

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

Subnational governance in Afghanistan



What is Govern4Afg?

Govern4Afg (Governance Forum Afghanistan) as an overarching platform supports the governance sector in Afghanistan in the implementation of the *BMZ Country Strategy*. Its objective is to foster policy dialogue between Afghan and German 'Drivers of Change' in the field of good governance.

Context

At the beginning of the transformation decade (2015–2025) in Afghanistan, the *National Unity Government (NUG)* has set benchmarks with the international community to realize the 'Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework' (SMAF) highlighting 25 concrete short-term priorities for more transparent and effective governance structures.

This factsheet on the role of subnational governance in Afghanistan reflects one of six areas addressed in the first year of implementation of Govern4Afg. The forum's results are based on the Afghan-international expertise of practitioners, experts and decision-makers with interdisciplinary academic backgrounds who have discussed and developed their views on good governance combined with a roadmap which regards sustainability, self-reliance and accountability as guidelines.

Currently, Afghanistan has a centralised government even though constitutionally it provides decentralised governance structures. In a highly fragile and volatile structure of the state, key decision-makers refrain from mentioning *decentralisation* and therefore prefer the term *deconcentration* from centralised power for improved service delivery to the periphery of the vast country. For various reasons the issue of deconcentration and cooperation within the provinces have actually been a topic of discussion for a long time. The

Subnational Governance Policy (SNGP) of the Government from 2010 has not been implemented thoroughly and confusion remains between assignments and capacities of actors on national, provincial, district, village and municipality levels. Current discussions within the new administration about deconcentration of budget and more decentralised governance approaches have fostered the debate among national and subnational entities. As a result of these direct talks, the President would like to implement budgets on subnational level; the general discussion on the *District Coordination Council/District Council (DCC/DC)* delivers space for improvement of policy and a cross-sectoral coordinated strategic approach. Namely, the SNGP has suggested one major and innovative approach: '*finance follows functions*'. By this approach responsibilities for service delivery are delegated through the line ministries to their specific provincial and district line departments.

Even though there are these new approaches on government level, the SNGP lacks coherence, duplicates mandates and is in high need of clarification regarding its legal and constitutional matters. There is certainly a need for multi-layered policy dialogues to focus on national level among key stakeholders around the topic of decentralisation and deconcentration, which has already started and will feed into a comprehensive SNGP reformulation. This has been initiated recently by the *Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG)* and other stakeholders such as the *Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)*. The dialogue process also needs to bring subnational actors from varying contexts together, so that they pave the way for the policy shaping process by addressing their problems and by discussing how new policies can respond to their own complex daily challenges of governance.

Results and recommendations

The Govern4Afg expert-team on SNG has informed policy-making circles alongside various non-governmental and governmental experts on the research objectives and they have been sensitised in the course of Afghanistan's reform agenda. So far, the team has particularly conducted two dialogue events of which the first one was held in Kabul (AREU) and the second one in Berlin (Collaborative Research Center SFB 700, Free University Berlin). International experts, representatives of international organisations, international non-governmental organisations and government representatives – especially of the MRRD and the IDLG – took part in the cross-sectoral platform. The initial outcome of this high-ranking event was informing wide circles of relevant Kabul-based Afghan and international actors about the existence of the SNG dialogue process. Henceforth, after these meetings the agenda was also adopted for the upcoming work of the SNG expert-team.

The second meeting was a discussion with the IDLG Deputy Minister Nader Yama who has confirmed the relevance of the general direction of the subnational governance dialogue process. In addition he has also recognized that the reforms are heading to the right direction. Beyond these he highlighted fields and issues that are of particular relevance to the policy dialogue in Kabul.

With the preliminary results of the research – i.e. the key informants interviews KII, the research on the CDS/Clusters/DDA and *shuras* in Northeast Afghanistan, and the SNGP – the expert team has decided to go along with the governmental '*forms follows functions*'-approach and to combine it with the idea of a polycentric governance process. Given these points the SNG-experts elaborate on the three successive points:

1. On the constitutionally given possibility for a unitary system with some delegation of authorities to the provinces;
2. Hence the government is in need for assistance in choosing and implementing local governance representation;
3. Therefore, the expert-team already started to work as a synergizing hub for all other thematic issues of Govern4Afg. The aim of the SNG-team is close collaboration on comprehensive and certainly intertwined policies with the expert-teams of the *Civil Service Reform (CSR)*, *Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)*, *Provincial Planning and Budgeting (PPB)*, *Mining and Civil Society (CS)*.

As result of preceding dialogue events and stocktaking, in April 2016, an intensified support facility for the updating of Afghanistan's SNG policy has been kicked off.

Findings and relevant topics

So far the expert-team's interviews, dialogue platforms in Kabul and Berlin, and the recently initiated overarching collaboration between the six thematic issues of the Govern4Afg-forum has led to a more comprehensive policy approach which regards the subnational governance policies as key for a better service delivery. The above-mentioned meetings with policy-makers in Kabul and Berlin are in need for data on subnational governance structures and in particular for 'success stories' on sustainable CDC-clusters and *shuras*. For this reason the research uses and analyses existing survey data from Northeast Afghanistan.

The main impact of Govern4Afg engagement on SNG are:

- Demonstrating a clear interest of IDLG and of the Afghan partners in general in the general direction of Govern4Afg dialogue processes;
- Understanding the state of the Afghan Government's thinking on subnational governance reform as presented and explained by Deputy Minister Nader Yama during a Govern4Afg dialogue event in Berlin;
- Pointing out the existence of further databases/sources of information on SNG structures that could be considered for further analysis;
- Identifying the existence of well-functioning subnational institutions; i.e. *Development Councils (DC)* and *District Development Assemblies (DDA)*.

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