

# Improvement of Urban Community Infrastructure with Community Participation in Kabul, Afghanistan

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The population of Kabul City, the capital of Afghanistan has increased by 2 million over the last decade and is now believed to be 5 million. Around 80% of main urban road is paved while the residential roads remain unpaved. Kabul Municipality's resources are limited both financially and capacity to address improvement of urban community infrastructure, such as residential streets and drainage channels. Kabul Municipality started improvement of urban community infrastructure with community participation in 2011. Given the initial success of this methodology a total of 59km of residential streets (average width 6m) and 99km of drainage channels has been improved with assistance of the Japan International Cooperation Agency in 13 Gozars (average area of 0.6 km<sup>2</sup> and with associated average population of 6700). Community members of the Gozars (neighborhoods) selected their representatives to prioritize their needs and contributed average of 37% to the installed infrastructure cost. As a result the community infrastructure has improved within 2 years of the start of the project with limited public finance. Women have been empowered, and a sense of ownership of development work has been created among citizens. Application of this concept is being implemented in other major Afghan cities. This paper analyzes the success factors and issues of implementation with community participation in a post-conflict state.

**Key Words :** *urban infrastructure in residential areas, community participation, empowerment*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The need for infrastructure and basic services remains large in Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan, which receives a huge influx of people migrating to the city from all over the country, due to the expected better employment opportunities compared to rural areas, and security problems in the south and east of the country, which is characterized by a post-conflict situation. Consequently, the population of Kabul has increased by about 2 million during the last decade. From the currently estimated population of over 5 million, 70% are living in unplanned areas.

The condition of the infrastructure in Kabul in general is poor, because of decades-long civil strife. Although the need for rapid improvement of the

urban infrastructure is considered as very important and urgent, lack of capacity and financial resources of Kabul Municipality limits their development work to main urban infrastructure. While about 80% of the main road is paved, infrastructure in unplanned areas are neglected thus creating not only problems in accessibility, but also health hazard due to dust from unpaved roads and garbage dumped haphazardly. Residents have not had resources and means to undertake maintenance and rehabilitation of their infrastructure and the Municipality as the responsible entity is constrained by capacity and financial resources to address their problems. Consequently, mistrust between the residents and Municipality developed.

The Government of Afghanistan successfully implemented the National Solidarity Program (NSP) that aims to improve the country-wide rural infrastructure through people's participation. Kabul Municipality adopted the concept of NSP for improvement of infrastructure in residential areas and launched the Kabul Solidarity Program (KSP) in 2011. KSP is an umbrella program that aims at the rehabilitation and improvement of living condition of Kabul by provision of infrastructure and city services to planned and unplanned residential areas with community participation. Given a successful pilot scheme of the KSP implemented in 2011, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) supported the Kabul Municipality with upgrading of residential infrastructure and encouraged community members to enter into a public-community partnership to enhance their quality of their lives and established the Project Implementation Unit (PIU). KSP aimed at mobilizing citizens to take responsibility for their development and to have a sense of ownership of the installed infrastructure and more significantly to build community solidarity, given the ethnicification that had occurred over the decade of civil strife. Community financial and in-kind contribution in the project cycle of KSP implementation improved living environment, and facilitated community solidarity through investment and engagement in a common cause.

In consultation with Kabul Municipality 7 Districts out of 22 Districts were selected. A District consists of several Gozars, which is divided into several Neighborhood communities. The average population of a Gozar is about 6700 and area is 0.6km<sup>2</sup> as shown in **Table 1**.

