



AsCAP
Asia Community Access Partnership



Afghanistan Scoping Study

Report on IRIM meeting and Way Forward



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Cover Photo: *All-weather Roads Bring Tangible Improvements to Rural Communities in Daykundi Province.* World Bank Report. SHAHRISTAN DISTRICT, Daykundi Province. February 7, 2017. (Photo Credit: Rumi Consultancy/ World Bank)

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Abstract

This brief report will discuss the outcomes of the Afghanistan delegation's attendance at the IRIM Conference in Kampala, Uganda, in November 2017, as well as outline the agreed upon way forward for the program in Afghanistan. Attending the conference were a senior Ministry official from the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Baryalai Helali, along with Scoping Study team members Abdul Bari Rahimi and Dr. Kerrin Barrett. The MOU was agreed upon in principal, with two projects identified for ReCAP program start up: 1) capacity building of MRRD Research Unit staff, and 2) a study of the socio-economic impact of rural roads in Afghanistan.

Key words

Afghanistan, rural roads, community development, MOU, annual conference, project support, program inception

ASIA COMMUNITY ACCESS PARTNERSHIP (AsCAP)
Safe and sustainable transport for rural communities

AsCAP is a research programme, funded by UK Aid, with the aim of promoting safe and sustainable transport for rural communities in Asia. The AsCAP partnership supports knowledge sharing between participating countries in order to enhance the uptake of low cost, proven solutions for rural access that maximise the use of local resources. AsCAP is brought together with the Africa Community Access Partnership (AfCAP) under the Research for Community Access Partnership (ReCAP), managed by Cardno Emerging Markets (UK) Ltd.

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Acronyms, Units and Currencies

\$	United States Dollar (US\$ 1.00 ≈ provide conversion to local currencies)
£	GBP
AFCAP	Africa Community Access Partnership
AIRD	Afghan Institute for Rural Development
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ARAP	Afghanistan Rural Access Project
ASCAP	Asia Community Access Partnership
ATVI	Afghanistan Technical Vocational Institute
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
IRD	Institute for Rural Development (MRRD)
iNGO	International Non-governmental Organization
IRIM	ReCAP Inter-Regional Implementation Meeting
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MOTCA	Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation
MOUD	Ministry of Urban Development
MPW	Ministry of Public Works
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NEEP	National Emergency Employment Program
NERAP	National Emergency Rural Access Project
NABDP	National Area Based Development Programme
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NRAP	National Rural Access Program
NRIRCI	National Regional Integrated Resources Corridor Initiative
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
PID	Project Implementation Document
PMU	Programme Management Unit
RTM	Regional Technical Manager

1 Purpose

Program inception in Afghanistan significantly benefitted from having representation at the ReCAP Inter-Regional Implementation Meeting (IRIM) held in Kampala, Uganda, November 20-24, 2017. Abdul Bari Rahimi (President, Afghanistan Technical Vocational Institute) had represented Afghanistan at the regional Steering Committee meeting in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and, along with Dr. Kerrin Barrett (Team Leader), were invited to attend the IRIM meeting. Accompanying Eng. Bari was a senior Ministry official from the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), Baryalai Helali, who provided valuable input into the conference proceedings and draft MOU. Attendance by the Afghanistan delegation signalled the country's formal entry into ReCAP/AsCAP community of rural roads and transport research practitioners.

2 Conference Outcomes

2.1 Conference

Dr. Kerrin Barrett, Eng. Abdul Bari Rahimi and Baryalai Helali participated in all three days of the IRIM conference, with Eng. Rahimi and Mr. Baryalai Helali attending the Steering Committee meetings November 23-24, 2017, as delegates representing Afghanistan. The team met the PMU staff and networked with colleagues from the other partner nations, forging relationships for future collaborations and learning about other research projects, some of which are directly relevant to Afghanistan's current needs and challenges.

