

**The Community Fora Process in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan: a case study**  
**December 2004**

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to those who facilitated this study in Mazar, Eng Sayed Sawayz, Habitat, and Eng Islamuddin Amaki, Community Forum Development Organisation. I am also grateful to Samantha Reynolds, former Regional Programme Manager of Habitat Mazar, for her detailed comments on a draft and subsequent discussions.

## **Introduction**

This study looks at the development of a network of community-based institutions providing political, social and economic benefits to people in the city of Mazar-e-Sharif, in the north of Afghanistan. The ‘Community Fora’ (CF) were established through the intervention of UN-Habitat in a process which began in 1995. This process not only continued through turbulent political changes - civil war, the coming and the fall of the Taliban, and the establishment of a new transitional government – but also grew and expanded both in size, mandate, coverage and influence. It illustrates how, even in extremely difficult circumstances, existing structures and processes may be in place which can be built on once the broader political environment becomes more favourable.

This case study was designed to contribute to a research study funded by the World Bank and implemented by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).<sup>2</sup> It is thus structured around questions and analysis contained in the framework of that study. This paper is in four sections. The first section provides details of how the study was conducted and background historical and country information. The second section provides a chronological description of the development of the CF process. The third section provides analysis of the development outcomes, design and implementation of the programme.<sup>3</sup> The final section provides concluding comments on the IDS framework hypotheses.

## **1 Background and context**

### **1.1 Study design**

This study was conducted in September-October 2004, according to the framework provided by IDS. Interviews were carried out with key informants from community fora committees (CF), Habitat and municipal government in Mazar. Attempts were made to locate those who had been in position for a number of years to talk about their experiences in the 1990s, even if they were no longer involved in the programme or were working elsewhere. The Mazar meetings were facilitated by UN Habitat.

Given the limited nature of this study, extensive use was also made of four key reviews of the programme:

- Dudley, E. (1995) “Building Trust: an evolving approach to resettlement. Some lessons from Afghanistan.” A report for UNDP/UNCHS. November
- Tamas, A.(1998) “ Origins of the Community Fora Programme: Innovative Community Development in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan. 1995-1998” UNCHS, Afghanistan

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<sup>2</sup> See Greeley, Martin ‘ A Framework for Assessing Programme and Project Aid in LICUS Countries’ September 2004

<sup>3</sup> A note on terms: there was no specific donor-funded project or programme called the Community Fora Programme, rather a process emerged through a number of programmes. Here the word process is used to refer to longer-term development over time of the community fora, and programme refers to Habitat interventions and activities which brought about that process.

- Rodey, B. (2000) “Quantum leap...a framework for peace and development in conflict and post-conflict Afghanistan: a socio-economic evaluation of the Community Forum Programme” February, UNCHS.
- Reynolds, S. (1999) “Rebuilding Communities in the Urban Areas of Afghanistan” Paper prepared for the Symposium and Round Table on Operational Activities, 27 to 29 June 1999

Due to time constraints, broader project documentation was not examined, and the analyses of other documentation contained within these reviews was accepted. Interviewees stated that these reviews were accurate in their portrayal and analysis of the process.

Although the CF programme was implemented in five cities and two rural areas in Afghanistan, this case study concentrates on the experience of the programme in Mazar. Time constraints did not allow for an assessment of the nationwide programme, and it has not been as well documented. Furthermore, since the experience of different cities appears to be somewhat different, it made sense to concentrate on the development of the programme in Mazar. However, the experience of other cities is referred to in relation to general applicability of approaches and the possibilities of scaling-up.

The researcher deliberately conceived of and explained this study as an opportunity to ‘learn from success’, making clear that she was not conducting an evaluation. This was both because of the objectives of the study, and the limited time available.

## **1.2 Historical and social context in Afghanistan<sup>4</sup>**

Throughout Afghanistan’s history, centralised state structures have co-existed uneasily with fragmented, decentralised power structures and a resistance to rule by ‘outsiders’ (Evans et al, 2004). When Russia invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the response was a resistance movement formed of about one million fighters (Mujaheden) in 1200 units across the country. After 1989, when the Russians finally abandoned Afghanistan, a minority of armed Afghans, estimated at about 50,000, formed militias which vied for political and military control. These militias became associated with the four main ethnic groups in the country - Uzbek, Tajik, Hazara and Pashtun – and explicitly exploited ethnic divisions to consolidate their own position.

In 1992, when the Soviet-backed regime of Najibullah collapsed, a coalition of anti-Soviet, Peshawar-based Mujahedin groups took power. However, these groups suffered from weak leadership and factionalism, and the coalition gradually disintegrated into warring factions based on ethnic, clan, religious and personality lines. The state largely ceased to exist, and the economy was ruined. The various mujahedin parties battled among themselves for control of Kabul, and anarchy reigned in much of the rest of the country. Militia leaders and regional warlords exacted various taxes from local populations, and engaged in numerous forms of

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<sup>4</sup> Many extensive accounts of this are available – see, for example, Misra (2004), Rasanayagam (2003) and Rubin (1995).

extortion, including kidnapping. In 1996, UNDP's Human Development Report placed Afghanistan 169<sup>th</sup> out of 175 in the Human Development Index.

Order was largely restored and authority centralised with the emergence of the Pakistani-backed Pashtun Taliban who gained control city by city until they captured Kabul in 1996. They imposed strict uncompromising notions of Islam on the country, but showed little interest in governing, and appointed relatively few people to administration, except in the areas of law enforcement and security. Women could generally not work outside the home, be educated in formal schools, and in public had to be covered with the traditional *burqa*. Nonetheless they did bring order of a kind to Afghanistan, putting an end to the violence and chaos brought by factional squabbles. However, poverty and political oppression led to high levels of refugee outflows to neighbouring countries and elsewhere, although formal data on poverty levels from this period is scarce. A 1997 UNDP document describes the situation in the country thus:

Afghanistan remains a country in crisis, with its infrastructure and social capital mostly destroyed and its governance systems ruptured. The national economy has been crippled through loss of export earnings, loss of jobs, lack of national economic management and revenue generation capacities. ...the urban areas have seen widespread destruction of their physical, economic and social infrastructures. This has severely disrupted the delivery of basic services, as well as eroded the capacity of urban residents to cope with the war. It has also had a devastating effect on municipal administration. Urban areas have become the final destination for many internally displaced persons and returnees....<sup>5</sup>

The Taliban were ousted in November 2001 by an international military campaign, after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington by Al-Qaeda.

Following the signing of the Bonn Agreement in December 2001, an interim US-backed administration was established in Afghanistan under Chairman Hamid Karzai. After the Emergency Loya Jirga (Grand Council) of June 2002, this was replaced by a transitional authority and the appointment of Hamid Karzai as President. A new constitution was developed and Presidential elections were held in October 2004. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for April 2005, although most observers expect them to be postponed (Reynolds and Wilder, 2004). Despite some recovery, social indicators are very poor. The estimated rates of infant mortality at 115 per thousand live births, and maternal mortality at 1,600 per 100,000 live births are among the highest in the world. Access to clean drinking water and health services is very low. Illiteracy is extremely high with stark provincial and gender disparities (WorldBank, 2004).

### **1.3 Mazar-e-Sharif<sup>6</sup>**

Mazar-e-Sharif is a city with a population of about 700,000, in Balkh province, 270 km from Kabul and about 90 km from the border with Uzbekistan. From the 1930s the town has been the major commercial centre for Northern Afghanistan, drawing agricultural products and carpets from surrounding provinces and exporting them to

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<sup>5</sup> UNDP *Afghanistan Peace Initiative 1997-1999*. Islamabad, quoted in Tamas (1999 p13)

<sup>6</sup> Information on Mazar is drawn partly from Pain (2003)

Kabul and, from 1979, northwards into the Soviet territories. It was also a major industrial town with fertiliser and textile production.