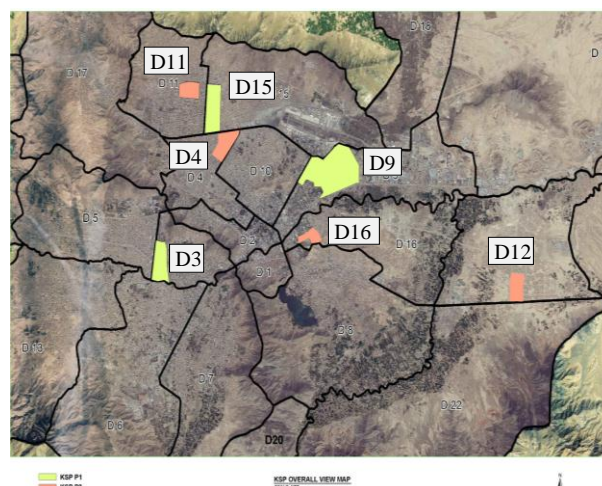
**Table 1** Data of the Project Area

D	Number of GDC	NDC	Population	Covered Area
3	2	8	10294	0.95km <sup>2</sup>
4	2	5	8534	0.85km <sup>2</sup>
9	2	8	17496	1.90km <sup>2</sup>
11	2	8	14690	0.95km <sup>2</sup>
12	2	8	18926	1.25km <sup>2</sup>
15	2	10	10600	1.62km <sup>2</sup>
16	1	3	6553	0.70km <sup>2</sup>
Total	13	50	87093	8.22km <sup>2</sup>
Average per GDC		3.85	6699	0.63km <sup>2</sup>

**Fig 1** shows the location of the target communities. They are distributed at different sites within the city area of Kabul.

A central principle of the KSP is to support participation of community groups in the government's decision making at all levels such as Neighborhood Development Councils (NDC), Gozar Development

Councils (GDCs) and, as anticipated, in the future to the Municipal Council.



**Fig 1** Location of the Project Sites in Kabul

By building capacity of municipal structures and its staff in engineering, community mobilization, and in facilitating transparency and accountability of finance and administration, KSP enabled them to deliver and manage development projects in a technically effective and efficient manner.

KSP under JICA support was implemented in two phases. Phase 1 (KSP1) was from 1 September 2012 to 30 June 2013<sup>1)</sup> and Phase 2 (KSP2) was from July 2013 to May 2015<sup>2)</sup>. KSP2 built on the success of KSP1 by giving greater priority to women's empowerment and women's projects, literacy, health and environment and improving capacity building and training opportunities for communities and staff of the Kabul Municipality especially at the different districts to improve their capacity to undertake gender-responsive settlement upgrading in the future. In addition it was expected that community members contribute around at least 25% the costs of the upgrading projects.<sup>3)</sup>

## 2. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

KSP was implemented through the leadership of Kabul Municipality. JICA supported PIU was located in the Planning Unit of the Kabul Municipality and functioned as an oversight entity to make sure that the program was in line with the agreed plan. PIU supervised project implementation activities in close cooperation with Kabul Municipality.

JICA engaged UN-Habitat as a Facilitating Partner to undertake project management, coordination, technical/social support and distribution of funding to the community. UN-Habitat provided technical support and had a program management team that included engineers, social mobilisers, and interna-

tional urban specialists, to advise the team and make sure that quality services were provided at all levels of the project cycle.

The following principles were followed in the implementation of the KSP program:

- An Afghan-led program, where engagement is a key component and creates a sense of ownership that contributes widely to the sustainability of the project;
- The program is designed and implemented in a way that community mobilization and engagement leads to improving trust and builds confidence between citizens, communities and local government, contributing to the cost effectiveness and sustainability of the project;
- The program followed the *people's process* in which people collectively identify needs and prioritize their demands;
- Focus on building institutional capacities of the Kabul Municipality to institutionalize the people's process and prepare the Kabul Municipality to implement future phases of the KSP by themselves.

KSP's implementation strategy is in line with UN Habitat's '*People's Process*' which it has successfully utilized over the last two decades while working in Afghanistan<sup>4</sup>). The People's Process places people – communities, women, youth, etc., at the center of decision making rather than authorities and technical professionals. The role of authorities is to support communities to identify their needs and priorities, plan and implement projects that respond to their needs to improve their lives and opportunities for advancement.<sup>5</sup>)

To operationalize the '*People's Process*', the following five steps were undertaken.

