

**Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
Case Study Series**

POLICY PROCESS STUDIES

**Policymaking in Agriculture
and Rural Development
in Afghanistan**



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About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research organisation based in Kabul. AREU's mission is to conduct high-quality research that informs and influences policy and practice. AREU also actively promotes a culture of research and learning by strengthening analytical capacity in Afghanistan and facilitating reflection and debate. Fundamental to AREU's vision is that its work should improve Afghan lives.

AREU was established in 2002 by the assistance community working in Afghanistan. Its board of directors includes representatives from donors, the UN and other multilateral agencies, and NGOs. AREU has recently received funding from: the European Commission; the governments of Denmark (DANIDA), the United Kingdom (DFID), Switzerland (SDC), Norway and Sweden (SIDA); the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); the Government of Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock; the World Bank; UNICEF; the Aga Khan Foundation; and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

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Acronyms

AACA	Afghanistan Assistance Coordination Authority
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ARD	Agriculture and Rural Development
ARDSS	Agriculture and Rural Development Sector Strategy, part of the ANDS
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
ASAP	Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program
ATA	Afghanistan Transitional Authority
CARD	Comprehensive Agricultural Rural Development
CDD	Community Driven Development
DEX	direct execution
DFID	Department for International Development (UK Government)
EC	European Commission
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FP	facilitating partners
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
IF	Key Informant
IIP	Implementation and Investment Plans
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
KDP	Kecamatan Development Program
MAAHF	Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
MIFSA	Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan
MP	Master Plan
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NABDP	National Area Based Development Programme
NDS	National Development Strategy
NDF	National Development Framework
NEEP	National Emergency Employment Programme
NEX	national execution
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
PDP	Provincial Development Plans
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
RAMP	Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOPS	United Nations Operational Services
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WatSan	water and sanitation

Executive Summary

This case study, on the making of policy in Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD), is the first in a series of studies by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) looking at policymaking processes in Afghanistan since 2002. There are particular reasons why there should be an interest in policymaking. It is linked to whether or not, and how, Afghanistan's government is able to exercise control and direction over its own policies, given its dependence on aid and the way in which aid is delivered. This, in turn, links to the implementation of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. These studies therefore aim to contribute to an understanding of how aid does or does not contribute to building an effective Afghan state.

A broad interpretation of policy is assumed and it is defined as a set of discrete intentions and resultant practices (through strategy development, funding and implementation) in the name of the public good. The objective of these studies is to build understanding of the contents of the policy agenda, the processes by which it has been made and the underlying interests, discourses and practices that have driven it. Policy is fundamentally political, not technical, and the purpose of policy enquiry is to open up the space for informed political choice. This requires more deliberative processes of policymaking, plus an engagement by those involved in policymaking with the competing views that have been found in this case study.

It is argued, based on the evidence, that three broad narratives drive policymaking in ARD. Underpinning each of these narratives are different perspectives on both the challenges and how they are to be faced.

The first, characterised as the "productionist" viewpoint, is largely to be found within the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). It emphasises the need to increase production and draws its understanding of what needs to be done from a narrative based on Afghanistan's past as a self-sufficient country with the rural population engaged in agriculture. It also seeks to recreate the role that MAIL is perceived to have played in the past.

The second narrative is essentially "developmentalist" and subscribes, to varying degrees, to the donor consensus on the need for good governance, private sector-led development, growth and poverty reduction. It emphasises the need to create an enabling environment through good governance, an investment in public goods, pro-poor investments and programmes (such as microfinance for the poor). It focuses largely on creating the chances for the poor to act as agents of their own destiny. This view is subscribed to by all but one of the donors working with MAIL and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD).

The one donor that does not subscribe to this second narrative is the United States Agency for International Development (USAID): its position is characterised more as "market-driven", with almost exclusive support of the private sector to drive development. Over time, it appears to have shifted its position from strong advocacy of the free market to more focused support for international agribusiness and commercialisation.

The attempt to merge these divergent narratives into a coherent ARD sector strategy has largely failed. The development of an ARD strategy has emphasised the competition between these positions rather than an exploration of the potential complementarities. This results from an essentially adversarial process of policymaking, where policy

narratives and their advocates have been unable to accept competing viewpoints. As a result, the opportunity to fully explore the policy choices and develop a coherent rural development strategy has been lost.

This study also reveals the basic incompatibility of effective government leadership with a high dependence on international aid. Across all programmes, donor behaviour, such as funding off-budget or selectively funding individual provinces, has not even reached the first stage of harmonisation as envisaged in the Paris Declaration. While there are partial steps towards alignment, supporting some of the Government's agenda and working through its systems, the lack of alignment is more striking than the degree to which it has been achieved. Under such conditions, it is apparent that ownership of the policy agenda does not rest with national ministries.

1. Introduction

1.1 Studies on polymaking processes: An introduction

This case study on the making of policy in Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) is the first in a series of Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) studies looking at polymaking processes in Afghanistan since 2002. Other studies underway or planned will look at polymaking processes in a range of sectors, including subnational governance, economic policy, education, health, gender policy and counter-narcotic policy. Additional analysis of both policy content and polymaking processes of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) is being undertaken and a synthesis paper, planned for early 2010, will draw on these studies and other relevant publications by AREU and others.¹

The selection of these sector areas for study draws on the organisation of the sector structure of the ANDS. It seeks contrasts between deeply political and contentious policy areas (such as governance or police reform) and apparently more technical sectors (such as agriculture and health). However, as will be seen, these more technical policy areas are also very political in their own ways. The selection of sector studies also draws on a World Bank assessment² of Afghanistan's development policies and their performance, which found great variation across thematic areas and sectors. It argued that in some sectors (health, education) and in rural small-scale infrastructure there had been considerable progress, but in other areas it was less visible. Counter-narcotics and agriculture were assessed as particularly poor performers with respect to policy and management³. In part, differences in performance were attributed to the quality of leadership within the key ministries. Thus the selection of sector areas is structured around contrasts, looking at polymaking processes in sector or thematic areas that are seen to have been relatively successful and those where performance has been assessed as more problematic. This study on ARD contains such a contrast; the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) is often judged as having been rather a poor performing ministry, while the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) is held up as an example of success.

It should be made clear that these AREU policy process studies, including this one, do not have as an objective to make judgements about good or bad, or successful or unsuccessful ministries or policies. As has been noted elsewhere,⁴ "success" and "failure" are themselves policy-oriented judgements that do not necessarily explain what policy or project effects actually are. In this sense, the judgements on success or failure in policy may reveal more about who supports a policy or project rather than what the impact of that policy has been.⁵

These studies are more concerned with the examination of the polymaking processes—

1 For example Andrew Wilder, *Cops and Robbers? The Struggle to reform the Afghan National Police* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007).

2 William Byrd, "Responding to Afghanistan's Development Challenge: An Assessment of Experience During 2002-2007 and Issues and Priorities for the Future," Report No SASPR-11 (Washington: The World Bank, 2007).

3 Byrd, "Afghanistan's Development Challenge," Table 2, 12.

4 David Mosse, "Is Good Policy Unimplementable? Reflections on the Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice," *Development and Change*, 35 no. 4, (2004): 639-671.

