taking a project.'*²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ NGO, KDH

¹⁹⁹ NGO, NGH

²⁰⁰ UN AGENCY, BDK

²⁰¹ NGO, KDH

²⁰² NGO, NGH

²⁰³ NGO, BDK

Within-sector coordination also appears to be strong with government departments coordinating with the main NGO actors within their sector. An NGO representative commented:

*'In Badakhshan they are cohesive and we have coordination with each other, for example DAIL, CONCERN, AKDN and WFP are working closely with each other. I attended many coordination meetings and I saw that whenever there is an agriculture project, all these organisations work closely together on that project; they share experience with each other and there is a close coordination among them.'*²⁰⁴

District and community coordination

Communication and cooperation at local and district levels operate through formal, informal and semiformal governance structures. Respondents commented on the formal structure of the National Solidarity Programme run by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, where elected village-level Community Development Committees (CDCs) are set up; each chairperson of such committees sits on an unelected District Development Assembly (DDA).

*'There was a meeting on the provincial level which was on planning and everyone, even from the districts, was invited. They asked about the priorities ... and finally presented the plan for Bamyan. It is a five year plan and the organisations should align their work according to it. We have CDC meetings at village level and we give them information. They talk about their priorities and needs in that meeting. They talk about how they need improved seeds and that they might give second priority to agricultural canals that they need. They might give the third priority to water management because they are worried about floods, or they might say the schools... According to that, they make a CDC plan.'*²⁰⁵

*'CDCs are the most influential networks. They are registered with the government and have a good regular structure. They are very active in some places; people have access to the CDCs, and they go there and receive training. But in some places the people have less access to them and their activities are very weak.'*²⁰⁶

CDCs are seen as powerful instruments as a result of their ability of direct development work, writing proposals and receiving funds for implementation. However, for this they are dependent on acceptance and approval of their proposals based upon policies developed centrally. Nevertheless, the vertical linkages between central policies and community project planning are weak in some instances. A UN agency official commented:

*'The initiative doesn't start from the community level, it starts from a higher level then it trickles down, so CDCs only know that this is what we are going to do because this is the policy. They are not consulted on the policies because we don't have the time and we don't have the right environment to sit down and start working on policies and know what is happening in the communities.'*²⁰⁷

Coordination between CDCs, DDAs and the provincial government is generally regarded as functioning well, with practical emphasis on provision of information rather than participation in the policy making process. For example, in Bamyan Province, representatives are invited to yearly conferences:

²⁰⁴ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BDK

²⁰⁵ NGO, BMN

²⁰⁶ NGO, NGH

²⁰⁷ UN AGENCY, KBL

*'There are yearly conferences called 'government to the people'. There are PowerPoint presentations that are given to the representatives of the people and then every sector and district present their activities to the people. They then ask if they have questions.'*²⁰⁸

Although CDCs and DDAs lack power, at the district level they are extremely significant and all NGOs operating in the area are required to cooperate with them.

*'For NGOs, the main gate to enter in a district or village is the CDC; they should be in the picture of everything. When we make a concept for an activity, there should be the CDC and DDA; we should organise our concept with 4 or 5 community or district representatives present. We want everything to be bottom-up and farmers should be the participants because we aren't aware of all the facts.'*²⁰⁹

As instruments of the National Solidarity Programme managed by MRRD and DRRDs, CDCs also work with NGOs locally to propose projects for their local area. Proposals are written by CDCs with the assistance of the NGOs and then approved at the provincial level by government department members:

*'Most of our works are through NSP and CDC programmes. Therefore, most of our contacts are with DRRD. As I said, we have a project appraisal committee, and all the government organisations like DAIL, DoPH, DRRD, DOE, DOC are members of that committee. Before we implement our projects we share the concept with this committee and after their approval we implement those projects.'*²¹⁰

In addition to the CDCs, there are informal shura committees revolving around specific issues:

*'Now in every district and village we have councils (shuras); we have parents' shuras, teachers' shuras... In every village we have different shuras.'*²¹¹

The degree to which these informal groups are consulted or involved in projects, however, is limited. Shuras lack the power that comes as an official state institution. Nevertheless, shura councils have local significance within traditional culture and structures. They can also be the origin of civil movements including farmers' cooperatives. They may constitute both a bridge and a barrier between traditional eldership and the political/technocratic authorities.

'I have seen the cooperatives which have participated in making of policy and they have enough experience, but maybe they don't have enough knowledge. They are experienced: they have lived in the society so the people do accept their ideas as an elder or a Mullah. They can attend meetings for making policy and I have seen in lots of places where the habitat itself was doing something for the councils. [I have seen that the authorities] asked the elders and local people for their opinion rather than the educated people because either the educated people weren't in the society or the elders' idea wasn't heard. If the policy makers want to work with people in the current time, there are two kinds of people in Afghanistan; the first kind is the elders whose views can be accepted, even while they don't have knowledge, and the second kind is the educated people. If they work with educated people, we can have more expectations from them according to the methods in policy making and method of implementation, but if they work with local people, some

²⁰⁸ NGO, BMN

²⁰⁹ NGO, KBL

²¹⁰ NGO, NGH

²¹¹ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

problems may come up in the future, like maybe the policy will be stopped or maybe it won't carry on well.²¹²

Project outcomes

Respondents offered evidence of rural change and development progress and most were able to name successfully implemented projects. Typical of such projects were:

