



Urban Agenda Platform

The global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development.

Transforming Urban Living Conditions Through The Strengthening Of Municipalities

Region	Asia and the Pacific
Award Scheme	Dubai International Award
Start Year	2017
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Summary

The self-reliance reform agenda of the National Unity Government highlights the idea that cities should be the keydriver of economic growth in Afghanistan. Urban actors have seized this opportunity to improve the living condition of urban citizens. A three-year national program was designed in 2015 and is being implemented in seven cities to assist municipalities.

Background and Objective

The urban population in Afghanistan has been increasingly constantly in the last decade and is currently estimated to be growing at 4% per year. In 2015, the total urban population was estimated at 8.7 million being 24% of the total population, up from 20% in 2001. The rapid urbanization led to an increase in informal settlements that covered 70% of urban areas on average. Households in informal settlements could only put limited investment in housing or business as their property rights were unclear or insufficient. Due to the rapid growth in cities, municipalities could not provide basic services to all urban residents. Municipalities did not have the capacity to collect sufficient local revenues to expand services and maintain infrastructure, nor to involve city residents in the planning process. The municipalities were trapped in a vicious cycle of low revenue collection and poor municipal service delivery.

Actions and Implementation

This is a completely new initiative in Afghanistan and programme, DMM and municipal staff are learning on the job. The action also involves many partners at national, municipal and community levels making the implementation process very challenging. The problems encountered during the project and the interventions to overcome them are as follows:

Problem: Weak technical capacity of municipal staff. **Intervention strategy to address the problems:** Training, mentoring and on-the-job learning including day-to-day support and oversight from the programme's technical staff.

Problem: Resistance by municipal staff to changes brought by the programme especially on performance monitoring/appraisal, supervision/oversight as well as accountability and transparency in municipal finance and land management. **Intervention strategy to address the problems:** Work planning, including setting and monitoring activity and output targets, monitored by government at municipal and national levels. Municipal staff engaged directly in community-based activities e.g. community visioning workshops to improve relationship and accountability between nahia offices and citizens.

Problem: Reluctance by community members to participate in programme activities due to low trust in authorities. **Intervention strategy to address the problems:** All programme activities are designed to be conducted with the involvement of both the communities and municipal staff; this is deliberately planned to show community members how the action will result in tangible benefits in their lives; the citizens' trust has been built gradually during the implementation of the action.

Problem: The action increased the pressure on urban poor households for safayi (property tax) payment. **Intervention strategy to address the problems:** The Safayi Regulations have been revised to introduce a progressive tax system including a property valuation methodology and tax rates that are equitable and sensitive to local property markets.

Problem: Reluctance of women and youth to engage due to conservative mindsets around the legitimacy of their participation. **Intervention strategy to address the problems:** Community representative bodies were required to have mixed gender and youth members. The action ensured that adequate female staff were recruited as programme staff to work with communities and ensure female participation in programme activities.

The principle tool for monitoring the performance of the action is the programme's results framework (includes indicators and targets). The progress and performance of the programme is constantly monitored at activity/output and outcome level as follows:

- A national steering committee (chaired by the Ministry of Urban Development & Housing; includes UN-Habitat and donors) meets quarterly and monitors progress through a performance reporting table submitted by programme management as part of quarterly reports.
- A Programme Management Unit (chaired by the Chief of Party) meets weekly and monitors progress through weekly progress reports submitted by programme teams in all seven provincial municipalities; the team also plans monitoring and technical support missions to the field.
- At Programme Implementation Unit (based at DMM and headed by a manager) meets weekly to assess ongoing operational and technical needs of the programme.
- Programme team leaders based in the programme locations in the field conduct day to day monitoring of activities by programme teams; they prepare and



Urban Agenda Platform

The global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development.

submit weekly reports on operational and technical issues All programme activities follow the Peoples' Process, an approach that mainstreams the participation of communities in the conception, implementation and monitoring of project activities. Community representatives are consulted and facilitated to discuss their problems, to formulate solutions and to determine their priorities. Communities are then empowered to implement projects that solve their problems with facilitation (finance, technical, etc) by municipal authorities, line ministries and UN-Habitat.

Outcomes and Impacts

Sustainability is secured after completion of the Action in each of its dimensions – physical, financial, institutional, environmental and at the policy level through the following: • Financial sustainability ensured through: (i) improved municipal finance and revenue collection; (ii) improved municipal management, through improved planning methods and plans; (iii) improved planning framework to encourage private commercial investment, employment creation, and stimulate local economic development. • Institutional sustainability ensured through: (i) increased municipal capacity that will result in better urban management, planning, revenue management and services delivery; (ii) demonstration of the benefits of local governance structures and municipal-community partnerships that will encourage greater use of such partnerships; (iii) policy support that clarifies the roles and responsibilities of stakeholder institutions, and provide a clearer framework for municipal operations. • Environmental sustainability ensured by: (i) improved living conditions through the various Gozar and municipal projects mainly aimed at improving basic services and infrastructure and promoting LED; (ii) feasibility studies and strategic planning of sub-project sites ensure minimal environmental damage due to development interventions implemented as part of the SMAP and CIPs; and (ii) local, eco-friendly construction materials will be tested and utilized where possible. • Physical sustainability ensured by: (i) including a maintenance plan in all Gozar and Municipal project proposals; (ii) forming a Gozar maintenance committee; (iii) earmarking financial resources for maintenance in municipal budgets; (iv) training local maintenance workers and municipal staff; and (v) designing and implementing appropriate, low-technology interventions that can be maintained/fixed locally and affordably by municipalities with limited technical and financial resources.

Gender and Social Inclusivity

Afghan Municipalities need to significantly increase their human and institutional capacities to collect and spend revenues in a more transparent, accountable and inclusive manner. UN-Habitat adopted the following to transfer the knowledge, technical skills and expertise to the municipalities and DMM: • UN-Habitat technical staff were embedded in DMM and municipalities to work closely with municipal staff and play the role of mentor. • The local capacities were improved through on-the-job training and mentoring to municipal staff in municipal finance and revenue management and support the Municipal Advisory Boards to improve municipal-citizen engagement and outreach. • Institutionalizing of skills; the new approaches and initiatives were included in municipal mandates and became part of its SOPs. • Learning by doing model was adopted, under which municipal staff were given the opportunity to take the lead of the process. • The action has significant potential for replication to all other provincial municipalities in Afghanistan. Mr. Abdul Baqi Popal, being at the forefront of the programme and his pivotal role in the action, can lead the replication process more effectively.

Innovative Initiative

The key lesson learnt during the implementation of the programme include: • Considerable time spent on collaboration with government partners to agree on key policy issues affecting such programmes should be factored in the implementation time • The fact that the programme deals with very important and sensitive matters such as taxation and land tenure has created very high expectations and equally high pressure from stakeholders for the programme to deliver on its results as soon as possible • The community validation procedure has improved transparency and legitimacy of the programme tremendously, increasing citizens' trust in local government

Conclusion

Outdated municipal law, Safayi fee (Property tax) regulation and the absence of legal framework for Occupancy Certificate distribution were the main challenges for the implementation of the programme. The following steps have been taken as a result of this initiative: •A new Land Management Law has been enacted and Occupancy Certificates regulation drafted •National Housing and Urban Upgrading policies have been developed and endorsed by DMM and MUDH •New Municipal law and Safayi fee regulation have been drafted and are pending approval