5 Mosse, "Is Good Policy Unimplementable?". For an Afghanistan example see David Mansfield and Adam Pain, *Counter Narcotics in Afghanistan: The Failure of Success?* (Kabul: AREU, 2008).

how policy has been made in Afghanistan. Why is this of interest? Why study policymaking? What is meant by policy process and how does one research it? And indeed what does one mean by policy? The most straightforward answer to the question of “Why study policy?” is that in general a great deal of effort goes into making policy in the belief that making and implementing the right policy is the key to progressive development. The effort expended on the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) is a case in point. Moreover, there is a wider interest in gaining influence over policymaking, so studying how policy is made in practice may afford the opportunity to be more influential in bringing other evidence and arguments to the table to make policy “better.”⁶ In this regard there is more than a degree of self-interest in these studies by AREU, which has mandated itself to “undertake high-quality research that informs and influences policy and practice”⁷ so “that its work should improve Afghan lives.”

There are particular reasons why there should be an interest in policymaking processes in Afghanistan. These are linked to the question of how and to what extent Afghanistan’s government is able to exercise control and direction over policymaking, given the extent of its dependence on aid and the way in which aid is delivered. As noted elsewhere,⁸ a high dependence on aid and effective government leadership are incompatible elements, particularly when there are severe capacity limits. Byrd develops this point further:

Difficulties in aid management and coordination have been exacerbated by the following factors. First, an enormous number of donors are active in Afghanistan—according to the Government as many as 62 including non-governmental donors. Second, a number of these donors—of the order of a half-dozen or more—are major players in terms of the amount of assistance they provide and/or as actors on the world stage. There is, unlike in many other post-conflict countries, no natural dominant or “lead” donor (e.g. for reasons of geographical proximity) in the development sphere, although the US plays such a role on the military side. In addition the UN system, and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in particular, plays a very important role, led by a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General. This includes overall coordination of the closely inter-linked political, security, and development agendas.

While in part a reflection of the high degree of aid dependence and very limited capacity in Government, problems in aid management also relate very much to the modalities of aid provided to Afghanistan. Roughly two-thirds of total assistance to Afghanistan (more in the early days) has been channeled bilaterally outside the Government budget and control systems, with little coordination and even limited information-sharing. Although some donors provide most of their aid through the Afghan national budget, several very large donors go off-budget with the bulk of their assistance.⁹

Given these contextual factors—a country almost entirely dependent on external aid, a government struggling to establish itself with restricted control of the overall development expenditure and where the broader modalities and priorities of state

6 See for example the Overseas Development RAPID (Research and Policy in Development) programme that aims to improve the use of research and evidence in development policy and practice, www.odi.org.uk/rapid

7 See www.areu.org.af

8 Hamish Nixon, *Aiding the State? International Assistance and the Statebuilding Paradox in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007).

9 Byrd, “Responding to Afghanistan’s Development Challenge,” 19.

building and reconstruction remain contested¹⁰—the question “Who makes policy and how?” is deeply relevant. It is also central to concerns over aid effectiveness and the implementation of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.¹¹ These studies therefore aim to contribute to an understanding of how aid does or does not contribute to building an effective state in Afghanistan.

What is policy and what is meant by the policy process? A broad interpretation of policy is assumed—it may be defined as a set of defined intentions and resultant practices (through strategy development, funding and implementation) in the name of the public good. The Oxford English Dictionary defines policy as “the course of action adopted by government” to achieve certain objectives. In this sense, the policy process is the means by which policy is conceived, negotiated, expressed and formalised and by which the procedures of implementation and practice are followed. Thus policy is not just the formal documentation to be found in policy statements, nor should it be assumed that policy is necessarily articulated in a formal way. Policy is also defined here as the actions taken to achieve the stated aims—the practice of policy or its implementation. Indeed, it is often in the investigation of policy implementation and the disconnect between stated aims and what actually happens that a deeper understanding of what policy is actually about is found. The widespread evidence of this disconnect has led to the question¹² of whether good policy—that is, policy which legitimises and mobilises political support—is actually implementable?

Given this wide interpretation of policy, policy clearly has to be thought of at multiple levels. At the broadest level, one can identify general policy, for example, in relation to poverty reduction. There is a general consensus across the donors¹³ that the key ingredients for achieving poverty reduction are growth, good governance and social development and that these broad policy priorities structure the details of what donors support. At the next level down, there are policy models or frameworks and approaches—market-driven development or sustainable rural livelihoods, for example—that guide the ways in which broad policy principles are seen to be implementable. These frameworks are reflected ultimately in programme or project designs that contain assumptions, sometimes explicit and sometimes not, about the cause and effect relations between an intervention and its impact. For example, the argument that the implementation of a microcredit programme leads to market access and empowerment of the poor is an assumption that, in practice, is rarely subject to critical assessment.

There is much about policy that is deeply managerial and technical, particularly so in Afghanistan, where the reconstruction effort seeks to build a state, to establish good governance and to reduce poverty. There is the assumption that such things can be managed by policy—that states can be built by the right policies and that poverty can be reduced if the right mechanisms are lubricated. Underlying this position is what is often characterised as the rationalist and technocratic view of policy. Polymaking is seen

10 Jonathan Goodhand, “Corrupting or Consolidating the Peace? The Drugs Economy and Post-conflict Peacebuilding in Afghanistan.” *International Peacekeeping*, 15 no.3, (2008): 405-423, comments on the “...confusion around competing and perhaps incompatible priorities. Liberal peacebuilding skirts around these tensions by assuming that all good things come together; but the failure to prioritize between the ‘war on terror’, defeating the Taliban, state building, counter-narcotics and reinventing the NATO alliance has often led to second-best, hybrid solutions...”, page 411.

11 Verena Fritz and Alina Rocha Menocal, “Developmental States in the New Millennium: Concepts and Challenges in the New Aid Agenda”, *Development Policy Review*, 25 no. 5 (2007): 531-552.

12 Mosse, “Is Good Policy Unimplementable?”, 639.

13 John Weiss, “The Aid Paradigm for Poverty Reduction. Does it Make Sense?”, *Development Policy Review*, 26 no.4 (2008), 407-426.

to be an activity carried out by technical experts who collect the best available facts using objective methods to make rational or best choices to address specific problems. Data is processed, policy choices are identified and costed, and policy decisions are made, leading to a process of implementation. In due course, through monitoring and evaluation, policy effects and impacts are assessed and these feed back into policy redesign. This mainstream or linear model of policymaking¹⁴ not only has a tendency to separate out the policy design from the policy implementation, but it has a tendency to ignore the politics around the making of policy choices, the allocation of resources and implementation processes. It ignores the widespread evidence that politics is fundamental to both policy choice and implementation practice.¹⁵

There is a polar opposite view of policymaking, which Mosse characterises as “the critical view”. This sees policymaking as a deliberate exercise in power designed to achieve social regulation and bureaucratic control through technical discussion that reduces poverty to measurements, makes the poor objects of policy through targeting them and depoliticises development.¹⁶ In many ways this position is as simplistic as the rationalist position and limited in equivalent ways. Somewhere in between these two viewpoints is something much more messy, where the “chaos of purpose and accidents”¹⁷ in policymaking happens and where careful attention to policy practice reveals a much more contested ground over policymaking processes and their outcomes.

The objective of these studies is not only to build understanding of the respective policy agendas they study, but also of the processes by which they came about and the underlying interests, discourses and practices that drive them. More understanding of policymaking is not just an end in itself, but a necessary step in contributing to the development of the policy agenda and policymaking practices and hopefully contributing to learning, improved practice and change. Potentially these studies will also contribute to a wider discussion and body of literature on understanding policymaking and practice in “post-conflict”, state-building and reconstruction contexts. In addition, a wider argument is also to be made for critical policy analysis that questions assumptions and methods used to claim truth or fact and reveals what might be hidden. Policy is fundamentally political, not technical, and the purpose of policy enquiry is “to facilitate rather than supplant informed political choice.”¹⁸ This links to the wider purpose of building participatory democracy and the goal of providing access to and explanation of data to all parties so that serious public discussion can take place on policy choices.