With the withdrawal of the Soviet army in 1989, Mazar became a stronghold of the various parties that made up the different factional alliances that held Kabul until it was taken by the Taliban in 1996. During the early and mid-1990s, Mazar was under the shifting control of different Mujahideen alliances and subject to sporadic fighting and the constant threat of war. There was virtually no relationship with Kabul, and different ministries responded to local rather than national powerholders.

In 1997, the Taliban made their first assault on Mazar, and with the help of various alliances, succeeded in entering the city. However they failed to maintain the support they had negotiated and an uprising drove them out, and a massacre of 2000-4000 Taliban soldiers followed. The following year, the Taliban finally took the city and exacted revenge, most notably against the Hazara people. When resistance to the Taliban in Mazar crumbled in August 1998, they imposed their severe interpretation of Islamic law on that city, as had gradually occurred across most of the rest of Afghanistan. Tensions in the city remained high throughout the Taliban period and some of the fiercest fighting in October 2001 was in and around Mazar.

Since November 2001, the city has been the centre of the power struggles between two of the Northern warlords – General Dostum, an Uzbek, and the Provincial Governor, Ustad Atta, a Tajik. Skirmishes regularly break out as they fight over control of customs revenues from the border crossings, the local gas and oil fields, and the profits from the fertiliser factory in Mazar.

## **2. Programme description: the development of the community fora**

The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat<sup>7</sup>) has been involved in Afghanistan since 1986, mainly in sanitation and urban infrastructure projects. The development of the CF marked a change in Habitat in Afghanistan from a technology-focused infrastructure approach to a community-focused process approach. This section charts that shift. Since the changing political circumstances have impacted considerably on the way the CF have developed and operated, this paper considers the development of the programme in three phases, corresponding to distinct political regimes. The final part looks at the replication of the CF in other cities in Afghanistan.

### **2.1 Phase 1: 1995-1998, from project inception to the Taliban takeover in Mazar<sup>8</sup>**

The activities which became known over time as the ‘Community Fora Programme’ sat within several sequential UNCHS’ programmes: particularly the Urban Rehabilitation Programme (1995-1997) and Rebuilding Communities in Urban

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<sup>7</sup> UNCHS became known as UN-Habitat when it became a ‘programme’ (the United Nations Human Settlement Programme) within the UN system in 2002.

<sup>8</sup> This section draws heavily on Reynolds (1999)

Afghanistan (1997 onwards).<sup>9</sup> It had its origins in a number of UNCHS programmes, especially the ‘Housing for Resettlement Programme’ (1991-1995). What is particularly interesting is that this programme was seen primarily as a construction and infrastructure project, with ‘institution-building’ a relatively minor component. As one review of it notes:

the culturally appropriate institution-building community development process...was mentioned infrequently as a minor element...(and) over 90% of the text in the project’s 1994 document relates to physical aspects of reconstruction.” (Tamas 1998, p14-15).

However, by 1995 a review of the programme by Dudley concentrated entirely on the process and noted Habitat’s:

progressive expansion of scope and a steady shift from technology-oriented projects to a process-oriented programme. [The Housing for Resettlement programme] was crucial in making this transition. While many of the elements in the project document reflect a technology oriented approach, in its execution it rapidly became focussed on the process. (Dudley 1995,p16).

This change of focus was partly driven by the international Regional Programme Manager (RPM), Samantha Reynolds. On arrival in Mazar in 1995, she began extensive consultations with community leaders, male community members and municipal officers, initially around technical issues of infrastructure repair.<sup>10</sup> As her consultations continued, she identified the following three main interrelated needs<sup>11</sup>:

- the need for an integrated approach to issues around human settlements, recognising that problems could not be dealt with in isolation without affecting (positively or negatively) other issues. Thus drainage issues were linked to solid waste systems, which were linked to health and education, and people’s ability to pay, and hence livelihoods issues. The project had to deal with all of these issues but with limited resources had to avoid spreading itself so thinly that it tackled none of them.
- the need to form partnerships with other assistance actors. Many actors were working in this area, but “each had their own diagnosis, and set of prescriptions and often operated with total disregard for other actors treating the same symptoms in the same sector and area” (p6). In the context of an ‘emergency’ and with rapid turnover of expatriate staff, programmes tended to be short-term and poorly designed leading to a culture of dependency.
- the need to facilitate and support indigenous processes. Consultations emphasised the lack of unity between people, which led to factionalism, discrimination and prejudice. There was also competition over access to assistance. Yet people were organising through extended family and traditional structures, but often these were not linked to each other, nor to the assistance community.

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<sup>9</sup> In 1997, Habitat’s activities became part of UNDP’s Poverty Eradication and Community Empowerment (PEACE) Initiative 1997-99, which coordinated activities of UN agencies in Afghanistan at that time.

<sup>10</sup> This process is described in detail in Tamas (1998)

<sup>11</sup> Reynolds (1999 p6-7)

*Box 1: The problem*

“The underlying problem was the lack of agreement of what the symptoms were, let alone the diagnosis and prescription. For rarely was the patient even consulted and asked to describe her woes. Too often prescriptions in the form of project documents were more like screen plays for the assistance actors to perform before donors to raise more funds for the next script. Thus often performance was rewarded by more funding and perpetuating what were fast becoming iatrogenic illnesses; the very treatment was exacerbating the illness.”

*Practical examples of the problem*

“Attempts to clear rubbish by just paying the municipality to collect rubbish was leaving people more and more dependent on an unsustainable system which, as soon as the funding stopped, would collapse. At the same time it allowed the authorities to get away with diverting municipal funds to the front lines [of the conflict].”

Similarly, on the issue of water supply, there was a central water department which had sub-offices in each city, which was responsible for the management and maintenance of systems, and the collection of tariffs. However, with the break-up of the state, there were no central funds available and it became increasingly difficult to collect tariffs, because people refused to pay for services they did not receive. The aid community addressed these problems in an ad hoc manner – funding various rehabilitation projects, but without the means to recover recurrent costs. Moreover they did not consult with the department over the installation, so when the system broke down and people went to the water department, the department knew nothing about the scheme, and they had not been collecting tariffs to cover costs of maintenance and repair.

Source: Reynolds (1999, p3,7)

As trust began to build with community leaders, a local mullah was persuaded to allow a meeting of women in the mosque. It emerged strongly that a priority for women was to be included in consultation processes, as well as receive some immediate relief items. Thus before addressing the longer term development issues, the project helped to facilitate the involvement of relief agencies and helped the women to organise and identify beneficiaries. During this process, the need for a more neutral meeting place other than the mosque emerged. Habitat was initially very reluctant because of issues around ownership, cost recovery and actual use, also the fear that it could be taken over for political or military uses or looted. However as consultation on these issues continued it was slowly decided that a building could be used to unite people, and that there must be some form of management and system for recovery of recurrent costs. The idea of the ‘community forum’ was born, as a space where women and men could gather to discuss their problems and decide on the best ways to solve them.

The first CF was established in District 5 in Mazar. Habitat provided initial seed-funding to cover establishment costs, and income-generating projects were established to cover recurrent costs, building on an indigenous system of profit sharing (see below for a discussion of financial operations). Recognising the need for education courses

and health care, as well as training in vocational skills, these were provided on a cost-recovery basis, with exemptions for the poorest.

These activities, and others, were managed by a three member management team, who answered to a consultative board. This initially consisted of members of the shura (traditional council) but over time people began to select other members on the basis of different capacities, such as honesty, and the ability to think. All major decisions were discussed at three-weekly community meetings, which were gradually systematised into three distinct parts: devotional, administration and social.