#### *Step 1: Community Mobilization and Awareness Building*

Communities and clusters of families were identified, together with awareness raising on the concept of GDCs and NDCs. At the same time the project team worked with Municipal and District level officials so that they became partners in the process, and the community awareness was done through training which was approved by PIU.

#### *Step 2: Establishment of Neighborhood Development Councils*

NDC members were elected and comprised both male and female members. The NDC was then registered with the municipality. Initial meetings were held to discuss communities' problems and resources. GDCs were also formed with representatives of male and female members of NDCs to address common community problems.

#### *Step 3: Preparation of Gozar Action Plan*

The GDC then developed Community (Gozar) Action Plans which identified activities that could be done by the community members and activities for which they needed the project's support.

#### *Step 4: Project Design and Proposal Preparation*

Detailed physical and/or socio-economic surveys were carried out for community proposed social, health or economic development initiatives. The proposals were cost-estimated and then endorsed by the NDCs/GDCs. Community contracts were then prepared. Wherever possible, community members would be employed for the implementation of infrastructure projects. While the physical projects created temporal employment, it was also an opportunity of community members to gain working experience and skills which could be used for other construction projects.

#### *Step 5: Project Implementation*

Community projects proposals were required to be reviewed and approved by the PIU and after PIU's approval, 'Community Implementation Agreements' were issued.

The approved projects were then implemented either directly by the community members or through contractors. Technical support was provided by the UN-Habitat. The implementation process, including physical and financial process was monitored by the PIU team. Once the project was completed a joint evaluation by community members was undertaken, the findings of which were discussed by the NDCs/GDCs so that lessons could be learned and shared.

Communities were expected to contribute to project implementation costs either in kind or in cash. As expected, the required level of community contribution reflected the economic status of residents of that area. Expectations were for a minimum of 25% community contribution for unplanned areas and 35% for planned areas, although the aim was to have an overall community contribution of 40% or above.

As part of the KSP2, JICA's broader goal was to improve local governance. This required emphasis on linking communities, municipalities and national governance rather than simply 'doing construction'.

The objectives at each level were set as follows.

At the Community Level:

- Improved living conditions;
- Employment generation;
- Economic development;
- Community empowerment and solidarity;
- Improved trust and confidence with the government.

At the Municipal Level:

- Capacity building;
- Service delivery;
- Revenue generation;
- Transparency in use of taxes.

At the National Level:

- Dissemination of experiences;
- Contribute to designing solidarity program in urban area.

### 3. OUTPUTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

#### (1) Establishment of NDCs and GDCs

The target communities were identified in coordination with Kabul Municipality, UN-Habitat and PIU. Registration of 50 male and 50 female NDCs and 13 male and 13 female GDCs with the capacity to able to identify, plan their development activities and implement their projects were undertaken.

Organizing and forming these Councils was an essential first step to start community projects. NDC members were elected by residents in each cluster. Election of members ensured a relationship of accountability between the household cluster electorate and the members, and helped bring the community together and create a sense of local trust and hope for an improved environment. At GDC level, women were empowered to engage through mixed-gender GDCs. All NDCs and GDCs were officially registered by the PIU and bank accounts for all NDCs were opened.

The impact from this output included improved citizen engagement in urban development and implementation of a decentralized decision making system. This has had a great impact on relations between the residents and strengthened the trust, unity, collective action and sense of responsibility to improve and help in the rebuilding a better, safer and cleaner environment for all.

#### (2) Preparation of Community Action Plans

After NDCs were established, the members gathered and discussed how to respond to their neighborhoods' needs to prepare Community Action Plans (CAP) and to formulate community project proposals.