Several of the more relevant presentations for the Afghanistan context were on gender mainstreaming, technology innovations, and Uganda's development of an Electronic Data Management System. As identified in the Scoping Study, including females in research and practice is a constant challenge in Afghanistan and merits special focus. The presentations on innovations, specifically satellite mapping and flexible tractor usage, also have direct relevance to Afghanistan. Dr. Mark Henry Rubarenzya, UNRA, offered the Afghanistan delegation his full support aiding in the development of Afghanistan's own data management system, adding that he also started 'from scratch'.

2.2 Potential Contributions of Afghanistan to ReCAP: Knowledge Sharing

As an example of potential contributions of Afghanistan to ReCAP's knowledge sharing, lessons learned from the Citizen Charter could add value to other ReCAP partner nations recovering from years of conflict. The proposed second project, a study of the socio-economic impact of rural roads and transport development under MRRD¹, is another example of how ReCAP/Afghanistan will be able to contribute its knowledge to the benefit of other partner nations.

3 Program Inception: Ways Forward

3.1 Memorandum of Understanding

As of the writing of this report, the MOU is close to being signed, with Mr. Helali's attendance at the IRIM conference for the full week a strong signal of support for ReCAP from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and MRRD. MRRD finalized the MOU at the end of December 2017, with Eng. Abdul Bari Rahimi, ATVI, providing in-country support. The MRRD brought a few minor changes to the MOU, and it is now ready to be shared with ReCAP and DFID.

¹ Part of Project 1 - Building Sustainable Knowledge Generation and Management Capacity for Rural Access and Mobility from the Afghanistan Scoping Study.

The new MRRD Minister has also been approved by Parliament, and will travel to London in February / March 2018 to sign the MOU.

Key PMU staff will be available during that week, and the Afghan delegation will be able to meet with DFID partners and visit local universities and research facilities involved in the ReCAP programme. The PMU will coordinate the meeting with DFID.

3.2 Initial Projects

Two projects were agreed for ReCAP program inception in Afghanistan during the discussions with the Afghan delegation and the PMU in Uganda: 1) capacity building of MRRD Research Unit staff, and 2) a study of the socio-economic impact of rural roads in Afghanistan. The two projects address the Scoping Report's recommendations, which centre on the importance of capacity building in rural roads and transport research, along with supporting research efforts in alignment with GIROA/MRRD needs. The projects discussion will occur in tandem with MOU finalization.

In the meeting with the PMU, Mr. Helali explained that \$195M has been spent thus far by MRRD (established in 2002) on rural roads in Afghanistan, and that they have an internal Institute for Rural Development (IRD) whose scope consists of: 1) a research section; and 2) a capacity development section. For the latter, capacity building of community development councils is the main focus. The research capacity of the Institute is quite low, as is common in Afghanistan, with performance gaps in how to conduct research, including research design, tool preparation, analysis and reporting. The Ministry of Finance provides a small budget.

Mr. Helali noted that research is the biggest gap in MRRD, and suggested that ReCAP build the capacity of their research center. The Programme Management Office employs around 15 people, with their educational background at the Master's level in the Institute. MRRD has one focal point in each of the 34 provinces to collect the data and return it to the Ministry. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) constructed the Institute's building on the MRRD compound. Although there are personnel, a building and budget, the problem lies in the need for on-the-job training and mobilization. Eng. Rahimi further explained that it is a research institute in name only at present. This presents an excellent opportunity for ReCAP to make a difference in vital research capacity in Afghanistan.

This capacity building project falls under the Scoping Study's recommended start up project: *Building Sustainable Knowledge Generation and Management Capacity for Rural Access and Mobility*. The purpose of this kick-off project is to build knowledge management capacity in relevant stakeholders in the rural roads sub-sector, specifically in the area of research management and uptake. The primary project outcome will focus and manage research on rural roads and transport to inform decision making at the highest level, specifically in government institutions (e.g., MRRD, MoTCA and MPW). The project will incorporate analyses of different aspects of roads infrastructure including: location of materials; availability of materials; road asset management and determining topics for the research entity (ie., research institute).