*'The most useful project here in Kandahar that people are satisfied with is the greenhouse initiatives. In the past people imported lots of vegetables from other places but now after building greenhouses here we can produce vegetables in all seasons of the year. Greenhouses were a small initiative but very useful.'*²¹³

Also in Kandahar:

*'A cooperative has started a collection of milk in order to produce dairy products; it was started with a small capacity but later it was developed and well improved.'*²¹⁴

*'Different kinds of fruits are now available all over Badakhshan. Before, the people in Badakhshan had no access to fruits. They had no knowledge of how to grow vegetables before but now they cultivate different vegetables.... In the year 2002, the amount of death among pregnant women was 6,527 and the main reason for that was poverty, lack of iron in their bodies, and lack of availability of fruits and vegetables. But now this amount decreased a lot and the number is 3270, which is a remarkable decrease.'*²¹⁵

Of the criticisms of policies and projects reported by respondents, most can be grouped into five broad categories:

- Short term projects cancelled or running out of money
- Too much attention paid to treatment of malnutrition, not prevention through agriculture
- A focus on ineffective and/or symbolic projects wasting money
- Lack of effective monitoring and evaluation programmes
- Lack of local capacity and resources and over-reliance on donor organisations

Short-termism

Short-term projects were seen as a major problem because of lack of sustainability after the project finishes. Most often donor organisations were seen as responsible for perpetuating a culture of short-termism. An NGO official in Badakhshan commented:

*'These programmes should be long-term. The peoples' capacity should be built so that good changes will come in terms of their nutrition and life. It would be better if NGOs work for 2-5 years because just like in business, the first year is an advantage while the next is loss. So if the NGO only works for 6 months to 1 year, when they leave their job, no change will follow. If they work for a long time, agriculture and livelihoods would be improved.'*²¹⁶

'The problem that we have here in Afghanistan is that most of our projects are incomplete. For example, if we have a project in the agriculture sector for gardening, we need at least three years to complete the project and to get some product out of the trees or garden. But most of our projects are for one year. And

²¹² UNIVERSITY, BMN

²¹³ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, NGH

²¹⁴ NGO, KDH

²¹⁵ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BDK

²¹⁶ NGO, BAD

because our projects are left incomplete, we can't get good results. MAIL has to make a policy and guideline along with donors to complete each agriculture project because most of our projects in agriculture sector are incomplete. It will take 3 to 4 years to complete an agriculture project and get a result out of it. But now our projects end after one year, and there is no one to take care of these incomplete projects so the whole project will vanish. For example, we had projects in Nangarhar's canals. Lots of NGOs came there and planted orange trees. After one year when their project finished, the workers left, and there was no one to take care of those trees so after some time all those trees vanished. Therefore we need to make a policy to make the projects longer and convince the donors to provide funds.²¹⁷

To combat the culture of short-termism, a shift from projects to longer-term programmes was seen as desirable, as was reducing dependence on funding from foreign donors.

'Our work is all project-based, but I think it is important to stop project-based work. Our work should be in long-term programmes in order to enable people to be self-sufficient.'²¹⁸

'Before we do something we should make a plan or a system so that we can continue our project even if the donor's funding is over. We should try not to make our country dependent on donor and foreign funds. We should try to use our own resources so that we can fund our development projects.'²¹⁹

Cure rather than prevention

There was a perception that some (humanitarian) project interventions were designed and implemented at the expense of longer-term projects, especially in tackling malnutrition.

'WFP have done lots of work on nutrition here. They distributed food products for poor people in this province. These sorts of works are not very helpful because their projects are short-term and after sometime they stop their aid. Instead of this type of help, they should implement more useful projects here. We have lots of arable lands, water, and human resources. Instead of distributing food products they should improve the agriculture sector here and teach people how to produce food; that type of project will be more effective.'²²⁰

Given the scale of Afghanistan's problems it is perhaps not surprising to find a high level of focus and emphasis on humanitarian relief programmes and policies. Evidence of national-level Sectoral Working Groups shows great importance given to monitoring and responding to rapidly changing humanitarian crises. Within the nutrition sector this means distribution of emergency food rations and clinical treatment of severe malnutrition. While it is beyond question that such initiatives are highly important, there was evidence of a need to move towards parallel agricultural development policies based upon long-term, sustained investment in the agricultural and nutrition sectors to complement the focus on emergency response — though there are signs that this is beginning to improve. As one UN agency official in Kabul stated:

'For me, since it is a country coming from emergency, the emergency network has been really influential. They have been mapping who is doing what, where are the gaps in funding, attracting lots of funding for programmes, so on. The emergency network for both agriculture and nutrition through FSAC has been really influential. The Nutrition Programme Coordination Committee is very new, and they are bringing new partners to sit down together... It is very influential because you have donors sitting in, you have World Bank,

²¹⁷ NGO, NGH

²¹⁸ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

²¹⁹ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

²²⁰ NGO, KDH

*and you have government people at policy level.... It is from the government but the UN has been pushing for this development coordination. We are thinking about slowly building capacity to move out from emergency to more protected and developed nutrition programmes. We have to make this more prominent, the government may have some kind of idea but they may lack capacity or resources to move it.*²²¹

At the provincial level there was evidence of a separation between emergency response and long-term development projects, with development activities coordinated through PDCs and emergency response activities through SWGs.