Any observer of policymaking in Afghanistan since 2001 will be aware that policymaking for the reconstruction and state-building effort has been driven by multiple and often contradictory and competitive interests (both internal and external). In focusing on “discourses and practices” and agenda content, these policy studies will not assume or necessarily adopt a rationalist position on policy content or policymaking. Equally, a stance that sees policymaking as simply about power, although power is intrinsic to policymaking practices, denies the good intentions of those making and applying policy toward achieving intended outcomes and the hope that policy can make a difference.

14 Edward Clay and Bernard Schaffer, *Room for Manoeuvre: An Exploration of Public Policy in Agriculture and Rural Development* (London: Heinemann, 1984), Introduction.

15 Frank Fisher, “Reframing Public Policy: Discursive Politics and Deliberative Practices” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Chapter 1.

16 James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, De-politicization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis, USA: University of Minneapolis Press, 1994).

17 Clay and Schaffer, *Room for Manoeuvre*, 192.

18 Frank Fischer, *Reframing Public Policy: Discursive Politics and Deliberative Practices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15.

An analysis of the overall policy storyline and the way in which policy content is argued for or against (the fundamentals of narrative and discourse analysis, see Section 3) is about exploring the choices that are made and by whom in constructing policy content while drawing attention to what is included or excluded from policy. As will be seen, an understanding of the differing policy narratives to be found in agriculture and rural development is fundamental to an understanding of the conflict over agenda-setting in this sector.

Policy is multi-level and these studies will seek to focus more on the top- and middle-level policy issues (e.g. the potential for agriculture to deliver pro-poor growth, the role of community-driven development or Afghanistan's access to the World Trade Organisation) than the lower-level policy issues, such as the procedures laid out in the operating manual for Facilitating Partners to implement the National Solidarity Programme. However, these lower-level policy practices often reveal much about the way in which higher-level policy is interpreted in practice (what the policy really means or is seen to mean by different actors); it will be used where possible and appropriate to explore particular bigger policy themes.

As noted earlier, these policy studies will be focused around the ANDS and its sectoral and cross-cutting thematic structure, although coverage will be selective of sectors and issues within each sector. The specific ANDS process and policy content are a separate study,¹⁹ although each study will need to consider the way in which the ANDS process may have influenced and driven policymaking in a particular sector.

A set of generic research questions has been used to structure the research and analysis and ensure comparability across the studies. While there will clearly be specificity according to the sector and cross-cutting themes, four broad questions structure each study, although not all questions will necessarily be addressed or addressed to the same level of detail in each study. These questions can be expressed as follows:

- **What is the policy agenda²⁰** and how and by whom has this been created, negotiated and ordered into a set of themes about which statements of intention are made?
- **What are or have been the procedures** or rules by which policy will be or has been created? How do these influence how the policy agenda has been or will be translated into practice through legislation, departmental orders or rules and other practices, both formal or informal?
- **What resources have been or will be mobilised** for the implementation of policy?
- **What are the rules and practices that define access?** Who is the policy targeted at and who will benefit from the policy? Who is eligible (included or excluded) and how are they defined (beneficiaries or targets, e.g. landless, women, poor farmers, opium poppy growers, etc.)?

Laying out these research questions in a somewhat formal way should not be taken to

¹⁹ See AREU, *Delivering on Poverty Reduction: Focusing ANDS Implementation on Pro-Poor Outcomes* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009) and Sayed Mohammed Shah, *Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) Formulation Process* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009)

²⁰ There may, of course, be multiple agendas and not necessarily consistent ones deriving from different interests and positions, between donors, between government and donors, among ministries, NGOs, etc.

imply that policymaking necessarily follows a logical pathway. Equally, policymaking is always a work in progress, continually being refined, and practice may not follow what is prescribed in policy documentation. So-called policy documents may emerge as a response to a demand²¹ and may respond more to what donors want to hear than to a case argued by the Government. Equally, policy may only emerge out of what donors have and have not funded and may be driven more by donor policy than national development policy; evidence of this is found within the ARD policy agenda.

1.2 Policymaking in Agriculture and Rural Development

This study is concerned with what the ANDS defines as the Agriculture and Rural Development sector. This rather curious separation of agriculture from rural development, as if they were additive rather than integral components, no doubt reflects the organisational history of the two ministries. Historically the Ministry of Agriculture²² (MAIL) has the longer identity as a separate ministry, dating back to at least the 1930s, and a countrywide presence, reflected in its current roster of over 10,000 staff. MRRD has in the past been very much a junior institution to MAIL. First established as the Rural Department Commission under the Ministry of Commerce in 1954,²³ it had a chequered history as an office under the Prime Minister (1956), a Rural Directorate under the Ministry of Interior (1966), dissolution in 1969, re-establishment in 1970 as an office and dissolution again in 1984. A Rural Management Office was finally established as an independent ministry, MRRD, and reconstituted in 2002 with a mandate to promote poverty reduction and social protection in rural Afghanistan.

There are several justifications for focusing on this sector as a key policymaking area. First, it is without question that the majority of Afghanistan's population lives in rural areas. Second, most of the poor of Afghanistan are to be found in rural areas (although the significance of urban poverty should not be ignored). Third, there has been a consistent policy position that agriculture and agricultural development will be the engine of growth for Afghanistan. Therefore, two key dimensions establish policymaking in this sector as of central importance: rural as the location of poverty and rural as the location of what is seen to be the key productive centre for Afghanistan's development position; these also identify the need for policy to focus on the linkage between poverty and production in rural areas.

If this is combined with Byrd's earlier assessment with respect to the relative performance of the two ministries, with the MRRD seen to be the more successful of the two, then the contrast between these ministries' policymaking processes is also of interest. Success, of course, is a problematic assessment and one might ask on what basis such a judgement is made. One yardstick that has been cited is the budget size of the two ministries and the proportion of budget that is core and the proportion that is off-budget (spent within the mandate of the Ministry, but not under its control). On this basis alone MRRD has not only had a larger budget than MAIL (see Table 1), but a higher proportion of its budget (more than 60 percent) has been under its own control in comparison with that of MAIL, although even this has apparently slipped in the last two years. This is not to state what

21 A case in point being the ANDS, which was a requirement for Afghanistan to achieve debt relief status. As will be seen, the development of MAIL's Master Plan was the response to a request by donors.

22 As will be discussed later, the Ministry of Agriculture has had various names changes in the recent past. For clarity it will generally in this text be referred to by its current name and acronym—Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL)—although documentary sources will be cited through reference to the name of the Ministry at the time of the document preparation.

23 See <http://www.mrrd.gov.af/English/History.htm>, accessed September 2008.

is cause and what is effect: does more core funding lead to more national leadership, or does more national leadership lead to more core funding? Rather, it is simply to note the difference and identify the fact that there do seem to be important differences between the two ministries. The question is: what relationship might there be between this statistic and differences in policymaking processes between the two ministries?

In regards to the more general research questions concerned with agenda-setting, procedures and resources, this report is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the methods used in doing the research and this is followed in Section 3 by a discussion on reading and analysing policy. The next sections investigate policymaking processes in MAIL (Section 4) and then comparatively analyse policymaking in MRRD (Section 5). The paper then looks specifically at the making of the Agriculture and Rural Development Sector Strategy (ARDSS) under the ANDS (Section 6), before exploring what is missing in the ARD strategy in Section 7. It concludes with a summary analysis of lessons and implications from the evidence of actual policymaking processes.