The following activities were undertaken by community mobilizers, training officers, planners and engineers:

- Comprehensive training was provided to the CAP team;
- A digital base map of the neighborhood was prepared for usage of identification of the needs and locally-available resources;
- CAP workshops were conducted based on

UN-Habitat's guidelines;

- Presentation of the CAP to all members of the community and stakeholders was made;
- Infrastructure projects to be funded under KSP were identified for all neighborhoods, based on the finalized CAPs;
- Notified and agreed community contribution between 25% and 40%.

**Table 2** shows that significant community contributions were achieved, on average 37% of total infrastructure project costs. It should be noted that achieving this high level of contributions was not easy and UN-Habitat, as the facilitating partner, made extensive and sustained efforts during the program period to build trust with community members in order to secure their contributions. The poorer districts (District 9 and 16) had a lower contribution rate (25% and 20% respectively) than other districts (District 12 and 15 with 41%).

**Table 2** Community Contributions.

D	Total cost	Contribution by KSP	by Community
3	1,935,119	1,245,954(64%)	689,165(36%)
4	1,849,457	1,126,303(61%)	723,154(39%)
9	1,210,873	902,384(75%)	308,489(25%)
11	2,040,415	1,339,281(66%)	701,134(34%)
12	2,285,756	1,358,450(59%)	927,356(41%)
15	3,653,115	2,149,416(59%)	1,503,699(41%)
16	604,285	480,996(80%)	123,289(20%)
Tot	13,578,990	8,602,754(63%)	4,976,236(37%)

Costs are in US Dollars

#### (3) Implementation of Community-driven infrastructure projects

Overall, 89 infrastructure projects were successfully implemented in 7 Districts. **Table 3** outlines the overall achievements of the infrastructure projects. 59.5 km of streets and 98.8 km of drainage channels were laid.

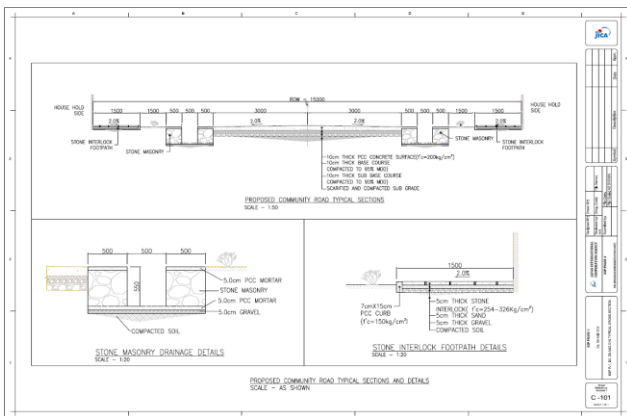
**Table 3** Completed Community Infrastructure

District	Street	Drainage	Footpath
3	7,302m	7,918m	4,902m
4	7,652m	15,727m	
9	5,939m	7,078m	6,256m
11	9,254m	19,870m	
12	10,012m	16,470m	
15	15,841m	27,914m	31,682m
16	3,457m	3,800m	
Total	59,457m	98,777m	42,840m

According to the amended rule of the Kabul Municipality drainage and footpath was for community

contribution. Considering the urgency and the necessity, the communities selected drainage as high priority for their project in KSP2.

**Fig 2** shows the standard design of the street and drainage. The carriageway is 6m wide with two lanes. The thickness of the precast concrete, the base course and sub base is 10cm each and has enough strength to carry vehicle load. Nonetheless the street was equipped with traffic control blocks to prevent heavy vehicles to enter the street and to reduce vehicle speed as shown in **Fig 3**. Drainage channels made by stone masonry of 0.5m width were at the both sides of the carriageway. Where possible, a 1.5m wide green belt was built to separate the drainage from a sidewalk of 1.5m width at both sides of the street. Thus the total right of way was set at 15m.