*Box 2: Replication across the city*

After the CF in District 5 had been functioning for about 4 months, it began to attract attention and there were requests to establish other fora elsewhere in the city.

- in District 7 a women's cooperative was having marketing problems, and in that district the forum essentially absorbed the cooperative. The head of the co-op became the manager and drew on existing networks of displaced women living in a nearby IDP camp. At one point there were over 1000 women registered with this forum for embroidery work which was outsourced and done in homes.
- women from District 4 approached Habitat, which did not have the time to help. They went ahead on their own, and with some guidance and with their own capital, they began establishing a forum. Habitat later assisted the process.
- in District 2, Habitat was given a large building with land by an NGO who had received funding to build a clinic but could not run it.

Through a variety of circumstances by July 1998 a total of eleven fora were established and operating in Mazar, at least one in each of the city's districts. Expansion continued with branches of fora being established in two districts.

It became clear at this stage that some sort of support to the fora and coordination between them was needed. This largely came into being through ad hoc coordination between different CF management teams, but it was formalised and funded by Habitat as the Community Fora Development Organisation (CFDO). This was designed to operate on the same consultative and value-driven basis as the CFs.

Source: Tamas 1998

The Habitat programme also undertook some larger scale interventions at this time in different sectors, recognising that neighbourhood driven initiatives would not be productive, unless larger scale city-wide systems were made operable (see box 3, below).

When the UN evacuated international staff in 1997 the programme not only continued to function but expanded its operation. Regular radio contact showed that the programme was making progress, even in the midst of heavy fighting.

### ***Funding for the CFs***

Each forum began with \$9900 seed capital from Habitat to cover establishment costs (facilities rental, fixtures and fittings), provision of tools and facilities for the different production activities, as well as employees' salaries for a six month period. This was used to set up a range of income-generating activities. In theory, the education and health services generated enough to pay for themselves, and the production facilities made a profit. There was a sliding scale which made services available to the poor for free or at a level they could afford.

Employees received base salaries at the going rate for their professions, and administration employees were paid levels comparable to government rates. Profit percentages were calculated on the basis of the going rates for the services or goods provided. A profit-sharing system distributed 20% of the profit to the worker, with 80% going to the Community Fund, used to pay for centre operations, the CFDO or expansion (such as establishing a branch of the Community Forum in another neighbourhood, or expanding or starting up additional services).

At each three-weekly meeting a complete financial report was provided showing all income and expenditures and future plans so the people were fully aware of all financial aspects of the Forum's operations. Full transparency was a central operating principle.

### ***Partnerships with other actors***

Once the fora began to function, partnerships began to form with other actors. Aid agencies found they had a mechanism through which they could interact with communities, and communities could compare assistance strategies more easily as a group, and reject those that only offered assistance to a minority, and not necessarily the poorest.

Partnerships with municipalities were also established and strengthened. Officials were invited to attend community meetings and to coordinate strategies and logistics. Communities attempted to establish working relationships with whoever was in control, remaining neutral and non-partisan.

The emphasis, however, was on community organisation to solve problems, rather than just specific outputs from other agencies. As one evaluator commented:

...[the programme] is as much about re-building the social dynamics of urban life as it is about repairing damaged buildings and services. As such the most visible results of a programme like this – clean drinking water, passable streets and lane ways, a regular system of waste disposal – only provide a partial picture of change. Behind the scenes, citizens and their institutions are

organising to overcome the scourges of war and poverty... (interim project evaluation, 1996, cited in Tamas, 1998, p18)

## **2.2 Phase 2: 1998-2001, under the Taliban**

Even though Habitat international staff were not present in Mazar, the fora continued operating and even expanded under the Taliban. In interviews, staff and those who were involved at this time, attributed their ability to keep functioning to their careful cultivation of key Taliban officials in the city and the programme's willingness to be flexible in its approach. In particular, a relationship was cultivated with the young Talib in charge of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. He was frightened of the programme being disapproved of by his seniors, but basically supportive of its aims. A senior Habitat official spent almost a month with him, showing him the work and explaining, using Koranic verses, what the programme was trying to do. As a result, in 2000, Habitat signed a contract with this Ministry, and was able to establish separate women's forums, enabling the increased involvement of women. Habitat also cultivated relationships with the mullah in charge of the sanitation work by drawing on Islamic arguments about the importance of cleanliness and sanitation.

Habitat adapted its approach to fit in with the external constraints. Women continued to educate women at the fora, under the cover of embroidery and other income-generating projects. In surprising ways, women were also able to advocate for their own needs. When the Taliban stopped a pasta-producing project on which many widows depended for their livelihoods, the women demonstrated outside the official's house until he relented. Of course, there was much organising and meeting that continued underground, at considerable risk to those who participated.

It did, however, become clear at the end of this period that, aside from the difficult political operating environment, there were a number of institutional issues that needed addressing. These included the level of community involvement in decision-making, the need for more representative boards, the extent to which the CFs were reaching wider communities and the level of dependency of the CFDO and the fora on Habitat. Additionally, in September 2001, Habitat funding for the CF program came to an end, mostly due to shifting agency structures and priorities.

***Box 4 Girls' rights to education***

When Kabul District 3 Community Forum was established in 1997, the Taliban allowed only boys to attend courses. Yet, the fathers also wanted their daughters to learn. Habitat suggested that they approach the authorities. Upon further consultation, the men asked a *mullah* (religious leader) who sat on the Consultative Board to meet with the Taliban. With the Quran in hand he approached the Office of Vice and Virtue and argued that there was nothing in Islam that prevented girls from being educated. As a result, the Taliban gave written permission for girls up to age 12 to attend classes. For a period, hundreds of girls filled the Community Forums of Kabul daily.

Adapted from Rodey (1999, p72)

### **2.3 Phase 3: 2001-2004, After the Taliban: crisis and restructuring**

After the fall of the Taliban, the Habitat staff were very involved in the design of the transitional government's National Solidarity Programme, which in its early conceptualisation drew on many of the ideas operationalised through the CF programme. However, in the eventual implementation of the NSP, urban areas were not initially included, so there was no funding available under this mechanism either. Therefore there was no external funding from Sept 2001-2003 to support the growth and development of the CFs and the CFDOs. Interviewees expressed intense frustration that agency short-sightedness and structural rigidity led to the cutting of funding at a time when fledgling organisations continued to need support and strengthening to function in a changing political and institutional environment.

Although the original vision was that the CFs and the CFDO would be financially self-sustaining, in the extremely difficult political and social context this has not proven possible as not enough revenue has been produced by the income-generating projects. The termination of funding from Habitat forced a rethink of strategy by the CFDO and the CFs and the level of their dependency on Habitat became clear. As a result, they began to approach other donors (IOM is currently funding the salary of CFDO managers), and also began to develop their own wider relationships, for example with the new officials in various government ministries and the mayor of Mazar. They have also decided to restructure, bringing back together the men and women's fora which had been separated under the Taliban. Better financial systems are being put in place, legal status and the legalisation of property ownership is being addressed, and the CFDO is being made more efficient and accountable.

To some eyes the CFs today might look less impressive than at other points of their ten-year history. In the past, they were involved with large relief assistance programmes, and many projects were being implemented with CF involvement. Certainly the programme has been subject to some critique from other researchers. For example, others associated with ongoing research programmes at AREU and elsewhere have questioned the extent to which the CFs are currently really engaging

with communities, and are able to facilitate broader processes other than just income-generating projects.<sup>12</sup> This limited study was really not able to form a judgement on this, nor did it wish to do so. However, the Programme Manager of the CFDO (who has a long involvement in the programme) argues that recent changes mean that the programme is fundamentally healthier than at any time in the past. More rigorous accounting and accountability systems have been put in place, elections of management committees and boards have been instituted, and a new system of smaller-scale neighbourhood forums is being implemented to enable people to participate at a more local level. Certainly the ‘programme’ is beginning to emerge from the ‘parenting’ of Habitat. Nonetheless, other interviewees argue that it is important that continued technical assistance is provided, to ensure checks and balances within the developing structures, and ongoing capacity-building.