Table 1. Core and external budgets (Millions of US\$) for MAIL and MRRD

Year	MAIL			MRRD		
	Core budget	External Budget	Core as % total budget	Core budget	External Budget	Core as % total budget
2005 (1384)	0.55	18.11	3.5	132.65	9.97	92.9
2006 (1385)	16.96	37.96	30.9	274.66	13.79	95.2
2007 (1386)	45.70	446.28	9.3	346.38	181.93	65.5
2008 (1387)	55.895	264.171	17.5	592.397	381.435	60.8

Source: Ministry of Finance database

Inevitably, there has had to be a selective focus on policy areas and this is discussed in each section. However, on the basis of this selection, it is argued that three broad narratives or stories have basically driven the policymaking agenda. The first, which is characterised as “productionist,” is largely to be found within MAIL. It emphasises the need to increase production and draws its understanding of what needs to be done from a story of what Afghanistan was in the past—self-sufficient and with the rural population engaged in agriculture. It also seeks to recreate the role that MAIL played in the past.

The second narrative is essentially “developmentalist” and subscribes, to varying degrees, to the donor consensus on the need for good governance, private sector-led development, growth and a focus on poverty reduction. It believes that what is required is to create an enabling environment through good governance, an investment in public goods, pro-poor investments and programmes (such as microfinance for the poor) to be able to have a greater choice in their life decisions and therefore improve their wellbeing. It focuses largely on creating chances for the poor to act as agents of their own destiny; it is less concerned with the structures that create poverty in the first place. This view is seen to be represented by all but one of the donors working within MAIL and by MRRD as a whole.

The one donor that does not broadly subscribe to this second narrative is USAID. Its

position is characterised more as “market-driven” with an almost exclusive support of the private sector to drive development. Over time, it appears to have shifted its position from strong, free-market advocacy to more focused support for international agribusiness and commercialisation.

Underpinning each of these stories are different perspectives on what the problem is and how it should be solved. These are not mutually exclusive narratives and there are both differences and overlaps of position within each narrative. However, these narratives largely define the nature of the policy positions that have been taken. As it will become clear, there has been rather little debate between them.

2. Methodology

Building understanding of the way in which policy is made is far from an exact science and difficult at the best of times. Policymaking does not leave a clear trail that can easily be followed. Documentation provides some of the source material—policy statements, background documents and so forth—but what formal policy states and what policy practice does are not necessarily the same things. In part, this reflects the fact that policy is often underspecified and the details emerge during interpretation. So a critical reading of what policy says it will do and an assessment of what policy does is required. But the link between policy and practice is often not easy to follow. Not only is there disjuncture of time—between when a policy is formulated and when it is implemented—but implementation practice, where the micro-politics played out between interested parties do not necessarily follow what policy prescribes. In part it is a question of trying to find and follow budgets—to what extent does money follow and is consistent with policy priorities? A further element in the assessment of policy arguments and assumptions comes from looking at evidence from the field, both assessments of project impact and other sources. These have to be handled with care; what often matters more is the way in which project or programme success or failure is represented, and this may have little to do with what the policy effects are.

Understanding policymaking in Afghanistan is doubly difficult. Documentary sources are not systematic and institutional memory is often short. Often key people, external advisors and staff of international agencies, who may have been influential and knowledgeable, come and go with remarkable frequency. Often the focus is more on upcoming policies—what one observer has called “the development policy marketplace where new and better policy is always being formulated and the orientation is always future positive.”²⁴ Old policies are junked, loyalty and interest is lost, and new policy is better. Accordingly, evidence has been drawn from a wide spectrum of sources that provide different but not necessarily complementary perspectives on policymaking and policy outcomes. In part, it has helped that one of the primary authors of this study has been tracking policy developments in agriculture and rural development since 2001 and has been aware of some of the discussions and debates that have taken place, although has not necessarily participated in them. In addition, the author has participated in a number of field evaluations of relevant projects and programmes, has undertaken field research within a range of Afghanistan’s provinces, and has been systematically collecting documentation on policy issues and practices.

Key informants, however, have played a critical role in this study. Over the course of 2007 and 2008, during various visits to Kabul, interviews took place with a range of people including various Ministers and Deputy Ministers, key advisors in both of the two study ministries and elsewhere, and staff in a number of international agencies and donor embassies. In total, the research was drawn from 29 key informants, some of whom were interviewed on more than one occasion. These informants are identified by code and position in table 2.

The second strand of evidence that has been drawn on is a critical review of draft and final versions of policy and project documents has been undertaken. The details of which documents have been sourced are discussed in the sections on policymaking in the two ministries. But it should be asked: what does a reading of policy mean?

²⁴ Michael Edwards, *Future Positive: International Cooperation in the 21st Century* (London: Earthscan Publications, 1999).

Table 2. Key Informants

IF01	Advisor	MRRD
IF02	Advisor	international agency
IF03	Advisor	MAIL
IF04	Staff	Embassy
IF05	Advisor	international agency
IF06	Academic	Kabul University
IF07	Advisor	MRRD
IF08	Advisor	MAIL
IF09	Advisor	MAIL
IF10	Official	MAIL
IF11	Official	MAIL
IF12	Staff	Embassy
IF13	Advisor	Embassy
IF14	Official	MAIL
IF15	Advisor	Embassy
IF16	Advisor	MAIL
IF17	Official	Ministry of Finance
IF18	Staff	Embassy
IF19	Official	MRRD
IF20	Advisor	international agency
IF21	Advisor	MAIL
IF22	Advisor	MAIL
IF23	Advisor	ANDS Secretariat
IF24	Official	MRRD
IF25	Official	ANDS Secretariat
IF26	Researcher	AREU
IF27	Official	MAIL
IF28	Ex Advisor	MRRD
IF29	Official	MRRD

3. Understanding and Reading Policy

How does one read policy and why does that question matter? There is, after all, a widespread view that policy is rational, that objectively collected “facts” are used to support and develop rational arguments that lead to clear technical outcomes. The job of the policy analyst is simply to transform information and argument relevant to policy problems, with the assumption that better information and analysis leads to better policy.

But facts never speak for themselves: they are both a product of method—how those facts are organised and collected—and of underlying values in deciding which facts are to be collected or discussed. Take the case of opium area and production statistics that have been a key “fact” driving counter-narcotic policy in Afghanistan and underpin claims for its success.²⁵ There have been two separate assessments of opium area and production—one generated through the annual surveys of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and a second one from surveys by the US government that have been less publicly available. These two surveys have used different methods, some of which have changed over time, and which have produced different results and some remarkable inconsistencies that have not been openly discussed but raise questions about the facts regarding true opium area and production.²⁶

A comparable example on problems with area statistics is an assessment of forest area in Nepal. In an attempt to “describe” environmental change in the Himalayas, the researchers sought data and expert opinions on deforestation, the rate at which forests reproduced themselves and their rate of utilisation. They not only found it impossible to obtain a coherent and consistent picture with respect to data and conclusions on these two variables, but they found major uncertainties over such questions as “what is a forest?” and “what is deforestation?”. They found it was impossible to determine the basic facts regarding deforestation and summarised their position as follows:

*Our conclusion is that the uncertainties surrounding the key variables in the man-land interactions in the Himalayas (and, worse still, the uncertainties as to what the key variables are) render “the problem” unamenable [sic] to the traditional problem-solving methods of applied science. The problem, we conclude, is that there is not a problem, but a multiplicity of contending and contradictory problem definitions each of which takes its shape from the particular social and cultural context that it helps to sustain.*²⁷

Similarly one can consider the characteristic of “poverty,” which can be subject to multiple interpretations that do not necessarily tell the same story. Different knowledge frameworks, underpinned by different values, questions and methods, generate different understandings.²⁸

25 David Mansfield and Adam Pain, *Counter-Narcotics Policy: The Failure of Success?*, (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008).

