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# Urban Governance:

# An Assessment of the Urban Development Programme in Afghanistan

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## Introduction

Afghanistan faces a wave, largely uncontrolled, of urban growth in the form of 'informal' settlements, without the most basic infrastructure, i.e., water supply, waste water and solid waste management and accessible schools and playgrounds, but also without suitable places of work for both men and women. All these are included in the notion of what a 'good city' is, and are intended to be created by the close cooperation of international and national agencies and the residents concerned, with specific roles for the city's administrative structures from the municipality down to the *nahiya* (district), the *gozar* (street) and the CDC (community development council).

Afghan and German partners jointly selected urban governance as one of six topics within the Governance Forum Afghanistan (Govern4Afg) to discuss key challenges in the sector and create a better understanding of recent developments.

The objective of this Policy Note is to summarise key findings of the assessment of the current urban development programme and present recommendations for its better implementation. It draws on material from a forthcoming Issues Paper on 'Urban Governance in Afghanistan.'

The research specifically focuses on the four major cities of Herat, Kandahar, Mazar-i-Sharif and Jalalabad. These four cities along with Kabul[1] house more than 60 percent of the country's growing urban population. Successful urban policy implementation in these cities can considerably reduce governance challenges and improve livelihoods of the majority of Afghans. That is precisely the direction for achieving good urban governance in Afghanistan, in conjunction with large investments: first in these four large cities, but then subsequently in the smaller cities, all over the country.

1 + 4 large city regions (2016)

| City Region | Population range (millions) |
|---|---|
| 1. Kabul | 4.8-5.5 |
| 2. Jalalabad | 1.5-1.6 |
| 3. Kandahar | 1.2-1.3 |
| 4. Herat | 1.5-1.7 |
| 5. Mazar-i-Sharif | 1.6-1.7 |
| Total (range) | 10.6-11.8 |

Source: Atlas of Afghan Cities, 2016

## Methodology

Several methods were used to conduct the study. The desk review covered broader issues and contextualised multiple tiers starting from the smallest administrative units up to the municipality, including their interaction with other agencies. The kick-off and dialogue events collected feedback on the research and provided a platform for discussion. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were also part of the research effort.

The policy on urban governance must ask and answer vis-à-vis Afghanistan two very basic questions: (1) 'What is a good city?' and (2) 'How can we turn the cities of Afghanistan into good cities?' The rapidly urbanising country with its agrarian physical, social and economic heritage does not have ready-made answers to such fundamental questions.

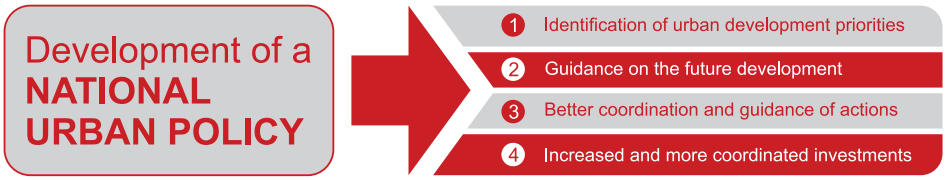
Two leading national policies and strategies are the Urban National Priority Programme (U-NPP) - Results Framework, 2016, and the Citizens' Charter, 2016 (which covers rural and urban areas), though these two strategies together do not add up to a complete national policy framework for urban governance.

1 Given its size and its particular significance as capital, Kabul is marked by a singular development and cannot be compared with the four major cities. It is therefore not considered in this paper.

## Key Findings

### The Principal National Policy Framework

A complete national urban policy needs to be in place in the near future to incorporate the ambitious urban support programme, which is coupled with the Citizens' Charter and its implementation in the coming ten years or more. The management and investment work for the four large cities (and Kabul) is now being formulated by the Government and its supporting international partners. Thus, implementation is, as of yet, in a preparatory phase.