*'We have different meetings here; we have Sector Working Group emergency meetings for emergency cases and we have PDC meetings [for development] held on a monthly basis. The PDC, which covers eight sectors, hold their meetings and make an initial report afterwards and then present it to the Governor and the PDC too.'*²²²

Waste

The amount of money wasted by organisations and by governments was also a frequent source of dissatisfaction. Sources of waste identified were the high operational costs and salaries within NGOs and aid agencies, as well as ineffective projects with more symbolic than practical value.

*'In recent years we have witnessed NGOs implement projects which do not meet the basic needs of people. For example, NGOs have built many places to keep raisins and they spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on them, which is not very useful, and no one really uses them. The organisations and NGOs should spend the budgets on more useful projects; for example, they should spend money on building water dams.'*²²³

*'The things that have been done here are from the NGOs and not the government. The greenhouses that have been built by some of the NGOs are only symbolic and nothing else.'*²²⁴

Accountability

The most frequent criticism of project implementation was the lack of monitoring and evaluation. The formal systems that were said to operate were explained by a member of DAIL:

*'Provincial Councils, District Councils, and civil society organisations always monitor the implementation of projects. Besides that, in the structure of MAIL there are departments of planning and policies; the Director of Agriculture along with head of planning and policy departments always monitor the implementation of projects.'*²²⁵

Though this monitoring and evaluation process operates in theory, it is widely seen as ineffective and for show. While NGOs and international agencies were largely seen to be accountable, the project implementing partners were not viewed as accountable.²²⁶ Their activities were rarely checked by people on the ground, and CDCs and shuras were said not to have an official mechanism of monitoring and evaluating programmes:

²²¹ UN AGENCY, KBL

²²² NGO, BMN

²²³ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

²²⁴ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, NGH

²²⁵ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

²²⁶ During a separate interview in Jalalabad, Nangarhar in May 2015, officials of the NGO DAI, the implementing organisation of the IDEA-NEW programme, commented that USAID have strict monitoring even 6 years after the project ended. There is internal M/E, plus M/E sub-contracted to a third party. Originally, performance was measured against 21 indicators, but the total is now down to 9, but still diverse, including agricultural output, sales, job creation, training, capacity building, etc.

‘There is an accountability mechanism that exists but it is more on paper, not actual. For example, they invite media and in front of them they show accountability and explain that they have done this, they spent that much money and so on, but there is no such accountability mechanism to show their activities with proof [that they have conducted and spent the money reasonably] and there is no punishment and reward system for them.’²²⁷

Lack of monitoring and evaluation is seen as a significant cause of corruption and inefficiency, wasting money that could be used on project implementation:

‘You know, in the last decade we had more than enough funding for Afghanistan by the foreign countries, but due to no accountability mechanism, nobody has been asked, where have all the funds gone? If we had proper monitoring and evaluation teams, we could monitor all the projects accordingly and today we could know the source of all the funds, what has been spent and where it was spent.’²²⁸

Lack of accountability was linked to a pervasive culture of corruption which not only siphons money away from where it is needed but also distorts the programme priorities and the targeting of resources.

‘Sometimes you have completed the project, which didn’t work, but it benefited the people implementing it and they want to repeat it because they will benefit from it. So you do something even though you are actually corrupting the whole system and you know it is not benefiting the people. A few are benefiting and they like the decisions, so they will decide to the things the same way because they have their pockets lined up.’²²⁹

‘One of the biggest problems in Afghanistan is the corruption. Unfortunately, half of our authorities and policy makers want make policies or design a project in a way so that can get a ‘benefit’ out of it. They prefer their own benefit. All these are barriers against policy makers.’²³⁰

Corruption is widely seen as a government rather than NGO problem, yet corruption in politics has knock-on effects for development projects. An NGO official made the comparison:

‘We don’t have transparency in our government system. The NGOs are impartial and neutral; we have our own specific criteria for malnutrition; for example, poor women, malnutrition-affected women, women who don’t have any source of income, widows and so on. We can follow up these criteria but the government can’t follow them. For example, if government gives money for the District Governor to distribute to poor people, the Governor will give it to his subordinates, and if he doesn’t do that, the subordinates will make a conspiracy against him and will fire him from his position. So these sorts of problems do exist in our government.’²³¹

Local capacity, resources and bureaucracy

Government departments are widely seen to be lacking capacity to handle projects and contribute to policy making. Lack of capacity within government Ministries and Departments was reported by (I)NGO officials to be a serious problem.

²²⁷ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, KDH

²²⁸ NGO, KDH

²²⁹ UN AGENCY, KBL

²³⁰ NGO, BMN

²³¹ NGO, NGH

*'We are working in several districts but trust me, the [government] staff aren't working at all; while they are literate, I have a lot more information than them, even though I'm not working in the agriculture sector. This is because I am in touch with them every day and I share in their work; I am involved in their workshops and activities. But some government staff are illiterate; they just sit in their chair and wait for bribe. They don't have any activity.'*²³²

Even where technology for knowledge management is available staff may not be trained to use it. *'Governmental organizations mostly communicate through documents, like their invitation letters are hard copies; they use hardware and most of their documents are hard copy, still they use pen, paper and documents in the government system but NGOs and UN organizations are using software and their communication system is through email.'*²³³

*'For example, the Department of Education staff are still busy with pen, paper, documentation, and ruler, even though GIZ helped them with 18 computers last year and now maybe they have more than 50 computers. But they still use pen, paper and ruler; if we ask an official about the exact number of students in this school, he will search all over the document to find the number. But we can find this in a few seconds through computerising. I have asked for this change many times and the same case exists in the agriculture Department and other Departments.'*²³⁴