26 Note for example the 2200 metric ton difference between two estimates of opium production for 2008, although the two sources are close on the crop area. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2008 survey estimated the year’s crop at 7,700 metric tons (<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/crop-monitoring/index.html>, 3.). Yet the US *Office of National Drug Control Policy* says it is 5,500 metric tons (<http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/news/press08/102408.html>). These differences are likely to be attributable to different methods of estimating opium yields.

27 M. Thompson, M. Warburton and T. Hatley, *Uncertainty on a Himalayan Scale* (London: Milton Ash Editions, Ethnographica, 1986), 6.

28 See Philippa Bevan, “Researching Wellbeing Across the Disciplines: Some Key Intellectual Prob-

This requires that those reading policy pay careful attention to the language and concepts that are used, because although a common term might be adopted, what it means and what is disguised under its use can cover a multitude of positions. For example, the term “pro-poor growth” appears throughout the ANDS and is interpreted in three distinct ways²⁹: i) as growth from which the poor can benefit. In that sense it means “inclusive growth” from which the poor have equal opportunity to benefit because of the removals of obstacles to their engagement in markets or access to public goods; ii) as trickle-down growth; and iii) as growth that disproportionately benefits the poor and thus addresses poverty inequalities. The ANDS gives a very specific definition in its poverty profile, and it is quite clear that it adopts the latter definition: pro-poor growth is defined as a condition “where the incomes and livelihoods of the poorest rise faster than the average growth of the economy.”³⁰ But this is not the way³¹ in which pro-poor growth is systematically handled throughout the ANDS, even though the same terminology is used.

Reading policy therefore requires a careful consideration of the use of language and definitions of critical terms, many of which are not always explicit and are more often metaphors that disguise more than they reveal. Policy texts in Afghanistan are full of such policy metaphors: terms such as “strong enabling environment,” “road maps,” “integrated approaches,” “comprehensive,” “strategic,” “ownership” and “international best practice”—to illustrate but a few. Thus policy has to be seen as a kind of gloss on events and “normally neither invites nor accepts refutation, especially when it takes a high moral posture; rather by every trick and trope³² in the book, its hallmark is nonrefutability.”³³

Reading policy also requires attention to the argumentation—what constitutes evidence and how is that evidence used in argument. To what extent, for example, are claims, which are statements of the interpretation of evidence, actually supported by the evidence given? Underlying assumptions that are often deeply normative—that is, a statement of what should be—need to be fully exposed and examined. There is nothing innocent about policy, and indeed how can there be, when the whole rationale of policy is to persuade?

Policy inevitably simplifies—it has to, because the real world is complex and a key function of policymaking is to reduce uncertainty, to present solutions, and to point the way forward. This simplification leads to the creation of narratives or stories that seek to persuade. They do this primarily by first providing a problem definition that justifies the solution that is offered for it (for example, the case of the perceived lack of rural credit in Afghanistan, the claims of widespread opium-denominated debt and the collapse of rural financial services: this has led to the development of a whole microfinance initiative responding to this perceived lack of credit availability). The fact that the existence of the problem is challenged by evidence from the field³⁴ is not something that readily

lems and Ways Forward,” in *Wellbeing in Developing Countries. From Theory to Research*, edited by Ian Gough and J. Allister McGregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

29 AREU, *Delivering on Poverty Reduction* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008).

30 ANDS, 27.

31 *Delivering on Poverty Reduction* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008).

32 A word, phrase, expression or image that is used in a figurative way, usually for rhetorical effect.

33 Des Gasper and Raymond Apthorpe, *Arguing Development Policy: Frames and Discourses*, (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 6.

34 See for example Floortje Klijn and Adam Pain, *Finding the Money: Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007) and Adam Pain, *Opium Poppy and Informal Credit* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008).

shifts the narrative describing lack of credit or the role of microfinance in addressing it. However, there are good reasons for these narratives.

Rural development is a genuinely uncertain activity and one of the principal ways in which practitioners, bureaucrats and policy makers articulate and make sense of this uncertainty is to tell scenarios and arguments that simplify or complexify that reality. Indeed, the pressure to generate policy narratives about development - where, again, policy is broadly defined - is directly related to the ambiguity that decision makers experience over that development. Other things being equal, the more uncertain things seem everywhere at the micro level, the greater the perceived need for explanatory narratives that can be operationalized into standard approaches with widespread application.³⁵

Rural development policymaking is doubly difficult in Afghanistan. None of the preconditions for successful national policymaking—policy history, stability in goals, environmental and political certainty, institutional memory and so forth—exist. There are multiple agencies in policy development and each is trying to tell a better story about what should be done. But stories often have hidden meanings and part of the task in this paper is to explore what these might be. In part, these can be uncovered by examining the way in which people talk about policy processes. But an analysis of policy content—what is written and done in the name of policy—is fundamental to assessing what processes of policy development and agenda-setting might have taken place. Accordingly this paper places considerable emphasis on understanding policy content as part of its assessment of policy process.

But there is a final issue to consider: does good or better policy lead to better practice? Even if one has a robustly argued policy, will it necessarily lead to better outcomes? Another way of putting the question is asking: do Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) or the ANDS matter? Do they make a difference? The evidence is not compelling. For example, one three-country study (Malawi, Nicaragua and Vietnam) on the role of the rural productive sector and rural policy in PRSPs³⁶ found that once the PRSP had fulfilled its function in relation to securing debt relief, it largely disappeared from the policy agenda.

³⁵ Emery Roe, *Narrative Policy Analysis: Theory and Practice*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994), 35.

³⁶ Elizabeth Cromwell, Cecilia Luttrell, Andrew Shepherd and Steve Wiggins, “Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Rural Productive Sectors: Insights from Malawi, Nicaragua and Vietnam” (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2005), 258.

4. Policymaking in Agriculture

This section explores the development of the policy agenda in Agriculture from 2001. While reference is made throughout this study to the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), it should be noted that the Ministry has gone through several identity changes since 2001. The Ministry started life as the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry (MAAH) but in 2002 became known as the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Foodstuffs (MAAHF). This was then transformed to the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MAI) on the receipt of funding for irrigation, but the neglect of the Livestock in its identity led to its current name of Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, by which, for consistency's sake, it will be referred to throughout this report. This section traces policy development from its first elaboration in the 2002 National Development Framework (NDF)³⁷ and the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) 2003 "Rebuilding Afghanistan's Agriculture Sector" study.³⁸ This contributed to the 2003 draft Agriculture Policy statement of 2003³⁹, subsequently revised and hereafter referred to as the 2004 Agriculture Policy. The Cabinet finally approved it in mid-June 2004.

Most of the elements of the ADB 2003 sector study found their way, some almost verbatim, into the 2004 "Securing Afghanistan's Future" (SAF) document⁴⁰ and effectively constituted the SAF's Agricultural Strategy. However, in early 2005, MAIL started the process of developing its own Master Plan, which was released later that year and is referred to in this section as the 2005 MP.⁴¹ From 2006, policy development followed two tracks. The first was the development of the Implementation and Investment Plans (IIP) for the seven programmes identified in the 2005 MP, which will not be discussed further. The second, addressed in Section 6, relates to the development of MAIL's contribution towards the ANDS Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy (ARDS). A timeline for this policy development is summarised in Figure 5.