*Box 5 Box X Partnership with municipal government: linking city-wide and community solutions in solid waste removal*

*Phase 1*

In 1994-5, the accumulation of large piles of solid waste was one of the most visible problems confronting Mazar. The City’s sanitation services was receiving support from WFP, UNICEF and other agencies, who provided fuel or food for work, but it still operated only in the most visible areas of the city. Its system of tariff collection had broken down. When Habitat approached the other agencies, they were critical of the municipality complaining that it shopped around different agencies for the best support. However, the agencies were failing to coordinate, and proposing solutions which were often not appropriate or sustainable.

Habitat began consulting with the Sanitation Department who eventually agreed that there needed to be both a city-wide and a neighbourhood-level system. Habitat started facilitating meetings with neighbourhood representatives in each district, usually held in a mosque, to discuss local sanitation issues. One district started a system of using local donkey-carts (*karachi*) to collect garbage, a known system which could be paid for at a local level. Habitat began to support the municipal system by providing fuel so that their trucks could clear the accumulated waste. They hoped eventually the local tariff system would also support the municipal costs. People in nearby neighbourhoods noticed the improvements and began to get organised and start *karachi* systems in their own areas. With help from Habitat staff the *karachi* system gradually spread across the city. Habitat purchased a tractor and two trailers for the city and supported the costs of taking waste from the collection points to the city.

*Phase 3*

Mazar is the most famous site in Afghanistan for celebrating ‘New Year’. Each year during the ‘Nau-Rooz’ holiday thousands of pilgrims come to pay homage at the Blue Mosque in the centre of the city, an event of great religious and cultural significance. In 2002, the mayor had an emergency budget of \$90k to clean up the city before Nau-Rooz, but only 10 days to do it. He did not think he would be able to organise the manpower and resources in that period. The CFDO suggested that the mayor should discuss with community representatives how the city could be cleaned in such a short

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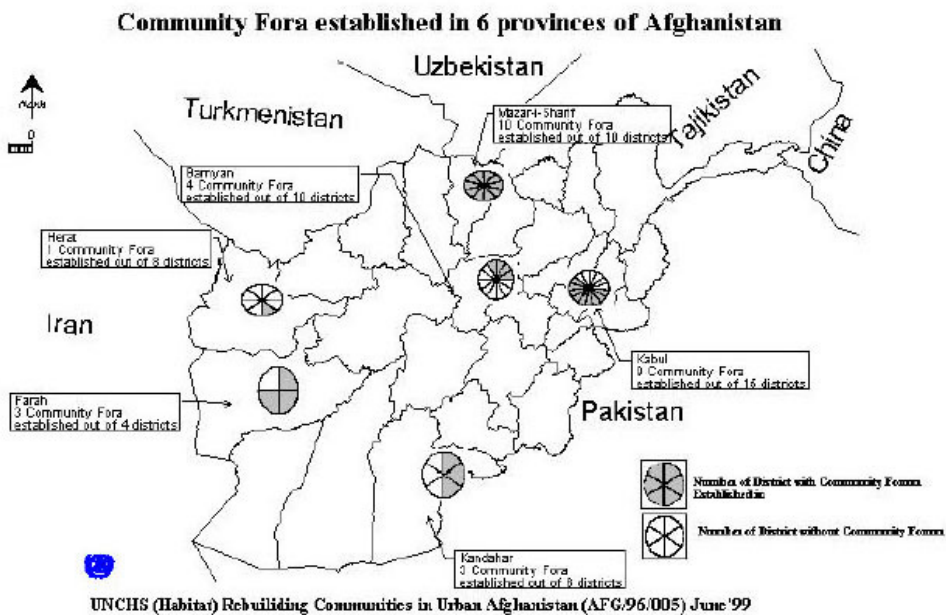
<sup>12</sup>. Pers comms.

time. Although sceptical, the mayor agreed. Each district decided on its own work plan and need for vehicle use, and before the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> day the city was clean. As a result, the mayor pledged his support for the CF process and told all municipal officials that they should collaborate, threatening to remove from post certain individuals who had been causing problems for the CFs.

Sources: Tamas (1998), interviews.

## 2.4 Replication in other cities

Similar processes occurred in other cities in Afghanistan, facilitated by Habitat. Between 1995-1999, the project established 33 fora in seven locations in Afghanistan - five cities, as well as two rural areas of Bamyan and Panjshir, as shown on the map below.<sup>13</sup>



Learning was applied from Mazar to the other cities, and vice versa. For example, in 1999 a key Habitat official from Farah moved to Mazar and was instrumental in instituting the election of board officials. However, learning between experiences was identified as a key problem in an evaluation in 1998 (Standley, 1998). Moreover, interviewees in this study suggested that processes in other cities had been less 'organic' than in Mazar, and although structures were established they were not as rooted in local communities and retained stronger characteristics of donor-promoted processes. They suggested that this was partly because the Mazar experience grew out of consultation that occurred in Mazar, and spread by word of mouth through the city, and there was therefore a greater sense of local 'ownership'. Additionally, in other

<sup>13</sup> Panjshir does not appear on the map, as the initiative was later and smaller in this region..

cities the process was not given as much time as in Mazar, and there was a shortage of staff with community development experience.<sup>14</sup>

The less successful outcome in other cities may also be the result of differing experiences of conflict. Social structures may have been differently affected and ongoing active conflict makes it difficult to establish a programme. In relation to Kabul and the rest of Afghanistan, the CF programme in Mazar was developed during a period of almost two and half years of relative stability in that part of the country. This provided the basis for the programme to develop in its early stages. However, in Kabul, for example, large sections of the city were destroyed before the Taliban took over.

The differing experiences across other cities, while not explored in detail in this study, do raise interesting questions about the replicability of such programmes, as well as providing a warning about attempts to short-cut processes, either in terms of time taken or staff resources allocated.

*Box 6: Common principles of the CF*

Justice – honouring the dignity and capacities of every individual, giving the freedom to speak and be heard.

Equity – inclusion of all in decision-making, and consideration in distribution of benefits.

Unity and solidarity – working together to identify and solve problems

Consultation – arriving at a consensus about the truth of a given situation and the wisest choice of action among the options open at any given moment.

Ownership – individuals and communities must feel ownership of a project and responsibility for their own development and progress. Fundamental to sustainability.

Service – a new work ethic based on a spirit of service.

Partnership – a community is built on partnership between individuals and disparate groups, between men and women, and between civil society and authorities

Sustainability – the long-term capacity to manage and sustain one's own affairs without external support. The CFs and CFDOs were developed with self-financing mechanisms and training components.

Capacity-building - to identify capacities within the community and allow them to flourish, and also to build the capacity of the community to work together.

Drawn from Rodey, 1999, summarising the CF draft handbook, other reports, evaluations and her own interviews.

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<sup>14</sup> Sources: interviews and Reynolds (1999)

### **3 Analysis of development results, design and implementation**

This section provides analysis of the CF process, according to the framework provided by IDS. It is divided into three sections: development results, design features and implementation issues.

#### **3.1 Development results**

People now have a local institution at the neighbourhood level where a number of different activities take place, where there are services, information and an increasingly familiar system of governance that they have recourse to on a regular basis through the community meetings. People have a common place where they feel they can access the assistance community or different technical departments as appropriate. There are local systems of cost recovery in place and systems of legislation and enforcement through community action. In addition, people are both able to exercise their rights and practice their obligations to society.” (Reynolds 1999, p18)

As identified in the IDS framework, and recognised in the quote above, there are many outcomes of the community fora process described above. There have been over the years numerous practical project and service-delivery outcomes, institutional capacity-building outcomes, and wider ‘governance’ outcomes.