**Fig 2** Street and Drainage Standard Design



**Fig 3** Vehicle traffic control blocks

#### (4) Achievement of Women Projects

To empower women and provide them with opportunities to be part of the community activities, close communication with the community members was undertaken throughout the program. In addition, there were efforts by the KSP implementation team to ensure that all projects pertaining to women were running smoothly and in a transparent manner. Weekly meetings with the participation of the female social workers of each district were arranged to identify and select the project as well as to monitor

the achievement of the projects. These meetings helped in identifying challenges and ensuring that the projects were implemented in a timely manner, and brought the opportunity for the team members to interact and share experiences. **Table 4** summarizes the women's project at each District. Similar to the infrastructure projects the average contribution by the community was 33%.

As the community decided priority of the projects, the community made larger contribution to literacy project than for infrastructure project in District 16.

**Table 4** Summary of Women's Projects

D	Activity	Total	KSP	Community contrib.
3	Tailoring	9,281	6,092(66%)	3,189(34%)
4	Health and Environment			
		39,693	30,000(76%)	9,693(24%)
9	Literacy	3,492	2,783(80%)	709(20%)
11	Social Awareness, Environment, Park			
		42,853	30,003(70%)	12,850(30%)
12	Health and Environment			
		51,079	30,000(59%)	21,079(41%)
15	Establish Social Awareness Center			
		14,302	10,994(77%)	3,308(23%)
16	Literacy	25,992	15,000(58%)	10,992(42%)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>186,692</b>	<b>124,872(63%)</b>	<b>61,820(33%)</b>

Costs are in US Dollars

The women's projects have made a significant impact on the lives of women in the target areas. These impacts include:

#### ***Female NDCs are getting recognition:***

Women projects have been very important in the overall mission of empowering women as through these projects, recognition of female NDCs among the communities increased. The voice of the women which earlier was very faint is now getting stronger as the communities are respecting their decisions. Women too are now more confident about their leadership abilities and capacities to contribute in their communities. Moreover, the core NDC members during the project received training and experience in procurement, administration and managerial skills that were earlier considered an area only for men. Through these projects women have shown special interest and talent in these areas.

#### ***Inclusion of women in decision making processes:***

In all the women projects, women themselves prioritized their needs and accordingly designed their projects. The deputy position at the Gozar level was a reserved position for women and other members were men, and woman appointed in this position had a bold voice in the decision making process and attended all the meetings.

#### ***Working with the government and influencing***

**powerful people:**

Although dealing with the government and making them voluntarily take part in the women's projects was a very difficult task, women are gradually demanding the services they deserve from the government. For example, a land in District 11 and 12 which were in the master plan of Kabul as a space for parks but had been usurped illegally by powerful persons, were returned to be parks. Women lobbied the Kabul Municipality to name the park and dedicate it to women and they managed with the help of the government to take back the grabbed land from the powerful usurpers. Also in District 11, NDCs developed very good relations with the government. The Greenery Department of the Kabul Municipality sent 25 workers to prepare the park's land for planting and worked for 20 days. In District 4, women got support of the Mullahs (religious leaders). The Mullah decided to give them one room in Mosque for their meetings.

**Raising health and environment awareness:**

Now women of different communities have a better knowledge about health and environment issues. In some working districts of KSP2, there were some misconceptions about very important issues such as vaccination and families never used to vaccinate their children, but now besides being active in environment protection and hygiene they also know importance of vaccination. Soft skills training in District 11 and in District 16 were also very successful as it provided skill set to women to have a better and organized life.

**Celebrating 16 Days of Activism:**

According to the report of Afghanistan Human's Rights Commission<sup>6)</sup> violence against women are increasing daily requiring serious actions and awareness campaigns. In this mission, NDCs played a great role to promote the awareness campaign to each home. In District 11 and 16, the 16 Days of Activism was celebrated with participation of women of the community.

**5. COMMUNITY EVALUATION**

A survey was conducted at all 7 Districts<sup>7)</sup>. **Table 5** summarizes the age group who took part of the survey. The sample size was about 1.4% of the population of the total target communities.