The scope of agriculture policy is vast. It ranges from assessment and support for agriculture's role in economic development, the role of agriculture in poverty reduction and achieving food security, natural resource management practices, and research and extension systems, to the details of animal health regulations and phytosanitary certification practices for the import of plant material. In all of these areas, there is scope for debate on policy choices, some informed by assessment of the best technical choices to be made (for example, different ways of approaching seed certification systems) and others by bigger choices over the role of agriculture in economic growth versus its role in poverty reduction. As will be seen, there is evidence at all these levels for policy debate. On some levels, the debate has been visibly engaged in; in others, at least as far as the documentary and informant interviews indicate, less visible and less public debate has taken place. This discussion necessarily has to be selective and will focus on some of the bigger issues that are central to a debate on the role of agriculture in Afghanistan and the major policy choices that are to be made. These are seen to be concerned with the appropriate balance and support for agriculture with respect to

37 Afghanistan Transitional Authority (ATA), "National Development Framework" (Kabul 2002).

38 ADB, "Rebuilding Afghanistan's Agriculture Sector" (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2003).

39 Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry (MAAH), "Making Agriculture and Productive Management and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources the Engine of Socio-Economic Development in Afghanistan. A Policy and Strategy Framework for the Rehabilitation and Development of Agriculture and Natural Resource Sector of Afghanistan" (Kabul: MAAH, 2003).

40 Government of Afghanistan/International Agencies, "Securing Afghanistan's Future: Accomplishments and the Strategic Path Forward" (Kabul: 2004).

41 Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food, Master Plan (Kabul: 2005).

its social objectives—poverty reduction, employment generation and supporting food security—and its economic objectives in providing growth and supporting economic development.

To investigate the development of the policy agenda, this study draws on an analysis of policy documents and from interviews with key people involved directly or indirectly in some of the policy development. However, it is largely in the more recent development of policy, most notably the 2005 MP, that accounts of those involved in the process could be accessed. In addition, evaluation material and other written material on policymaking practices is also drawn on. The structure of this section follows the chronology of policy development:

2002: Draft A Strategy of Agriculture and Livestock Development of Afghanistan

2003: Asian Development Bank: “Rebuilding Afghanistan’s Agriculture Sector”

2004: MAAHF: A Policy & Strategy Framework for the Rehabilitation of Agriculture and Natural Resource Sector of Afghanistan. Approved June 2004

2005: MAAHF: Master Plan 2005

2007: MAIL: Agricultural Strategy for the ANDS, 19 March 2007

2007: MAIL: Master Plan and programmes. Implementation and Investment Plans

This section traces the emergence of three narratives (the “productionist,” “developmentalist” and “market-driven” positions) in the agricultural policymaking process. These can largely be identified within the policy texts, although the market-driven position, most strongly advocated by USAID, is also evident in programme implementation. These three positions are characterised by some shared assumptions but driven by very different problem definitions that shape the specific policy response. As a result, these narratives are played out as exclusive and competitive positions. What the analysis reveals is that a debate around agricultural policy between these positions largely did not take place and as a result strategies have emerged that do not investigate choices or tradeoffs. These strategies also reveal a lack of deliberative policymaking processes around the agricultural agenda; policy positions have been declared rather than based on evidence and argued for in certain cases by particularly opportunistic behaviour.

4.1 The 2002 National Development Strategy

The NDS, written in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Taliban, had as its immediate focus a humanitarian and reconstruction agenda, although it clearly laid down the critical role of national ownership of the development strategy. However, this was within a framework where the market and the private sector were the key instruments for delivering sustained economic growth. It was also largely written by expatriate advisors working from assumptions both of what the *status quo* was in Afghanistan (a scenario basically of devastation and destruction) and how it should be developed.

Within the first of the NDS pillars (Humanitarian, and Human and Social Capital), key rurally relevant priority programmes—specifically with respect to sustainable livelihoods and addressing problems of chronic malnutrition—are identified.⁴² But the transformation of these into National Development Programmes, in particular the National Solidarity

42 NDS, 18.

Programme (NSP), will be seen to have resulted in these being placed in MRRD and not MAIL. Agriculture was located as a sector in the third pillar: Physical Reconstruction and Natural Resources. Key points to make about the policy position with respect to the role of agriculture can be summarised as follows:

Three themes are noted here. First, the complete focus on agriculture as a productive rather than social sector ignores a potential role for agriculture in poverty reduction and enhancing food security. Second, assumptions made about the role of agriculture in rural livelihoods are linked to views of a collapse of agriculture and associated issues of debt. Third, a critical role is envisaged for agriculture as an engine of rural growth and priority given to the private sector. These themes are carried forward into the 2003 ADB sector policy.

Box 1. Summary of the National Development Strategy Agricultural Agenda

- The objective of agriculture in the agricultural sector is to enable the farmer to respond to the domestic and international market through better knowledge, tools and linkages with the market.
- Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the majority of Afghans.
- The sector has suffered badly as a result of drought and conflict, and it must be revived rapidly if another season is not to be lost and the massive dependence on food aid reduced.
- A private sector-led strategy of agricultural growth requires redefining the role of the state in the area of policy and reorganisation.
- The critical role of small holder and rural communities for reviving the agricultural sector and rural economy will be emphasised.
- A number of actions are needed:
 - 1: Affordable credit has to be provided to farmers who have a major debt burden because of poppy cultivation and years of drought;
 - 2: The historic role of growing fruit, which has suffered substantial damage, needs to be revived and the development of a sector processing agricultural products for external markets supported so that they meet health and regulatory standards;
 - 3: Modern agricultural tools will be necessary to increase agricultural productivity;
 - 4: There is a need for investment in agricultural research; and
 - 5: Since access to land is regulated through Islamic and customary law, there is need for a nationwide land registry and a process to settle disputes; such a registry would allow for the use of land as collateral for entrepreneurial activities.

4.2 The Asian Development Bank 2003 “Rebuilding Afghanistan’s Agricultural Sector Policy”

The ADB 2003 document, drafted entirely by external consultants, established itself as a needs assessment that was undertaken in two stages:

Technical specialists undertook subsector assessments whose findings and recommendations were integrated into an overall natural resources sector and agriculture sector needs assessment and a medium term development framework.⁴³

This was seen to be a medium-term strategy and policy.

The report proceeds with a statement of the sector background. This presents a picture of the extent of destruction of the rural economy over the preceding 25 years, a heavy dependence upon food aid and the effects of drought compounding non-sustainable resource use, poor management and inefficient production systems. It argues for the adoption of technologies to reduce vulnerabilities to drought, stating that if “productivity can be restored to levels similar to the rest of the region, then Afghanistan should be able to resolve medium- to longer-term food security concerns”. Indeed it asserts that the medium-term emphasis should be on achieving self-sufficiency in cereal production “given the legacy of the past 25 years, which has left so many families unable to feed themselves.” This is the first appearance of the “productionist” narrative. However, the report also notes that a longer-term perspective might give more weight to a focus on a cash crop and export-driven agricultural economy that might then require the importation of cereals.

This background is followed by a further elaboration of the sector development framework organised into a section called “Determinants of a Strategic Approach” and “the Strategic Approach.”⁴⁴ The determinants section simply lists a range of factors, both generic (demand issues, spatial diversity, population, market access) and specific to Afghanistan (returning refugees, the need for food security, poppy substitution and mined areas), without in any way arguing how these factors—individually or collectively—lay out choices and priorities. The Strategic Approach section appears to set as its goal the achievement of Afghanistan’s pre-war status (self-sufficiency and the export of horticultural crops) while underlining the importance of the rural sector recovery, where “80-85 percent of Afghans depend upon natural resources for their livelihood” for determining the overall rate of economic recovery. It notes geographical diversity, asserts an agenda driven by community priorities but notes that this requires a dual approach. On the one hand, it should “include both productivity enhancing interventions for those with land and employment opportunities and targeted off-farm interventions for the landless or families with small amounts of land.” Objectives are then set and medium-term outcomes defined in terms of “self-reliant communities able to meet needs through a combination of food production, off-farm employment and trade.” Specific interventions are noted, listing primarily market-oriented issues—skills development, business training, microfinance, mechanisation—“to lower women’s burden and improve efficiency and productivity, export promotion and so forth.”