Lack of capacity is put down to various reasons including a dependence on foreign staff that contributes to short-termism:

*'The international staff that come here for 3 months or 6 months for their work isn't effective. Their turnover results are coming short on our goals.... For example, a foreigner comes in the country but is only allowed to stay here for 3-6 months. If he/she gets used to the environment at the first 3 months, he/she will end up wasting a lot of time. He/she then goes back and another person will replace him/her cannot take his/her work. We have seen it many times. When we ask something, their usual answer is 'the person before me didn't really explain things'. This has an important role so if people are hired for longer terms, then that would be great. The contract should be at least 2 years.'*²³⁵

Dependence on foreign staff means that capacity is not built among Afghans as most technical work is done by outside consultants and advisors. Short-term contracts for foreign staff are also seen as perpetuating a culture of short-term planning. One government official commented:

*'The issue is really not with turnover; the issue is with short-term planning of the donor agencies. The short-term plan of one year or two year is not helping the Government of Afghanistan to promote food security in this country. In fact, food security requires long-term planning and very few actors are interested in long-term planning. So that is why short-term planning is affected by turnover of their staff.'*²³⁶

There is generally a view that lack of government capacity is also due to insufficient salaries for civil servants, and a brain drain where competent people are recruited by NGOs or promoted to national levels where they can receive higher salaries. NGO officials were aware of this challenge faced by the public sector:

²³² NGO, KBL

²³³ UN AGENCY, BDK

²³⁴ UN AGENCY, BDK

²³⁵ NGO, BMN

²³⁶ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, KBL

*'There are a lot of professional staff in the organisations because the salaries in the organisation is much more than [that of] the government; everyone seeks a job in (non-governmental) organisations.'*²³⁷

*'This is a clear issue which governmental staff are working with a less salary and this is why they aren't interested for their job and salary.'*²³⁸

*'Most of the people with capacity are working with NGOs and UN organizations, I know most of them and a very small number of them are with MAIL.'*²³⁹

Government bureaucracy is also widely seen as an obstacle to progress. Bureaucracy includes over-staffing, long-term complicated and non-transparent processes, and complex tender processes for implementing NGOs. One UN official commented:

*'The staffing of governmental organisations is more than they need. For example an organisation which needs only 60 staff, now has about 180 staff but their work isn't appreciable at all and their skills are very low. According to their staffing, they have no shortage but their education level is very low.'*²⁴⁰

A Provincial Department official commented on bureaucratic inefficiency:

*'Let me give you an example, right now I need a mobile phone but I cannot get the one that I want. I have to ask procurement and the procedure will take three months. If we have enough budget after three months, I will have my phone otherwise I will never get the phone. Within those three months, I would have to bear many problems. There should be a system where it should just take three days.'*²⁴¹

An NGO official commented on project tender procedures:

*'To get one project, hundreds of NGOs will come to auction, and it is not clear who will take the projects. This is bureaucracy.'*²⁴²

Corrupt and nepotistic hiring practices were also said to be common within government departments, according to NGO officials:

*'This is a big problem in the government, that they hire people based on relations and ties but not based on merit. For example a person who doesn't know much about agriculture can be working in a very high position in the MAIL. And when they work, their output is not very good. Unfortunately this is a very big problem. Someone who has graduated from a law faculty is working as a director in the MAIL. Law and agriculture are two different professions. People who work in the agriculture sector must be specialists in that field, and they must have good experience.'*²⁴³

*'Hiring is based on relationships so there is a problem within the governmental system.'*²⁴⁴

*'There is a lack of capacity in Afghanistan, and they mostly hire people based on relations, not based on merit.'*²⁴⁵

'As a common Afghan I can say that most of the hiring done in government organisations is by relationships, they don't consider merit. Those who come through relations, I think they don't have the capacity to

²³⁷ NGO, KBL

²³⁸ NGO, BAD

²³⁹ NGO, KBL

²⁴⁰ UN AGENCY, BDK

²⁴¹ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

²⁴² NGO, NGH

²⁴³ NGO, BMN

²⁴⁴ NGO, BDK

²⁴⁵ NGO, KDH

*understand and use research. Therefore, the capacity is much less in government organisations. If we hire a person based on his knowledge and abilities, they will have the capacity...*²⁴⁶

A provincial government official also commented on staff turnover:

*'People will just come to replace them through connections but nobody asks them whether they know anything or not. The poor boys that are really skilled cannot get any jobs because the NGOs and the government organisations hire their workers through connections, leaving the skilled jobless.'*²⁴⁷

Even the implementation of projects and selection of beneficiaries by NGOs is pervaded by relationships. According to a provincial UN official:

*'It's the unemployed women, friends and relatives, and those within their circle [who participate in projects]. NGOs and institutions that work in this section basically find themselves acting as a business.'*²⁴⁸

A number of respondents acknowledged that primacy should be attached to the appointment of people with technical skills, who will often be of the younger generation. A provincial UN official commented:

*'They should abolish the older staff slowly and they should bring the young generation to work, but regretfully they don't hire the young generation...'*²⁴⁹

Even where there are well-educated young staff, they have to operate within organisational constraints. A UN official from Kabul argued:

*'You have brilliant guys in the Ministries who are really sharp and who understand if you tell them what is coming up and how things should be, they understand. They are very well trained but sometimes their hands are tied...'*²⁵⁰

4 Conclusions

4.1 Main themes

Emerging from this analysis are important themes concerning how agriculture can be further leveraged for nutrition within Afghanistan.

