

Think-and-do-tank Govern4Afg on Good Governance in Afghanistan

# Good Urban Governance

## What is Govern4Afg?

The two-year initiative ‘Governance Forum Afghanistan (Govern4Afg)’ has been launched by German and Afghan partners to establish a platform for policy dialogue on governance topics in Afghanistan. Govern4Afg brings together representatives of research, science, Governance practitioners and decision makers to discuss and further develop on governance related topics. Thereby Govern4Afg supports the Governance portfolio in Afghanistan in the implementation of the BMZ Country Strategy and contributes to overarching policy development and implementation aligned with Afghan context and needs.

## Context

The good governance reform agenda of the Afghan Government includes urban governance as an important field of action because the Government of Afghanistan has recognized urbanisation as one of the most significant drivers of change. While growing urbanisation used to be seen as a threat, especially because it was coupled with massive rural-urban migration due to continuing armed conflict, it is now seen as an opportunity for the country to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, as urban areas have lower poverty rates and better access to services. Thus, Afghanistan has joined many other formerly agrarian countries where rapid urban changes are now taking place.

The current phase of rapid urbanisation in Afghanistan is still new in the hitherto overwhelmingly agrarian country. Urban population is growing at a rate of more than four percent p.a. – a considerably higher rate than the global average of 1.8 percent. This poses a

particular challenge especially under circumstances of widespread poverty and continued political instability and armed conflict. While the urbanisation rate at the turn of the century was about 10–15 percent only, it now stands at some 8.3 to 10.1 million living in urban areas, or about 22–25 percent, depending on how “urban” is defined. A rough summary of the present situation is that the bulk of the urban population is concentrated in five city regions, i.e. Kabul and the four largest cities Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif with a total of six million inhabitants. Govern4Afg will focus on these four major cities after Kabul.

The re-evaluation of the inescapable trends all over the world is promoted and translated into national action programmes sponsored by international development agencies. The World Bank and UN Habitat are very active, as the most prominent and experienced supporters of appropriate urbanisation strategies that are now being launched in Afghanistan. The policy framework is set by the Urban National Priority Programme (UNPP) of 2016, which is coupled with the Citizens’ Charter which structures and promotes social development in both rural and urban areas.

The Citizens’ Charter as a national programme has recently replaced the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) which had been successfully implemented since 2003. A broad range of ministries are involved in using the Citizens’ Charter as their overarching policy framework. Thus, the list of stakeholders related to urban governance issues also includes the emerging local government, i.e. municipalities and their districts (nahiya), down to the “grass-roots” organisations at the neighbourhood level (gozar), and below that, community development committees.



*Kandahar, urban settlements at the outskirts, 2013 (left).*

*Roundtable discussion on Good Urban Governance, February 2017, IDLG/Kabul (right).*

At the national level, the main stakeholders are the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) and the new Deputy Ministry of Municipalities (DMM) as well as the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MUDAH).

## Approach

Govern4Afg activities on Good Urban Governance interfere in the context of an upcoming programme supporting the municipalities by very large World Bank provided funds. The research methodology consists of both references to international good practices, adapted to the conditions in Afghanistan, and feedback from the practitioners' experiences at various levels. The consultants conduct three workshops to share and discuss their progress in fact finding and enquiry: a kick-off in mid-December, a roundtable on 5 February 2017, in which initial findings were discussed; finally, findings will be presented and discussed in May 2017. The participatory approach allows to keep all stakeholders informed on the progress of the work, to continuously discuss and receive feedback.

Initially only two items were expected to be included in the research work, i.e., suggested revisions of the boundaries of municipal districts and sub-districts, and basic infrastructure and services as stipulated by the Citizens' Charter (to be used in the implementation of the World Bank funded programme). However, this omits the essential aspects of how such ideas and criteria are to be translated into action by the combined effects of the Citizens' Charter (for public participation), and the World Bank funded block grants for CDCs and gozars, and – more indirectly – for nahiyas. Therefore, it is the consultants' considered opinion that the Guidelines must focus on how the good ideas and criteria are to be implemented by the agencies at work, from the local communities and their leaders up to the municipalities that must be supported by the national ministries involved.

## Expected Outcomes

The effects of the Govern4Afg contributions in the field of urban development must be seen in conjunction with the emerging government policies and their implementation. The two main outputs will be:

1. **Conceptual Guidelines for Urban Governance in Four Major Cities** (brief and concise, as a practical guide primarily for use by government officials);

2. **A more comprehensive Discussion Paper** (broader and more “academic” in nature).

Through the elaboration of the Guidelines, Govern4Afg will provide hands-on recommendation for municipality officers to support the management of urban development. The Guidelines will provide guidance to the revision of gozar boundaries and propose improvements in the provision of basic services at neighbourhood level where “grassroots” user groups interact with municipality and line agency officers (for example, in the provision of potable water).

The discussion paper is designed to introduce new perspectives for the government's policies for urban development and operations in the context of the ongoing reforms. The publication of the Discussion Paper is expected to lead on to further policy research in the field of local government operations, public-private participation, and implementation of basic infrastructure projects at gozar and nahiya levels.

Beyond this scope, Govern4Afg aims at influencing the strategic planning and action programmes at nahiya and municipal levels. It strives to their better integration with the essential sector policies (such as water / waste water, solid waste management, road networks, and community facilities at all levels) by introducing new perspectives and innovative solutions to key policy makers. Enhanced city environments (not only in terms of physical structures but especially in terms of more capable and effective governance) are for the purpose of improving the livelihoods of urban citizens and making life more enjoyable.

The country is only at the beginning of a long process of gradual improvements coupled with multiple learning processes but Govern4Afg is determined to make a crucial initial contribution towards this development.

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