The body of the report contains the subsector needs assessments organised by discrete subsector assessments (natural resource management, water resources, community

43 ADB, “Rebuilding,” 1.

44 ADB, “Rebuilding,” 2,3.

development programs, agriculture, livestock, agricultural research and off-farm employment) with little discussion of inter-related issues. They are largely technical assessments, although they play to many of the normative assumptions of what is required to make a “modern agriculture sector,” including a proper legal framework clarifying tenure and property rights, inefficiencies of water use, community development and the need for farmers to access quality seed, inputs, farm power and finance. Off-farm employment gets a brief two paragraphs. It states that:

It is accepted that families in most parts of Afghanistan that have less than 0.5 ha of irrigated land have difficulty in earning a living solely from agricultural production [and that this] means that about 65 percent of farming families rely on off-farm income generating activities to achieve a modest living.⁴⁵

These off-farm income sources are based on hired labour and small-scale rural enterprises.

Two major comments can be made about this document. The first is its status as a strategy document. Although it talks of a strategic choice and it notes in passing a choice to be made between food security objectives and production, or growth, objectives in agriculture, it fails to follow this through and to investigate the implications of those choices and what trade-offs need to be made. Indeed, in common with most strategy documents related to poverty, rural development and the role of agriculture in Afghanistan, “it fails to confront the issues of prioritising actions and resource allocation or even of simply outlining possible trade-offs among identified objectives.”⁴⁶ Much of what it contains is a long list of things to be done and little on how they are to be done. Actions are not even consistent: thus, while it is acknowledged that 65 percent of farming families rely on off-farm income (hiring out labour being an important component) and the strategy tries to address rural employment, it can equally talk of the need for mechanisation to promote farm efficiency. Moreover, many of the assumptions about what Afghanistan was or is are challenged by the evidence. As Fitzherbert, a long-time observer of Afghanistan’s agricultural economy, has noted, “views about agriculture and the agricultural economy in Afghanistan have been perceived through a set of orthodoxies, which are frequently simplistic, outdated or ignorant, or based on a perspective that overvalues the role of the state and aid agencies in agricultural recovery and change.”⁴⁷ He goes on to be particularly critical of assumptions made about the destruction and loss of seed (pointing to the record grain harvest of 2003, in which total aid contribution to farmers’ seed needs was probably less than four percent of the seed sown).⁴⁸ He also questions the assumption that rural Afghanistan is populated by small-scale, farm-dependent households⁴⁹ that have remained agriculturally static since the 1970s (commenting that average yields of irrigated wheat in Afghanistan in the 1990s were above those of the 1970s or 1980s); he also asserted that the different components of the farming system

45 ADB, “Rebuilding,” 23.

46 Alberto Zezza and Mauro Migotto, “Towards a Framework for Agricultural Development and Food Security in Afghanistan,” in *Reconstructing Agriculture in Afghanistan*, ed. Adam Pain and Jackie Sutton, 253 (Rugby, UK: Food and Agricultural Organisation and Practical Action, 2006).

47 Anthony Fitzherbert, “Rural Resilience and Diversity Across Afghanistan’s Agricultural Landscapes” in *Reconstructing Agriculture*, ed. Pain and Sutton.

48 An assumption that has been restated in 2008—see Jonathan Burch, “Seed Shortage hits Afghan Wheat Farmers,” 2008 (<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/ISL392352.htm>, accessed 15 December 2008).

49 See also Ian Christoplos, “Narratives of Rehabilitation in Afghan Agricultural Interventions,” in Pain and Sutton, *Reconstructing Agriculture*, for a more extended discussion of the yeoman farmer fallacy.

could be treated as discrete units.

Equally, the assumption that Afghanistan was a country dependent on food aid was greatly off the mark. The evidence is clear that there has been a systematic undervaluation of the role of commercial imports of wheat and despite the long-term drought and political instability, grain markets have continued to function.⁵⁰ It is also the case that food aid has played a fairly small role, providing at best eight percent of supply between 2000 and 2004.⁵¹ Despite the evidence to the contrary, many of these key elements (25 years of destruction, dependence on food aid, food security as food production and 80 to 85 percent of the rural population being dependent on agriculture) persist in much of the policy documentation in agriculture since 2001.

4.3 The Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food's 2004 Policy and Strategic Framework

The 2004 policy went through several iterations and appears to have been initiated in 2002. The authorship of the policy statement is not known, nor is the process of consultation it underwent. There was reportedly an early draft which, while approved in principle by the Cabinet, did not find favour with donors.⁵² Donors particularly disliked its emphasis on domestic grain production and focus on national food self-sufficiency rather than household food security (which would combine production with market access to grains); its emphasis on service delivery rather than rural livelihoods; and its lack of attention to market-based responses. To the extent that this early version of the draft policy drew on, or was supported by, the ADB's 2003 policy is not clear, but the latter also emphasised the production side of grains, at least in the medium term.

The contextual assessment largely follows that of the ADB (2003) in its claims of collapse, destruction and need for credit. A list of 14 pressing issues or problems is identified, consistent with the contextual statement. This led to 14 Strategic Objectives, starting with the empowerment of farmers to engage in the markets. Somehow these objectives are seen to support sustainable rural livelihoods and promote poverty reduction. However, there is no analysis of rural livelihoods or poverty to support such a statement, rather an assumption that various visionary actions will lead to these effects, but how it will happen is not addressed.

Key policy issues are seen to be the responsibility of the Government: the role of the private sector, policy review and reform, and supporting an enabling environment for growth. As with the 2003 ADB policy, this is largely a statement of vision, poorly anchored in evidence; it contains long lists of things to be done but little attention to the detail of how they should be accomplished or in what order. But even the limited attention to the trade-offs between food security and growth and the critical role of employment for 65 percent of rural households, all of which was included in the ADB policy, has been lost from this document.

This investigation of three policy documents has so far shown the emergence of three policy positions, or narratives, around the role of agriculture. These are primarily asserted and written as unarguable truths by technical experts, primarily expatriate; but these are based on assumptions that are open to question. However, with the development of

50 See Andrew Pinney and Scott Rochini, "Food Security in Afghanistan," in *Reconstructing Agriculture*, ed. Adam Pain and Jackie Sutton.

51 Pinney and Rochini, *Reconstructing Agriculture*, 138.

52 See MAAHF, (2004), 2.

the Agricultural Master Plan, the processes around policymaking became more visible.

4.4 The MAAHF 2005 Master Plan

On the basis of the 2004 Ministry policy, the then Minister approached donors for funding. Six donors⁵³ agreed to consider support for the Ministry, which by this time was seen to be visibly lagging in comparison with MRRD, subject to the preparation of a ministry Master Plan to guide investment strategy. The donors also, according to one informant⁵⁴, argued that the MP should be developed on the basis of the ADB (2003) document. It is from this point that greater evidence on the process of policy preparation can be found.

Policy processes around the Master Plan

From 2003, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) funded "Support to Strategic Planning for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods" and placed advisors in both MAIL and MRRD. From 2005, two international advisors were present within MAIL and appear to have played a key role in the process of developing the MP.