Source: UN Habitat, 2016

### The Expected Municipal Management Roles

The programming and implementing work of the four cities has a complex and dynamic nature. This is mainly due to the various forms of diversity within these four cities (and Kabul). It was found that the low capacity of the municipal authorities, compared with the requirements for implementation of the programme, is a major challenge to fulfil the management roles. The interviewees are thus aware of the need for strong guidance of the programme, particularly in terms of administrative and managerial capacities of municipal authorities.

### Limited Administrative Structure

The originally intended limitation on *gozar* and *nahiya* standardisation (in terms of population size) is limited because most improvements at the grassroots level (i.e., CDC and *gozar*) cannot be planned and implemented in isolation from the larger plans and networks to which they are connected.

Three layers of planning and management activities come together in the urban support programme:

1. The 'grassroots' or 'bottom up' efforts under the Citizens' Charter, coupled with massive block grants for CDCs and *gozars*;
2. The intended strategic action programmes at *nahiya* and municipality levels (SNAP and SMAP) that will soon replace the urban master plans;
3. The national and regional sector priority programmes in education, health, water and waste management, etc.

### The *Gozar* Reforms Stipulated by the Citizens' Charter

A quick review of the existing *gozar* distribution in the four cities revealed that only in Kandahar the *gozar* area/population size can remain close to present values. However, in the other three cities, the *gozar* reform will result in a drastic reduction of the numbers. The *gozar* restructuring would have to be undertaken before the urban support programme begins, as a precondition for grant disbursement in the four cities.

For the four cities, the proposed reform resulting in *gozars* of comparable size and administrative quality would lead to considerable changes as shown in the table below. In other words, the required implementation time will likely have to be augmented for amalgamating the existing small *gozars* into standardised ones. This is likely to delay the eagerly expected infrastructure investments. As the table below shows, only Kandahar, just one of the four cities, may be allowed to go ahead with the *gozar* infrastructure programme, without restructuring.

### The Planned Reduction of the Number of *Gozars* in the Four Cities

| City | Old *gozar* structure (present) | New *gozars* (reform target) |
|---|---|---|
| Jalalabad | 232 | 97 |
| Kandahar | 78 | Review, but no major change required |
| Herat | 331 | 112 |
| Mazar-i-Sharif | 432 | 72 |

Above the level of the *gozar*, the *nahiyas* are also quite different in size and capacity. Accordingly, a restructuring may have to be added to the programme implementation at a later stage.

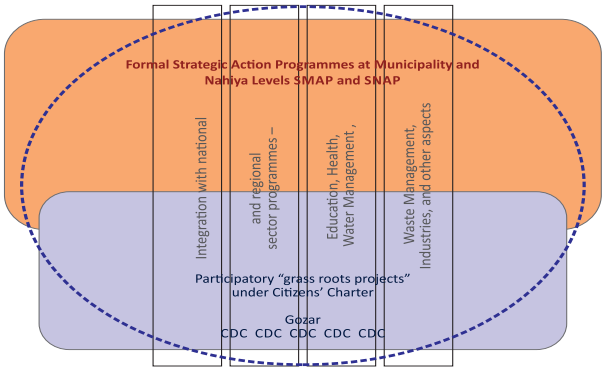
## Recommendations

The recommendations in this Policy Note include 'technicalities' for the underlying study (*gozar* reform, and a menu of basic community facilities). The first is to adopt an appropriate format for municipal planning and governance, a recommendation that was not described by the Citizens' Charter. This is followed by further recommendations to address the existing gaps identified in the findings:

### Municipality Planning and Management by Means of Three Coordinated Action Fields

The programme for the four cities (and then, for other cities) must be implemented by a broad management approach in which three layers of planning and action are used, as indicated in the chart below. The municipality (shown by the dotted oval in the middle) requires (1) innovative strategic plans (strategic municipal action programme [SMAP], and strategic *nahiya* action programme [SNAP]), but also (2) participatory 'grassroots projects' (as stipulated by the Citizens' Charter), apart from (3) those sectoral plans and strategies that are governed by the national ministries.