A revised version of the development results matrix is presented in annex 1 for easy reference on the areas in which there were outcomes. Further details are provided in the narrative below.<sup>15</sup>

#### ***Project and service-delivery outcomes***

It is difficult to assess the multiple outputs of the programmes, across 11 forums over 10 years. The necessary documentation simply does not exist, and the figures that do exist do not always break down the outcomes by city. The following statistics (taken from Rodey 1999) gives a snapshot of the situation in 2000 (at the height of Taliban control) in the 37 forums across Afghanistan:

- Overall, 78.5% of families surveyed in Mazar-i-Sharif reported that they had participated in some way in their Community Forum, even though meetings were often irregular and attendance quite limited due to the political environment.
- Programme-wide, 235 men and 187 women were serving voluntarily on Consultative Boards.
- Some 2,300 girls and 3,150 boys were receiving educational courses.
- The Youth and Children Development Programme (YCDP) in Mazar had a membership of 740, including 200 girls.

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<sup>15</sup> A note on means of assessment: documentation from the programme over time has been relatively weak. Here assessment of outcomes is made using the information provided in the key documents listed on p2. It is recognised that this is partial and time-bound. In particular, good cumulative figures since 1999 are not available. Moreover, it was not possible to verify these figures individually, but the interviews conducted in Mazar did not in any way contradict this limited information.

- Across the programme, 300 women and 500 men were regularly employed in community owned enterprises, management and education sectors
- In Mazar, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Taliban) gave one-month work permits to 674 resource-poor women in September 1999 to undertake a house-to-house survey to identify the most vulnerable population for winter relief.
- The fora provided organised training and resources to facilitate emergency relief for more than 200,000 people over three years. They not only distributed aid, but employed vulnerable community women and men to do so.
- As a network, they had partnered with at least 28 UN agencies and NGOs between 1995 and 1999. In 1997 and 1999, these partnerships provided assistance to more than 100,000 people.

Many of these outcomes, especially the emergency assistance elements, were poverty sensitive. The CF, founded on principles of transparency and fairness, provided a vehicle for assistance agencies and the public sector to reach into communities and allocate with fairness to those most needy. On many occasions the CF decided who would be beneficiaries of assistance, and lists were made public so all could see the decisions. While many of the services operated on a cost-recovery basis, there were usually exemptions available for those who were known to be unable to pay.

There were few formal assessments of beneficiary satisfaction, although the three-weekly meetings provided ongoing opportunities for input by beneficiaries.

### *Institutional and capacity-building outcomes*

It is even harder to assess the institutional and capacity-building outcomes of the process. While it is clear that functioning fora exist in each of the 11 districts in Mazar, it is much harder to assess the extent to which organisations were established that have become local institutions and serve the wider 'community empowerment' objects of the programme. It is also difficult to assess this over time during the different phases of the project. However, there are certain indications that this has occurred. For example, in the first phases of the project, when the international Habitat manager left Mazar in September 1997 because of security problems, the fora maintained their services to the community. The programme was managed by national Habitat staff and CFDO personnel but with involvement of many individuals from communities. . Indeed, it was the only UN programme to maintain operations in that part of Northern Afghanistan at that time. Moreover, unlike most other private or public facilities, the fora buildings were not vandalized or looted during the general lawlessness and chaos.

As well as building capacity within those who were involved with the CFs, the programme also built capacity with the limited municipal system, in order to strengthen its ability to serve the whole population. It worked on a one-to-one basis with individuals to help them understand how to engage with communities, and has also conducted training courses for officials. It also created greater partnership and cooperation between aid agencies. By 1999, 28 aid agencies had worked through the network to identify the most vulnerable families (Rodey, 1999).

### ***Governance outcomes***

The fora provided a model of representative governance which, until recently, was unique in Afghanistan. While the programme drew on traditional methods of organisation, such as the *shura* (which is almost always made up entirely of male elders), it went beyond such structures, building in elements of greater representation, participation and accountability. Everybody was also allowed a public voice at the three-weekly meetings.

The fora also linked ‘civil society’ with the public sector in a new and productive way, organising fair systems of tariff collection for services, in the face of a collapsed public taxation system.

Additionally, the CF played a significant role in local reduction of ethnic tensions, at a time when issues of ethnicity were undergoing heavy politicisation in Afghanistan and when conflict was increasingly conducted along ethnic lines. People from different ethnicities have worked together in the CFs, and defended each other in quite extraordinary ways (see box 7 below).

#### *Box 7: Promoting cross-ethnic collaboration and understanding.*

The Taliban were Pashtun from the South, but the population of Mazar is primarily Uzbek, Tajik, and Hazara. The conflict between the Taliban and Hazaras was particularly brutal. During the late 1990s, the Taliban brought 25 Pashtun families to live in District 5 in Mazar, which could have caused great local conflict. However, after discussion, the community decided this group could elect one representative to the CF board. The chosen man proved of great assistance and help to the people of that community, providing information and a channel of communication with the Taliban. When the Taliban fell, and the Pashtuns fled from the North fearing for their lives, 9 members of the CF brought him and his family to the CF building, as a place of safety. They told him he was free to leave whenever he wished, but until then they would do their best to protect him. They told local leaders not to harm him or his family.

Source: interviews

The CF have also clearly worked to preserve human rights, under a political regime in which they were under great attack, but also in an ongoing context in which discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and gender continues. The fight to provide education and health care for women and girls is the most notable example of this.

### ***Spillover effects***

As discussed in the IDS framework, there are serious problems of attribution in identifying spillover. Moreover, in a programme with such broad, and somewhat undefined objectives, it is difficult to draw a line between designed outcomes and

‘spillover’ effect. For example, reduced ethnic tension (as discussed above) was not specifically a designed outcome.

However, it is a reasonable assumption that the CF programme had the following broader spillover effects:

- i) reduced displacement and cross-border migration. In a context where there were already between 2.7-3.5 million Afghan refugees in the period 1995-2001<sup>16</sup> as well as uncounted IDPs, it is reasonable to suppose that the provision of livelihood opportunities, some basic services, as well as emergency assistance contributed to a reduced emigration from the cities in which CFs were functioning. It is, however, impossible to either quantify or verify this.
- ii) a broad, and perhaps unquantifiable, contribution towards peace-building by providing stability and a model of negotiation and cooperation. A review of the programme argued that it had “demonstrated its potential to achieve positive impact on the peace process by providing a greater sense of normalcy; by providing opportunities for expressing ideas; and by providing incentives which motivate people to disengage from conflict.” (UNDP 1999, quoted in Tamas p 19). In particular, many of the young people of the city, who have grown up with permanent conflict, have had involvement with the youth movement associated with the CFs. The impact of such involvement is hard to assess but is unlikely to be negligible.

### **3.2 Design considerations: how did good design contribute to development results?**

Many of the basic design issues, around objectives, scale and coverage have been discussed in section two above. This section draws some of the threads across the different phases together, highlighting key issues.

To some extent a rigid assessment of outcomes against design is not possible, because the process evolved through a number of different programmes, in which design was left relatively flexible. In fact, the programme interventions were remarkably *undesigned*, and what was unusual is that the staff and implementing agency were flexible enough to be able to work with this approach. As Reynolds wrote in 1999 (p20):

The project’s progress and evolution was also very much facilitated by the style in which the original project document was written in that it stated principles, but left much room for the genuine development of an implementation strategy on the ground through consultation with people.

In many ways this flexibility is in itself a key design feature, which enabled the process both to incorporate lesson-learning and to adapt to changing external

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<sup>16</sup> UNHCR (2001) Afghan Refugee Statistics <http://www.un.org.pk/unhcr/Afstats-stat.htm>

circumstances. This is perhaps one of the key lessons that can be learnt from this case.