Over 90% of the residents appraised, agreed that cleanness, safety, security, social cohesion, community integration were fostered by KSP. People now communicate with each other and help each other while it was not the case previously, as persons from different ethnic background lived together. Around 80% evaluated the assistance by the Mu-

nicipality as effective, and 99% are now willing to cooperate with the Municipality in the future. Over 96% of male responded to the trainings in project management and accounting as useful, while females indicated their satisfaction of training around 85%, signifying that some gap existed between the provider and beneficiary of the training. Nonetheless the awareness about the environment and health increased by over 96% in both genders.

**Table 5** Age Group of the Satisfaction Survey

Ages	Male	Female	Total
5-14	27	1	28
15-24	172	174	346
25-34	110	180	290
35-44	122	112	234
45-54	109	92	201
55 and over	77	43	120
Total	617	602	1219

**6. LESSONS LEARNED**

**Lesson 1: Proper communication and transparency encouraged community engagement**

It was very difficult in the earlier stages to motivate community members to contribute, but JICA learned that communicating with the community by presenting the KSP program in a coherent and logical manner, resulted in community agreements to contribute, especially in the poorer areas.

Residents in some other Gozars questioned the trustworthiness of KSP actors, and set forth difficult conditions for contribution. As soon as the community received bank account cards, these cards were submitted to the GDC treasurers in presence of the elders and beneficiaries. Through this initiative the program learned that this facilitated public trust and transparency between the KSP program, the Municipality and the community.

Securing community contribution took considerable time, effort and skill. KSP social mobilisers had to work considerably hard, under difficult circumstances to build the trust amongst community to work with the Municipality. In several NDCs the community simply did not want to contribute so these NDCs had to be dropped. It was particularly difficult to secure contribution from higher-income, planned areas than from poorer, unplanned areas.

**Lesson 2: Building trust between project partners**

Residents of District 4 were initially unwilling to contribute because they requested KSP to pave their roads at the width of 8m, but the road was designed at the width of 6m in line with the Municipal Master Plan. The residents were of the opinion that the Master Plan was made either by JICA or UN-Habitat

and imposed upon them.

In order to solve this controversial problem, a large meeting was held with the residents of District 4 in which the high ranking officials of District Office explained to them that paving their road at the width of 6m is in accordance with the Master Plan of Kabul Municipality. KSP staff embedded at the District 4, experienced and learned that working through close cooperation with District Office not only increased KSP trust among the community but also encouraged community members to contribute and accept the plan.

#### ***Lesson 3: Solutions are with the community***

An area of 7,500m<sup>2</sup> has been identified in District 12 together by UN-Habitat district staff and Municipality where a women's recreational park should be constructed as the majority of the population especially women identified this as a key priority. Some people, however, were against the proposal and criticized KSP as they were of the mistaken opinion that the decision had spontaneously been made.

KSP district staff held a meeting with both male and female NDCs and the District Municipality of the area in order to solve the conflict. After a lengthy discussion among all stakeholders, all residents were satisfied and agreed to construct a park in the identified area. KSP staff learned that *“if the problem arises from the community, the solution also exists there to whom we should refer to”*.

It is also very important to assign appropriate number of experienced local experts at the PIU to deal with and oversee all sorts of local issues.

#### ***Lesson 4: Linkage between the Municipality and the Community***

Through the KSP, the Kabul Municipality and community gained considerable exposure to participatory planning and implementation approaches. While the institutional structures and processes are not formally in place, which require the municipality to plan with communities, there is evidence that the experience has helped to build a bridge between the two and for each to see how the strategy can bring about mutual benefit in the longer term.

Before implementing KSP the Municipal officers thought they are the sole authority to address all sorts of urban problem, which could not be realized and was the cause for frustration and mistrust between the Municipality and the communities.