### The Planning and Management Structure for Implementing the Programme




### City-wide Facilities - Adopt a Suitable Framework for Orientation

Besides discussing the basic facilities under the Citizens' Charter, it is recommended, to include a structured overview of (1) the 'big picture' of city facilities by city size and type, and (2) an inventory of the wider neighbourhood facilities to which the grassroots support programme (inspired by the Citizens' Charter) will contribute (due to limited space, these are not visualised in the Policy Note).

### 'Menu Driven' Local Infrastructure Improvements (As Stipulated by Citizens' Charter)

Local-level improvements to infrastructure, public utilities and community facilities are one of the standard international approaches to combining active participation of local inhabitants in planning and bottom-up decision-making, with the financing and managing of urban facilities through multiple sources. Such proven models of success are to be adapted to local Afghan conditions and viable practices in the format of the proposed 'menu driven' infrastructure programme that is summarised below.

The 'menu' originally suggested by the Citizens' Charter as presented here has incorporated two significant modifications: (1) defining the household numbering and the *gozar* reform as a precondition, rather than a component of implementing the menu of community facilities; and (2) adding a 'joker card' to the six standard facilities that the gozar councils may choose to implement (their favoured 'joker project' can be selected in addition or instead of the standard facilities on the menu).

### The 'Menu' for *Gozar*-Level Improvements

| | |
|---|---|
| Preconditions: Required two steps for each city, prior to selecting projects from the 'menu' below | 1. New standard household numbering<br>2. Reform of gozar population size and boundaries |
| Menu of seven types of projects for each *gozar*, to be selected by the city | |
| 1 | Street upgrading, including drainage and tree planting |
| 2 | Potable water provision |
| 3 | Solid waste management |
| 4 | Park/recreation area/playground |
| 5 | Lighting, electricity provision |
| 6 | Livelihood projects for women |
| 7, as a "joker card" | Suggested specific project of the city's own choice (details to be defined) |

Summarised and modified from Citizens' Charter Manual, December 2016

**Long-term Capacity Investment:**

In view of the deficiencies in urban physical and socio-economic conditions, the need for boosting management capability requires long-term and clearly targeted support (which is not described in the programme documents). This calls for a concerted action programme, which includes the following components:

- Design a pilot programme: one *nahiya* in one of the four cities or in two or even all four cities simultaneously; it is important to design and implement this kind of programme carefully and without the impatience of the rest of the city to start their own programmes.
- Start the pilot work only in areas where the preconditions have been met, i.e., where the *gozar* boundary adjustment has been completed. Evaluate the pilot work carefully prior to implementing the local projects in other *gozars*.
- Involve graduates and trainees from any relevant education programme; for example, the new Masters' course at Kabul Polytechnic University.
- Retain the best performers among the local trainers and get them involved in subsequent courses. Bring in officers from other cities to witness the programme in the four large cities.

It is envisaged that the action programme will include four or five specialisations in the broad field of socio-economic and physical urban improvements, such as accounting and procurement procedures; water/wastewater and environmental components; integrating the women's learning and training facilities; playgrounds and primary schools in the neighbourhood, and several others.

The very large and complex billion-dollar programme that is visualised by the Citizens' Charter still requires considerable time and efforts for adequate preparation. The danger of programme failure due to negligent preparatory work is too great to risk.

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Govern4Afg
Governance Forum Afghanistan
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This Policy Note was prepared as a contribution to Governance Forum Afghanistan (Govern4Afg). Govern4Afg was launched by German and Afghan partners to establish a platform for policy dialogue on governance topics identified as being highly relevant for Afghanistan. The two-year initiative brings together representatives of research, governance practitioners and decision makers to discuss and further develop on governance mechanisms that guide state-building as well as enhance the overall understanding of the governance context in Afghanistan. In this context, AREU, as a consortium partner implementing Govern4Afg, has published a whole series of related research papers on governance in Afghanistan.

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