The design of the programme in its practical details emerged from the use of the fundamental ‘methodology’ of the programme: consultation, action, reflection. The basic tool of the programme was consultation. This was defined as “arriving at a consensus about the truth of a given situation and the wisest choice of action among the options open at any given moment.” (Reynolds, 1999, p7).

### ***Domestic ownership***

Domestic ownership of the CFs was always in the design of the programme, and this was intimately linked with financial self-sufficiency in the conceptualisation of the programme. Habitat planned to withdraw support earlier, however, it was felt that the extremely difficult political and economic context under the Taliban made that impossible. Rodey’s review of 1999 concluded that the initial capitalisation of \$9,900 per forum was sufficient to create viable community organisations, but that the extremely difficult political and economic circumstances did make it a challenge for income-generating projects to be sustained with that level of capitalisation.

The actual difficulties encountered when Habitat withdrew both financial and other support in 2001 suggest that the programme had not reached the levels of self-sufficiency originally planned. Furthermore, at the time of the fieldwork, the management was dependent on funding from other international donors. However, external funding is not a sign that ownership is not domestic, and this new funding had been sought and gained without the intervention of Habitat. Certainly, the programme was being managed by Afghans, although there was still a widespread perception among municipal officials and others that the CFs were a Habitat project.

### ***Civil society and local institutions***

Clearly this programme depended on local institutions, indeed its focus and objective was to build a local institution through which individuals could organise, access the assistance available, as well as mobilise local resources. However, what is particularly interesting is that while its initial entry points were through traditional local institutions, such as the *shura*, it went beyond these institutions in its capacity-building and management elements. It recognised that such institutions in Afghanistan are often dominated by those with economic, military or other force, and consist entirely of men. It thus sought to draw on the strengths of traditional institutions, but move beyond them to a more representative and participatory form of self-governance.

Of course, the extent to which this was achieved is open to question. Individuals who are able to dominate one institution are often able to ‘capture’ another. However, those who have been involved in the CF report that people have felt progressively able to appoint to positions of influence those community members who displayed the characteristics which they felt were needed (and these desirable characteristics were discussed openly and agreed on at the three-weekly meetings). The recent institution

of secret elections to the management committee is a further step in this process. Furthermore, what is undeniable is the extent to which women have and continue to be involved in the running of the CF. Under the Taliban, of course, when separate CF were operating, they were entirely responsible for the running of the women's CF. Now that the men and women's fora have been joined again, women continue to remain heavily involved in all aspects of the CF, in a way that is somewhat unusual in other organisations in Afghanistan.

### **3.3 Implementation processes**

As discussed above, one of the key aspects of both the design and the implementation of the programme was flexibility. However, this has been both facilitated and hindered by the approach to resources.

#### ***Resource mix and adequacy***

The programme was developed out of the understanding that resources were far too scarce to meet the multiple needs, and that a means of addressing the interlinked problems needed to be found without spreading the resources so thinly that they achieved nothing. It was also recognised that resources from other agencies were being used in a way that was not sustainable. Additionally, it was noted that there were community resources available, both financial and practical. People were already paying for the services they received (for example, trash collection, water delivery) but often they were receiving poor, expensive or unreliable services, sometimes in a way that damaged their neighbours (for example, one family's water use affected the sanitation issues of another).

For these reasons the original Habitat project under which the CF were developed, the Urban Rehabilitation Programme, had two distinct components of its \$2.4 million fund: the Neighbourhood Action Programme, and the Municipal Infrastructure Programme. The funding balance was 2:1 in favour of the community-based work, in recognition of the essential nature of community-based work in making infrastructure development sustainable (Dudley, 1995). However, aside from the allocation of \$9,900 start-up money for each forum, it is difficult to assess expenditure directly on the CF programme for a number of reasons:

- i) The CF were developed as an integrated part of Habitat's broader urban rehabilitation activities, and did not constitute a specific 'programme'.
- ii) In the early years money was not allocated within Habitat's financial management system for community development in the way that other project activities were funded, so it is impossible to assess the allocations for 'soft' activities such as capacity-building and facilitation, as opposed to infrastructure or construction.
- iii) Due to joint operations by different UN agencies during the years of conflict, budgets were often combined or shared between agencies. This makes attempts to track allocations to particular activities especially difficult.
- iv) The community development work with the CF was often funded through the relief programmes which were administered through the CF.

- v) Current and existing staff acknowledge that there is a very poor ‘paper trail’ related to the programme.

However, the programme ‘Rebuilding Urban Communities in Afghanistan’ 1997-1999 within which the CF programme was embedded had a core UNDP budget of US\$6.9 million plus additional funds raised as either parallel funding or a part of the joint effort with other agencies, which gave a total working budget of around US\$ 10 million. Approximately half the core budget was devoted to direct capital expenditure with the remainder allocated to personnel, equipment and miscellaneous support items. The project operated in nine sites: Kabul, Herat, Mazar, Kandahar, Farah and Bamyan (Standley 1998). Standley comments on the fact that UN personnel and other support inputs accounted for approximately 50 per cent of the overall UNDP budget (although a much smaller percentage of the overall budget):

Whether this ratio of direct investment to the overheads allocated for delivering the outputs is justified is an issue that cannot be resolved without reference to evaluated experience elsewhere and the use of some sophisticated and probably wholly academic assumptions on social values. However, the P.E.A.C.E. Initiative [UNDP] is not the normal post-war rehabilitation programme and the strategic thrust towards community-development at the grassroots level explicitly involves human resource inputs for capacity-building without immediate measurable gains and, in any event, requiring highly creative approaches to tracking and quantifying benefits” (p17).

This discussion is particularly interesting because it parallels current discussions on the National Solidarity Programme, in which Facilitating Partners are being castigated for their high delivery costs. Under current budget analysis of NSP, training and capacity-building are classified as ‘overhead’, thus producing very high apparent ‘project’ delivery costs. However, those implementing the programme argue that these elements are integral to the programme.

In general, however, the Habitat programme was expensive to run, not only because of high staff costs, but also because of poor security and poor infrastructure. In particular, security concerns caused a number of different financial and time costs. For example, the project had to contribute towards the cost of running two UN aeroplanes, as well as install a radio network throughout the country to maintain communications between the field offices and the support office. These types of costs must be factored into the budgets of those seeking to work in the type of insecure environments that LICUS countries often are.

Problems around resource provision have been central to some of the difficulties that the project has encountered at different stages, and were tied into perceptions of the ‘relief-development’ divide amongst donors. Shortages of funds in the late 1990s meant that management had to put a great deal of effort and time into raising funds, and had to portray their activities as more ‘relief-focused’ than they wished, to cater for a situation in which most donor funding was humanitarian in orientation. Additionally, this placed strain on the CFs at an early stage as they were being required to deal with city-wide relief efforts when they did not really have either the structures or capacity to be able to do so.<sup>17</sup> Those involved in the programme questioned the donor consensus that development activities could not be usefully

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<sup>17</sup> Source: pers comm. RPM

engaged in during conflict. Instead, they argued, seeds could be planted which would come to grow and bear fruit at a time when the external environment and broader political economy were more conducive to reform.