Lack of policy integration

Firstly, we found a lack of integrated policies, and where policies do, in theory, touch upon agriculture for nutrition, knowledge and practical value of these policies is limited at the implementation level.

²⁴⁶ NGO, NGH

²⁴⁷ PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, BMN

²⁴⁸ UN AGENCY, BDK

²⁴⁹ UN AGENCY, BDK

²⁵⁰ UN AGENCY, KBL

Gaps in responses

Secondly, there were significant gaps in our expectations:

- There was almost no articulation of the ways in which **women's participation in agriculture** can help nutrition. The multisectoral linkages envisaged were not evident in understanding agriculture and nutrition policies, and there was no evidence of knowledge of MAIL's new strategy. The only respondent who was able to explain the importance of women in agriculture was from MoWA, as noted in section 2.4.
- As noted earlier, this research did not consider the structures of **civil society** at the village and District level (Nemat and Werner 2016). Nevertheless, apart from the huge role of NGOs as implementing organisations of public projects, there was no evidence that national civil society organisations were engaged in advocacy on technical agriculture and nutrition issues. While many organisations are active in development issues – within particular spheres – a culture of awareness of sectoral and intersectoral development activities was very weak, and knowledge of shared experience was limited.
- Thirdly, therefore, a related gap was **knowledge management**: there seemed to be no national knowledge management architecture to record, report and disseminate policies, practices and experiences, and most individual organisations, both public sector and (I)NGOs, have failed to develop an accessible web presence that might strengthen the knowledge culture. Team collaboration and document sharing applications and software offer opportunities for knowledge management and sharing that might address the challenges of horizontal and vertical coordination. Use of Facebook and social media appear to be popular, especially with the younger generation, but were confined to personal use.

Poorly designed policies

Thirdly, the policies themselves were said to be often ill-designed through top-down processes, with insufficient knowledge and awareness of local realities and heterogeneity. Provincial stakeholders did not express much confidence in the knowledge of central policy makers, and noted an overdependence on foreign interventions.

Fragmented information flows

Fourthly, we found that communication both within and between sectors was good at both the national and provincial levels, but there was evidence that communication between the hierarchical — national and subnational — levels of government was poor. Information flows were fragmented within parallel and often ad hoc communication routes. There was little or no evidence of knowledge management processes, either through communication from the communities, districts and provinces to the centre, or of precise policies from the centre to the provinces. Use of modern information management technology — internet — was negligible. In separate discussions, use of social media was said to be confined to personal and social purposes.

Coordination constraints

Fifthly, there was evidence of coordination activities among myriad policy formulating bodies, funding and implementation partners but there are many inconsistencies to overcome.

Barriers at the national level

Major barriers remain to leveraging agriculture for nutrition. These are not confined to the specific sectors but symptomatic of Afghanistan's broader development challenges. Extreme dependence on external human and financial resources shapes policy and practice according to international expectations, but fails to deliver efficient and effective processes and outcomes. In particular, we find that lack of capacity and resources within government Ministries and Departments along with poor infrastructure and huge security concerns remain major barriers to progress.

Finally, the deteriorating security situation and increasing humanitarian needs, particularly from returning refugees (UNHCR 2016; United Nations General Assembly 2016) point to the need to manage and integrate in a deliberate way the acute humanitarian interventions and long-term chronic development needs, of which malnutrition is just one element.

4.2 Policy responses

Based upon our analysis we tentatively propose the following prioritisation for cross-sectoral policies leveraging agriculture for nutrition:

1. **Greater decentralisation of policy making to provincial levels.** This idea is not entirely novel, but needs significant development in dealing with national and subnational governance.²⁵¹ Devolution requires that the scale of operations strikes a balance between the availability of technical expertise and local capacity with the ability for sectors and organisations to communicate effectively in PDCs and SWGs. Provincial-level governance also results in policies that are likely to be context-specific, and with fewer inappropriate projects and policies created centrally or copied from other countries. It is necessary to formulate a 'context-sensitive' approach rather than a model of 'one-size fits all' (Nijat *et al.* 2016).
2. **Improved information flows and knowledge management between central and provincial governments.** Internet websites for public sector organisations need to be developed and used as knowledge repositories, with appropriate links to donor and international organisations, including the UN. Increased use of provincial governance — both line ministries and the governors' offices — and district level SWGs may be one mechanism to bridge the current poor lines of communication and information flow between national and provincial levels. Other solutions could include greater consultation in policy formation at the central level and improved training in government policies at the provincial level. This is consistent with other recommendations to strengthen the role and performance of traditional and modern civil society organisations at the lower levels of subnational governance (Nemat and Werner 2016).
3. **Investment in infrastructure for agriculture and nutrition,** with particular focus on creating the conditions for successful domestic markets and enterprises. Food chain organisation should also focus on creating processing and storage facilities and the infrastructure such as energy and communications upon which these depend. Roads and energy linking food chain stakeholders will enhance food access and expand a stable domestic agricultural market.

²⁵¹<http://moph.gov.af/Content/files/Position%20paper%20on%20decentralisation%20April%202015.pdf>

4. In addition to infrastructure, **the national trade policies for agribusiness** to be developed, in addition to infrastructure. This will beneficially impact many current problems including but not limited to: undue reliance on foreign imports; allegations of inadequate food safety controls; lack of national micronutrient fortification of foods; insecure physical access to food; and lack of agricultural incentives for farmers and food chain entrepreneurs.
5. Increased **investment in departmental government capacity** within the agriculture and health sectors. Capacity at the provincial level is weak due in part to ‘brain-drain’ as individuals with capacity are recruited to work for (I)NGOs, UN agencies and central government for significantly higher salaries.