This project will be supported by the Research Institute (Project 5 in the Scoping Study Report). Both research and research uptake is lacking in Afghanistan and new strategies are needed to ensure top-level buy-in and continuing support for innovative ways of rural road design, building and maintenance. The project will develop curriculum, training and strategies for research uptake that are applicable to the Afghanistan context and leverage ReCAP's lessons learned and content from similar projects. The key research question here is: "How can we mentor the Institute employees to bring quality research to enable decision-making?"

The second project proposed by Mr. Helali is a study of the socio-economic impact of rural roads in Afghanistan. Thus far, only a small study has been conducted. There is a need to sample for the whole country and look at 16,000km of roads that have been rehabilitated over the past 15 years, including those under the Citizen Charter. This second project will look at the impact of infrastructure on communities, tying into the bigger transport services project in ReCAP, investigating what is contributing to poverty reduction in rural communities. Basic community data will be collected regarding water supply, health and education availability, etc.

Tying into both projects is the need to strengthen research uptake at the policy level, for example, determining who will write the reports, and then how to use the data and the reporting to effect policy change that will benefit rural communities. The projects will be undertaken by international consultants in association with counterpart research staff from MRRD/IRD for ongoing capacity building and mentorship.

3.3 Next Steps and Logistical Considerations

A number of next steps, as well as logistical considerations, were discussed in the Afghanistan program meeting at the conference. In tandem with the MOU modifications, the PMU team will modify the initial project implementation document (PID) created in the August workshop for Project 1 in the Scoping Study, as well as write the second PID for the study and two concept notes for the proposed projects. Maysam Abedin will put together the two concept notes, organizing the work in phases. The PMU will develop an Action Plan that will guide project start up.

It was noted that a clear plan is needed regarding the needs of the IRD. Further consideration will need to be given as to whether ReCAP will need to have someone go in country and scope the work very tightly, with a training plan, etc. A thorough training needs analysis must be conducted as part of this activity. All present acknowledged that teaching people to do research is a special skill, and mentoring is important to make sure that the research coming out can be used. This aspect will be incorporated in the first phase of the first project. This effort may involve training in other countries, even attaching to other projects to implement it. The project scope will need to include this kind of detail.

It was also noted that ReCAP will normally set up a national steering committee of stakeholders at the outset of program implementation in country. This activity will need to be accomplished alongside the two projects at inception. (The Scoping Study Report has a list of potential stakeholders who could serve on the Steering Committee.)

As indicated in the Scoping Report, logistical considerations are central to the implementation of ReCAP/AsCAP in Afghanistan due to the security situation in the country. The PMU and its staff and contractors fall under DFID's Duty of Care rules, though those rules are interpreted by Cardno within its own security framework. In effect, for Afghanistan this means more flexibility in terms of transportation, movements, accommodation and other logistical needs than British Embassy personnel are allowed, underpinned by an awareness of the ongoing dynamic security situation on ground.

Both start up projects will require the in-country presence of Service Providers, along with support from, ReCAP's Regional Technical Manager (RTM) for Asia. Capacity building for the research institute will require hands-on training of MRRD personnel, as will support for the rural roads socio-economic impact study. Moreover, face to face interaction is an ingrained part of the culture of Afghanistan, where relationship-building is highly valued. Therefore, program success will in large part hinge upon regular visits to the country by the RTM/PMU and ReCAP Service Providers, supported by regional workshops and conferences.

The Scoping Study team has identified a local contractor to provide security arrangements for in-country visits. The contractor is currently providing security for US Pentagon officials, and meets all international standards for security contractors while providing services at a reasonable cost to clients.

It is recommended that the ReCAP team plan a one to two week visit to Kabul after the MOU is signed in order to meet key MRRD staff and officially launch the projects. While in country, the ReCAP team will also be able to meet with DFID and other major donor partners, as well as international non-governmental organizations (iNGOs) and non-governmental organization (NGO) implementers in the roads and transport sector to forge ties and strengthen ReCAP's presence in country. Quarterly follow up visits in country will ensure the program stays on track with its initial project goals.