From the beginning of the project, it was recognised that funding was not the only important resource, but that technical assistance was also critical. Importantly, it was recognised that different types of technical assistance were needed. Habitat had traditionally been strong on technical engineering skills, but weaker on facilitation skills and an understanding of how to facilitate community development. Engineers had to learn that decisions were not always taken according to the technical advice that they provided, but rather that the results of community consultation were given weight. This was a difficult process for many of them.<sup>18</sup> This was explicitly recognised and discussed at the time:

The process of helping to mobilize a community around issues of common interest moves at its own pace: ensuring collective ownership of the process is more important than rapidly achieving a tangible result.... Most technical professionals become impatient with the ambiguous and seemingly directionless process. Few have been exposed to the concepts that would enable them to recognize and support the subtle dynamics of an emerging consensus resulting from an evolving expression of a community's interests. Few recognize the need for collective ownership as a prerequisite for sustainable development. Because they have not been trained in these matters, it is not fair to expect them to demonstrate competence in this complex area of professional practice (Tamas, 1998 p83-84)

This difficult process of mixing the technical skills of engineers with the 'softer' skills of community development was mostly achieved through the leadership and example of the Regional Programme Manager. She encouraged the development of a more consultative environment in the office, for example, by having regular cross-departmental meetings in which views were shared. She also spent a great deal of time in the field with engineers, trying to set a good example, as she comments:

"If the international manager was prepared to listen to people then the thinking was it was not beneath their dignity to do so either. A lot of the problems were related to their perceived status in the eyes of the community, plus their distrust of communities and vice versa. It took much time and much patience at the end of the day."<sup>19</sup>

In some ways, this was one of the most remarkable shifts in the programme, that through skilled management, it was turned from being an engineering project, to a community development process. However, it is also worth noting that management found it much harder to convince the principal donor of the project, UNDP, who was pushing for more 'hardware delivery'.

### ***Revenue and budget management.***

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<sup>18</sup> Source: interviews with Habitat engineers and others

<sup>19</sup> Source: pers comm. RPM

In day-to-day budget management there were also issues that affected how the programme functioned. On the positive side, good systems to release funding were developed. This depended on a good relationship between the RPM and her manager in Kabul. The productive relationship between the Habitat office in Mazar and the country office in Kabul was identified as one of the key facilitating factors that enabled the success of the project, as described by Tamas:

In Mazar the Regional Programme Manager operated in a broader organizational context that provided.. support from her Programme Manager (and other parts of the Habitat system) to do the work that resulted in the CF. This included establishing an atmosphere of trust and confidence in the RPM's abilities and making financial and other resources available as required. Guidance was provided as needed to keep work on a productive track.. An example of this high quality interaction was the question of releasing funds for community projects in a timely and effective manner. The manager in Kabul did what he could to make these funds readily available, providing the RPM in Mazar with the tools she needed to maintain credibility with the community and her own colleagues. Success with this task function (making funds readily available) contributed to an effective *process*.. (1999, p82)

On the more negative side, there was limited capacity within the CFs to formulate and track budgets. This not only constrained project implementation but also led to opportunities for corruption. This has now been recognised as a weakness and better systems are being established.

### ***Implementation process and activities***

Several of the issues presented in the IDS framework matrix, such as stakeholder participation and inclusivity, including gender sensitivity, are central design features of the CF process. These have thus been discussed throughout, and further detail is not provided here. Instead this section focuses on issues not discussed at length elsewhere: policy dialogue, coordination, learning and sharing, and public relations.

#### ***Policy dialogue***

In all phases of the project, the staff both interacted with authorities and facilitated the interaction of communities, particularly on issues around the provision of services. Of course, in the periods of a very weak or non-existent state (particularly in phase one), the extent to which such dialogue was either possible or effective was limited. However, in phase one, Habitat did engage strongly with the municipality, arguing that it should set up a systematic operation across the city in which people paid for their services, ensuring greater equity and sustainability. It was through this policy engagement that Habitat was able to link the small-scale community initiatives with larger city-wide processes. In phase two, the most notable effects of such policy dialogue was during the time of the Taliban, when staff and community members engaged in quite remarkable ways with Taliban authorities (see, for example, box 4 on girls' education in Kabul).

A further means by which the CF experience has fed into policy processes has been its influence on the development of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP). Some of the issues around this are discussed further in the conclusions.

At a lower level of engagement with policy processes, at the time of the fieldwork there appeared to be little policy dialogue occurring, especially between communities and policy-makers. While this remains an aim of the project and senior staff do meet with authorities, community members have little engagement in such processes. Moreover among many there did not seem to be a strong desire to do so. This may be partly because such mechanisms do not yet always exist, and one of the weaknesses of the current government is its level of openness to the creation of such spaces. However, as Afghanistan moves towards a planned I-PRSP, it may be that the CF can provide one means through which consultation of communities can take place.

### *Coordination*

UN agencies more broadly recognised the lack of agency coordination to be a serious weakness of the situation in Afghanistan. In 1998, UNDP developed a ‘strategic framework’ which was supposed to lead to a more integrated approach by the international community, within an overall vision and strategy for achieving peace (UNDP 1998), however the results of this were mixed.

In Mazar, failure of agency coordination, and its negative effects on development outcomes, was one of the factors that influenced the design of the Habitat programme. Habitat established a City Commission to attempt to provide a forum for coordination between aid agencies, various city departments and other formal and informal leaders. In this forum the municipality asked UN agency staff to describe and explain their activities. Although there was resistance to this from some of the agencies, it strengthened the role of local departments in influencing aid agency activities. It also increased Habitat’s credibility with municipal and other authorities.

The CF process also contributed to greater coordination between agencies, in part by providing a mechanism through which agencies could interact with communities. To some extent this passed the coordinating function to the CFs, who gained greater influence over the implementation of programmes that affected them. By 1999, Reynolds commented that “increasingly, antagonistic sister agencies and departments have become less hostile and more inquisitive about the process” (p17).

There were, however, always problems with agency coordination. In the early days of the programme, for example, Habitat’s efforts to establish cost recovery systems were undermined by other agencies who were promoting welfare-oriented interventions. For example, where the project was establishing training courses on a fee basis proportional to income, other agencies were not only establishing free courses, but were paying people to attend training. This pattern was also replicated in other sectors. There was also been limited planning on the part of the Habitat staff for linkages with other UN programmes (Reynolds, 1998).

More recently, the programme has shown considerable success in establishing linkages and coordinating with certain government agencies, particularly in the areas of adult literacy, and the establishment of kindergartens. Here limited government provision is drawing on the facilities and organisation of the CFs to extend their services beyond what they would otherwise be able to do, both numerically and geographically. Many of these linkages are based on the personal relationships and involvement of the officials with the CFs over the years – and it is perhaps this

element which has brought about the greatest levels of coordination. However, interviewees also commented that in some ways coordination with municipal authorities is harder now that the CFs are unable to pay salaries, benefits and other inducements to municipal officials in the way that Habitat was able to do.

### *Learning and sharing*

The importance of learning has been critical for the success of the programme, and this has been recognised from the early days:

...There are no easy formulas for this kind of work. There are broad principles and approaches but in the end it is trial and error. A successful programme learns from its experience and that of others. Programme managers and field staff take time to reflect on their errors and achievements, and draw lessons for future practice...(interim project evaluation, 1996, cited in Tamas, 1998, p18)

The underlying methodology for work was that of: consultation, action, reflection. The aim was to apply this approach to all activities conducted, providing plenty of space for learning and sharing. This approach is still articulated, somewhat as a mantra, by those involved in the management of CFs today. Importantly, the design of the programme was left open enough for the implementation to be adjusted to accommodate learning from reflection.

The programme was not, however, particularly methodical in keeping track of its learning, and as discussed, found it difficult to share across cities. While a few evaluations and pieces have been written, in general most of the learning is held by the individuals who were involved in the processes. The lesson from this is that systematising of learning takes time, effort and money, and very often those who are most involved in the processes from which most learning can be gained are too busy to do so. Agencies and donors should therefore attempt to provide the resources for such learning to be captured and shared widely.

### *Public relations*

As discussed above, relationships with authorities were improved very much not only by the willingness to listen and the ability to deliver results, but also by Habitat's attempts to increase municipal influence in coordinating the activities of other agencies.