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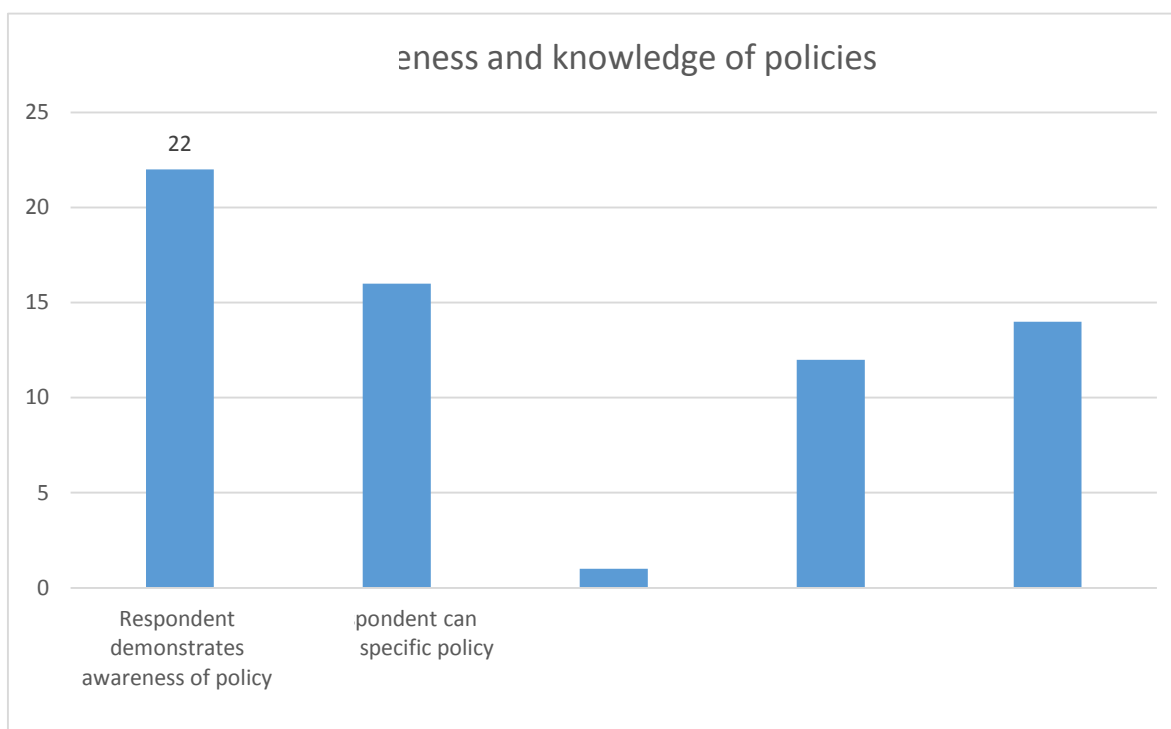
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Appendices

A1 Policy awareness

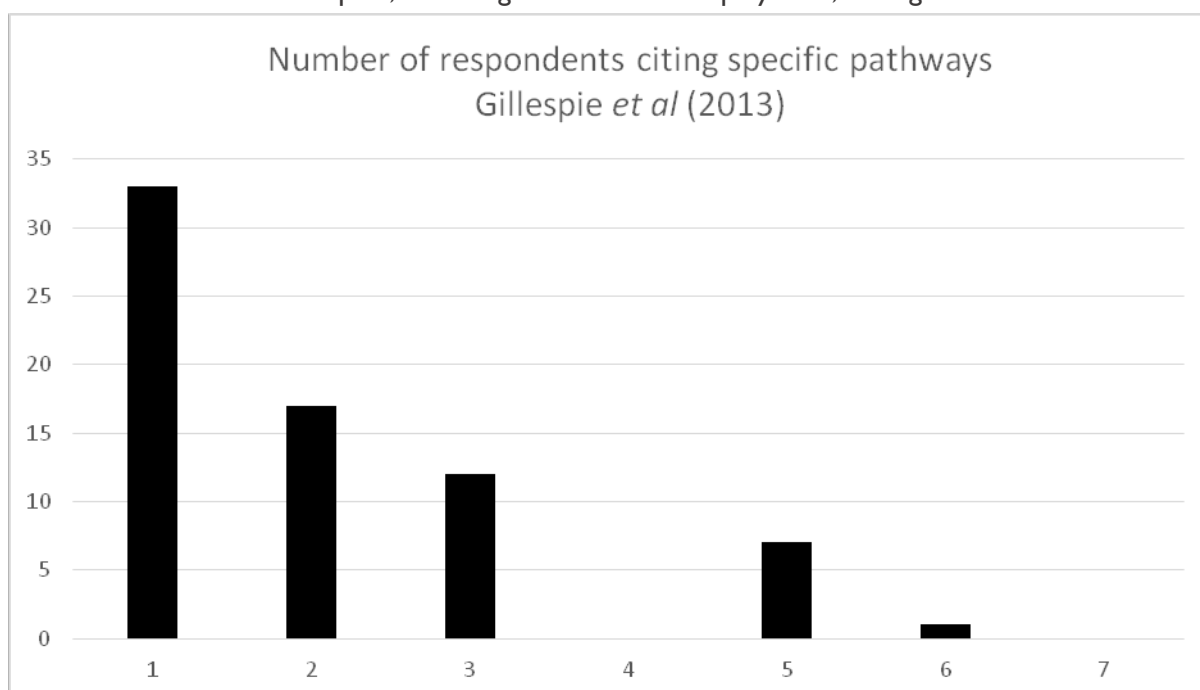
- Awareness of policy was mainly limited to respondents' own sector, and it was mostly considered that agriculture and nutrition policies were not strongly linked.
- Respondents were aware of broad policy approaches but were unable to cite policies precisely.