#### ***Lesson 5: Creation of NDCs and GDCs as the basic entity to solve the local problem***

KSP contributed to the creation of the NDCs and GDCs that could respond to the needs of the community members. When the NDCs/GDCs are empowered with development roles such as planning

and managing project activities, they contributed to the integration of society. In addition, the KSP demonstrated that through the NDCs/GDCs, communities could build close relationship with the municipal authorities as a recognized entity for effective service delivery.

#### ***Lesson 6: Joint monitoring as key factor for people's active participation***

Once the NDCs/GDCs were established and registered with the Kabul Municipality, the NDCs/GDCs were trained on Community Action Planning (CAP) exercise, they consulted with communities and undertook the CAP process. During the implementation process, community-based projects were regularly monitored jointly by the CDCs/GDCs, UN-Habitat, PIU and JICA, and then evaluated at the end of the projects. This was a joint monitoring system where all aspects of the projects were monitored and job recommendations provided.

#### ***Lesson 7: Participatory Governance Process from bottom-up***

Concerning Kabul Municipality, more needs to be done to establish the institutional links within the system, which would ensure the process of participatory planning, and management is sustained. The KSP, however, contributed to the sustainability of the good governance process by strengthening the capacity and by training the municipal staff through the participatory process. The trained municipal staff learned and gained experience in all aspects of the process, enabling to provide municipal services.

There was an appreciation of the work undertaken by the communities by Kabul Municipality. There is also an interest to see this approach adopted in other neighborhoods. This appreciation is demonstrated in the willingness of the Kabul Municipality to register the NDCs/GDCs as credible partners. It is particularly important in a war-torn country like Afghanistan to ensure proper governance and service delivery at the municipal level. KSP demonstrated that it is possible to implement the participatory governance process using the bottom-up approach by gaining trust and support from the residents.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The wider impact of community based urban development demonstrate that the approach is a very cost-effective, efficient, and contextually appropriate way to address the critical challenges facing Afghanistan's cities. Additionally it establishes the governance mechanism for the people to manage their own affairs. Because the process is just as important as the outputs, it directly builds sub-national governance capacity and legitimacy and leads to

important social benefits and impacts. These include (i) improved community cohesion and solidarity with reduced ethnic tensions and greater sense of national unity, (ii) increased sense of belonging in cities and improved relations with municipality and (iii) an improved engagement of women and youth in civic life and decision making. Because communities lead the process, and invest their own resources, they feel a sense of ownership over the improvements and ensure adequate maintenance.

Economically, the community led approach harnesses significant community contributions to overall project costs (an average of 37%), creates job, strengthens livelihood assets, and stimulates the local economy. It is estimated that the community led approach is only half of the cost of “top-down” urban infrastructure upgrading programs.

Regularization and formalization through incremental upgrading increases tenure security which is a catalyst for private sector investment. When residents feel secure they improve their houses open businesses, and use their dwellings as productive assets. Upgrading streets and greater access to services improves resident health, wellbeing and safety; reduce travel time and improves the overall quality of life.

Based on the success of the KSP1 and KSP2, KSP type participatory community projects are now implemented in other communities of Kabul and other major cities like Jalalabad, Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat and Kandahar with funding from Japanese Official Development Assistance managed by the Japanese Embassy. The World Bank is also considering funding to Kabul Municipality to further promote KSP.

Presently, aid fatigue has reduced the amount of funds available to support urban development projects in Afghanistan. Institutional capacity is also severely limited in Afghanistan as in most post-

conflict states. It is one aspect of government that is very difficult to change quickly and the country may remain a fragile state several years after the conflict. Conditions may worsen when the initial surge of aid and accompanying expertise fades as happening in the country. KSP project combined community investment with donor/public technical skill set to provide community governance and oversight to deliver goods and services at costs that are affordable for hitherto underserved population.

KSP concept is an effective mechanism to rehabilitate the basic urban infrastructure and improve living conditions in an effective manner, while also achieving a sense of ownership of the installed infrastructure in a urban setting.

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