Throughout the duration of the CF process, key individuals in authority have been identified, and Habitat and others have invested considerable time and energy in working with these individuals. In the early phases of the project, one of those individuals was the Head of the Sanitation Department (Tamas 1999, p43-44). Another key individual was the young Talib at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (see section 2.2).

It may perhaps be a broader learning point that in LICUS countries, where there is usually very low institutional capacity, it is particularly important to focus efforts on one or two individuals who are receptive to change, and have some measure of influence in bringing it about.

#### **4. Summary and conclusions**

This report has provided considerable detail about the process of establishing a network of community-based organisations able to deliver social, political and cultural benefits to poor Afghans. The study has shown that, when appropriately designed, aid can achieve effective results within a poor governance environment and can deliver sustainable benefits. It has emphasised the importance of the flexible and consultation-driven process of design and implementation which enabled this success to be achieved, within the context of a flexible agency. Key personnel within the project recognised that without understanding local power dynamics, both within communities and between communities and government agencies, projects would continue to fail, or succeed only for a short-time.

This experience was particularly unusual because it created synergy between different processes and groups which are often separated in development efforts in LICUS countries, particularly those emerging from conflict:

- i) between technical engineering and community processes. Simultaneous repair of physical infrastructure and social fabric occurred, and what was once an engineering project was re-oriented towards community empowerment. This involved considerable reorientation of staff and agency expectations.
- ii) between small scale community development efforts & larger scale infrastructure processes. The success and sustainability of the individual projects and activities hinged on the ability to link community-efforts with city-wide processes.
- iii) between local authorities and ‘civil society’. Even under one of the most repressive regimes and under the harshest abuse of rights, women and others were able to advocate for their rights.

The CF process is also particularly interesting in that it did not just seek to replicate some of the oppressive ‘traditional’ structures, but sought to move people towards a more equitable and inclusive form of self-governance, even in conditions of extreme instability and conflict.

Some have argued that the CF process may illustrate that widespread political instability can actually create conditions in which it is *easier* to ‘do development’ than when a society is relatively stable. When old systems and relationships of power are not so strongly entrenched, the destruction of a system of governance can contribute to the emergence of alternative structures (Tamas 1999). Furthermore, sometimes when there is no strong state, it is possible to innovate and have more freedom. There may also be more direct access to communities, and people may be more willing to organise because there is no alternative way of meeting their immediate needs. Certainly the study shows that even in very oppressive environments, it can be possible to work round and negotiate with power-holders such that some development activity can take place. However, the study has also shown that one of the critical factors in ensuring success in this case was the outstanding leadership of the programme. Even though the RPM was forced to evacuate in the late 1990s, those she had trained were able to carry on their work.

*Can the success of the CF be scaled-up?*

One of the reasons there is currently considerable interest in the CF programme, is because of its influence on the design of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), a programme in which block grants for small projects are made to Community Development Committees (CDCs), which are established by election. Initially the CF experience was considered one of the key models on which the design of this flagship government programme would be based. Many of the Habitat staff with years of experience with the CF worked hard to distil their experiences for the benefit of the donor and government officials who were designing the NSP. In practice, former and current CF staff feel that some of the key elements which contributed to the success of the CF – particularly around the need for a slow process and the extent of facilitation – have been removed from the design of the NSP. Moreover, features critical for building ‘good governance’ at a local level have been removed, and there is now a danger of simply focusing on project delivery or, worse, building new power structures which can be captured by various interests. The three key institutions that made up the CF were the Consultative Board, the three weekly meetings and the community fund. The NSP, however, has only taken up the Consultative Board in the form of the elected CDC. The regular community meetings are not part of the process, and the community fund has been turned into a more limited ‘community box’. Moreover, the training materials Habitat designed to facilitate the whole process have not been adopted and they feel that their broader experience has been ignored. The Habitat staff experienced in the CF process feel that without regular consultation the heart of the community process is missing and thus the structures may not last, nor build inclusiveness, nor empower women. This may be an overly pessimistic view, some early evidence suggests that NSP is working well in some places, although not in others. There are, however, ongoing issues around the sustainability of the CDCs.<sup>20</sup>

Clearly the transition from activity during a period of a weak or collapsed state to participation in processes of state reconstruction or formation is critical and needs to be supported. One of the biggest lessons learnt by those involved in the CF programme is that doing programmes during a period of conflict or state collapse needs to be seen as a transient stage. It is a time when one can pilot programmes, build skills, trust, ownership and systems, ready for an up-scaling as and when the context shifts to a period of state formation. However, there needs to be an explicit shift in approach and appropriate support available when the context changes, and state formation/reconstruction activities begin.

One of the biggest challenges facing the CF today is how they can become integrated into broader development and state-building agendas in Afghanistan. What is a legitimate role for the CF in the current efforts to establish both representative and participatory forms of governance? Can the CF be ‘legalised’ in some way so that they become a legitimate form of lower-level governance? At the time of writing, there is little clarity about how such institutions, or indeed the CDCs being formed under NSP, can be integrated into the development of the elected lower level bodies mandated in the new constitution, and how such ‘experiments’ in community development can fit with broader subnational reform agendas.

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<sup>20</sup> See Boesen, I (2004). Additionally, ongoing research at AREU is considering issues around the establishment and impact of NSP, and its effects on power structures and local governance. Very preliminary observations suggest that NSP is working considerably better in some communities than others, but the reasons are not yet well understood. Outputs from this research, when available, will be published at <http://www.areu.org.af>

## Annex 1

<b>Programme or Project Outcomes</b>	<b>Description</b> [Incl. Scale and Scope]
Service provision	Yes. Health and education (literacy, vocational training, Koran) classes provided on cost-recovery basis. By 1999, 33 health posts established. (Reynolds 1999). In 1998 the Mazar programme provided education and vocational training to 10,480 people (Tamas 1998) Emergency assistance channelled through CFs to numerous beneficiaries. Beneficiary identification city-wide for distribution of relief items.
Capacity Building	Yes. Training to staff, both vocational and organisational. Strengthening of capacity of community members to participate and organise.
Natural Resource Management	Yes. Community decision-making on issues of NRM strengthened, particularly on usage of water & sanitation issues. Rehabilitation of green spaces. By 1999, 500 kitchen gardens had been established, 84,800 trees planted and 10 parks reestablished. (Reynolds 1999). Training of families in composting.
Infrastructure Development	Yes. Strong linkages with Habitat's municipal infrastructure programme. Local initiatives through CFs linked into wider municipal initiatives eg by 1999, 700 hand pumps installed by Habitat but maintained and repaired by communities. By 1999, 100 neighbourhood solid waste collection schemes established, linked to municipal waste collection systems.
Policy Reform and Economic Management	Yes, with municipal officials advocacy on policy around service provision. Considerable policy advocacy with the Taliban both directly by Habitat and communities around allowing women to associate & continue working. Significant policy advocacy following Bonn with senior UN officials, new administration and World Bank, which led to the development of the National Solidarity Programme.
Private sector Development	Yes, on small scale. Numerous small income-generating projects established. In Mazar by 1998, full-time employment was provided for 250 people (Tamas 1998)
<b>Governance Outcomes</b>	
Political Stability: Strengthened	At a local, not national level. Levels of factionalism and conflict diminished. Practical working relationship established between 'the state' and citizenry
Domestic Leadership Strengthened, nationally or regionally	Yes. Valuable training given by participation in CF. Interviews mentioned that many officials currently working in municipal government in Mazar were involved with the CF under the Taliban.
Ethnic tensions reduced	Yes. See text
Security Enhanced	Yes. Local level tensions diminished.
Human Rights Strengthened	Yes, education and participation of women strengthened.

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