* Or states categorically that such a policy does not exist (explicit mentions only, not inferred by answers)

A2 Agriculture-nutrition impact pathways

- There was valuable evidence of interventions focused on nutrition-sensitive agriculture, such as kitchen gardens and fruits, to enhance dietary diversity.
- There was evidence that respondents considered that efficient food markets could contribute to food security and enhanced nutrition.
- Nevertheless, most articulations of formal agricultural policy tended to be productivist, concerned with outputs, income generation and employment, and agrifood trade.

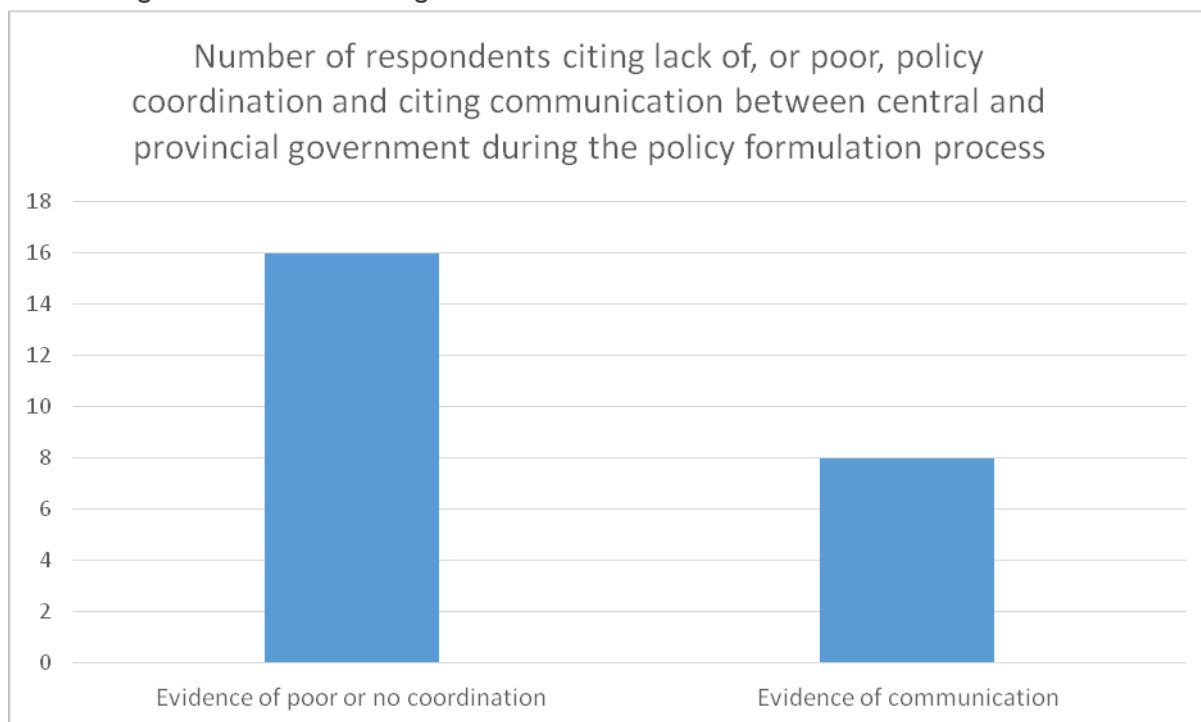


Pathways

1. Agriculture for food
2. Agriculture for income
3. Agriculture and food prices
4. Non-food expenditure of agricultural income
5. Female agricultural labour and power
6. Female agricultural labour and child care and feeding
7. Female agricultural labour and women's nutritional status

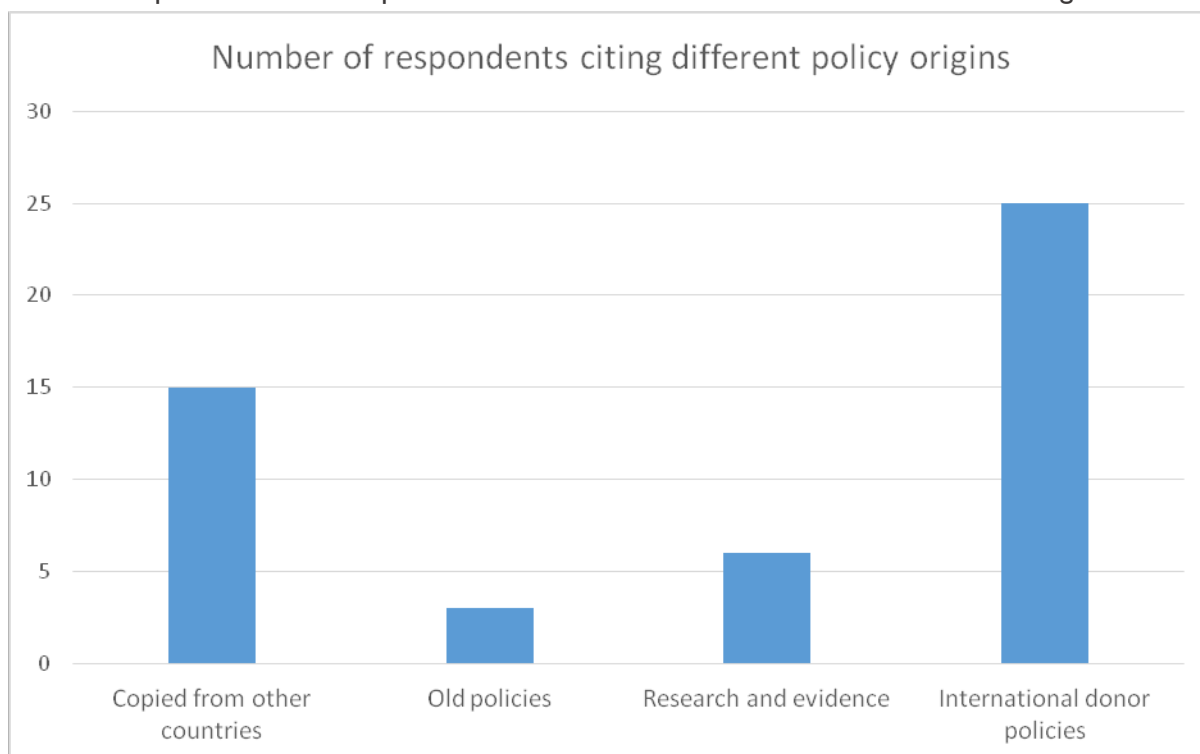
A3 Policy coordination and communication

- Policy making was highly centralised in Kabul among people who do not understand the provinces, districts and communities, and who, for fear of the insecurity, often do not travel to gain first-hand knowledge.



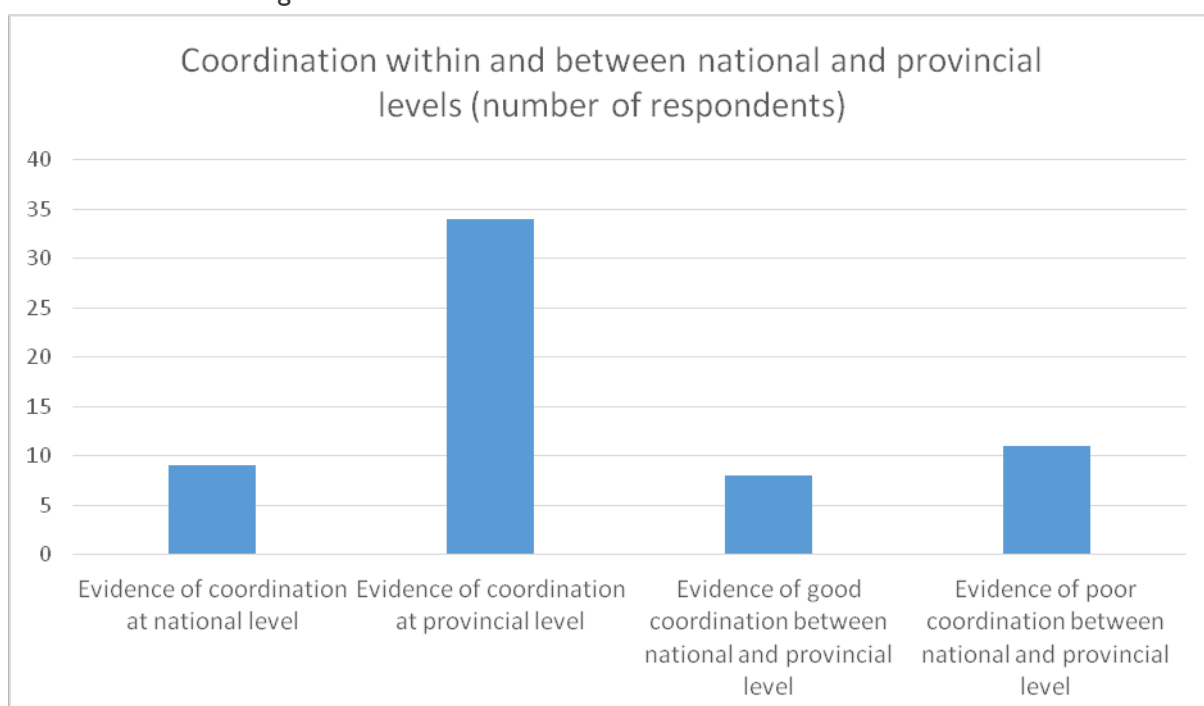
A4 External influence over policy formulation

- Policies and projects were said to be strongly influenced by donors, and were often copied and pasted from the experience of other countries and were not relevant for Afghanistan.



A5 Evidence of policy coordination

- Vertical communication for consultation from the centre down the provinces was minimal, even though there were systems for feeding information upwards from the provinces to the centre.
- There was evidence of good intersectoral policy coordination fora in Kabul, viz., the clusters and other linkages.
- There was evidence of good intersectoral coordination fora within the provinces, such as Sectoral Working Groups and the Provincial Development Committees, and other elements of subnational governance.



A6 Research quality and policy making

- Research was said to be weak and data often fabricated for fear of insecurity during field visits.