According to the one of the advisors⁵⁵, the ADB (2003) provided the basis for the strategy and he and his colleagues set up working teams around seven programmes: horticulture, livestock, food security, natural resource management, research and technology transfer, rural financial systems, and capacity development. He saw the process of developing the MP as a method of building capacity within the ministry, which by both his assessment and that of others (both external advisors and national staff⁵⁶), was limited and unfamiliar with strategic planning processes. In the words of one external observer who had long-known the Ministry of Agriculture: "It was lost in a mythical past and looking to a mythical future" and there was little external recognition of its lack of capacity.⁵⁷ In the MAIL advisor's view (IF08), the development of the MP was a key part of a mentoring process in building understanding of policy, the differences between strategy and policy and how to develop log frames. One participant in that process,⁵⁸ the leader of one of the programmes, observed how the process had built understanding of log frames that had not been there before and in his view the content of the programme reflected national ideas. Other non-national advisors were more reserved about the extent to which the process had built capacity⁵⁹ and the quality of the output. However, some commented that it had given the Ministry a degree of confidence and ownership that had not been there in the previous documents.

Inevitably there were differences in the ways in which the various programmes were developed. All were apparently written in English, but there were different degrees of ownership. Some drew quite strongly on external documents (most notably the livestock and horticultural sections on external project documents prepared by the World Bank and European Commission⁶⁰); in others, external advisors appear to have had a key role in the formulation of content. The MP, with its 397 pages, certainly competes with

53 The World Bank, ADB, Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), European Commission (EC), DFID and USAID.

54 Informant IF08, interviewed 5 August 2007.

55 Informant IF08, interviewed 5 August 2007.

56 Informant IF 11, interviewed 8 August 2007.

57 Informant IF06, interviewed 1 August 2007.

58 Informant IF11, interviewed 8 August 2007.

59 Informant IF22, interviewed 15 January 2008.

60 Informant IF08.

Securing Afghanistan's Future⁶¹ in terms of its bulk.

It is also clear that there were major differences in the views of ministry staff and external advisors, as well as between different external advisors—largely reflecting which donor was supporting them. Many of the national informants from the Ministry privately expressed reservations about the overall direction and focus of policy development in which they felt they were being pushed. One (IF11) described the feeling that the ministry was being pushed into the implementation of big programmes for which it had little capacity and expressed the need for a slower process. References to the past and the role that the Ministry had been seen to fulfil then were a persistent theme. It was, in the words of many,⁶² a view that the Ministry should have a much more direct role in implementation and that it had a responsibility for ensuring that people were fed. Many stated that it was much too early for the private sector-driven economy that donors were arguing for⁶³ and that an open economy in Afghanistan before it was ready for it would lead to greater inequality.

There were some in the Ministry who had found the process of MP development constructive and were pleased with the outcome. Nevertheless, they felt it was the donors who were driving the content—that they were giving the money and would therefore make decisions. One senior member of the Ministry staff believed that it was the external expatriates who were really shaping the policy, but then went on to comment on the divisions between the advisors.

Clearly, during the latter part of the preparatory process for the MP, a major division emerged between different advisors. One Afghan contrasted the commercial approach of John Mellor, who was working as an advisor with the USAID-funded Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program (RAMP)⁶⁴ and argued that private-sector development was the best route to poverty reduction, against one focused more on social concerns over agricultural development reflected by the other donors (DFID, in particular). Informant IF14 felt that the Mellor position was better argued: “strong, well-presented arguments that were more technical,” and that they did not have time to follow the “social route to poverty reduction,” as he called it.

For the other advisors, this was less a question of the merits of the argument than about the way USAID was able to influence the Minister. In the view of Informant IF08, the Minister at that time was guided more by whoever was sitting closest to him; toward the end of the MP development, RAMP advisors had much greater access and, in his view, took the progress off-track. This led to a split both with respect to philosophy and process. For Informant IF08, the differences in philosophy reflected a USAID position that wanted market-based development and trickle-down effects for poverty reduction, versus others who argued for a focus on poverty reduction, farming systems and rural livelihoods. The differences in process reflected the way in which USAID, through RAMP, was seen to have intervened in a process of policy development concerned with capacity development and mentoring the Ministry, and hijacked the agenda from the top. It led to a major division and somewhat frosty relations between USAID and four other donors (the World Bank was apparently not part of the stand-off).

The non-USAID advisors and their donors objected in particular to the way in which the

61 Government of Afghanistan/International Agencies, 2004.

62 Informant IF10, interview 6 August 2007; informant IF27, Interview 24 January 2008.

63 Informant IF14, interview 8 August 2007.

64 Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program (RAMP) funded by USAID from 2003-05.

near final version of the MP was taken away by RAMP and redrafted, without consultation, to better reflect the USAID view.⁶⁵ As will be seen with the ARDS, the direct intervention in policy drafting, in order to ensure policy content consistent with its views, has been a regular USAID practice.

The Master Plan text

Reportedly, although it has not been possible to do a direct text comparison, there were two drafts of the key pages of the Executive Summary of the MP. The first represented more the poverty focus and the emphasis on rural livelihoods. The current version is consistent with a market-led focus. It starts as follows:

*The sum of the various components of the Master Plan is designed to provide a 6 percent overall growth rate in the agricultural sector. Those will double farm incomes in 12 years. The pattern of growth provided is normally associated with no change or slight improvement in the distribution of rural income, because of the strong income and employment multipliers to the rural non-farm sector. Thus total rural income will also double.*⁶⁶

This thread continues into a summary of the multiple roles of agriculture and an argument for it to be the basic engine for the transformation of the economy. This, it notes, would lead to poverty reduction and poppy eradication, with the MP accelerating this development. The multiple roles of agriculture are first seen to ensure food security through production in the short term, with a longer-term focus on high value commodities and with the land area given to staples declining (the ADB argument). The MP, it argues, will lead to a large increase in farm incomes, which in turn leads to increased rural wages and employment. The discussion of the role of agriculture in poverty reduction acknowledges that the poor are not those who produce the bulk of agricultural output—in fact, they are largely to be found in the rural non-farm sector, where there is need for a massive increase in employment.⁶⁷ Note here the contrast between ADB 2003, with its focus on the off-farm sector (arguing for employment for rural labour related to agriculture), and the position here, which argues for employment outside agriculture (non-farm). The key role of agriculture in the MP is that it will increase farm incomes and thereby provide the income to drive the non-farm sector and create rural employment.

The other key roles that agriculture is seen to potentially fulfil are: to generate foreign exchange, to improve the income and status of women, to serve as an alternative to opium poppy, and to act as a milieu for establishing the primacy of the private sector. Thus:

*Most private sector entrepreneurs in Afghanistan are farmers - about... one million counting only those who have enough land to be seen as not subsistence but commercial.*⁶⁸

Finally, the commodity priorities are identified based on their existing base weight (estimated from crop area weighted by a rough estimate of value per output per hectare), their growth rates and therefore the potential share of future growth. These analyses

⁶⁵ According to informant IF08 and confirmed by others, the document was taken away for three weeks and redrafted to reflect the USAID position. IF21, interviewed 21 January 2008, reported a later incident where a key text was redrafted and substituted for the Minister's signature and it was only her intervention that led to it being replaced with the original version that had been agreed.

⁶⁶ Agricultural Master Plan, 1.

⁶⁷ MAAHF, "Master Plan," 3.

⁶⁸ MAAHF, "Master Plan," 5.

lead to an argument that horticulture, because of its base weight and potential for high growth, is a key priority sector to be followed—not least because its export potential can make it the driving force behind commercialising Afghan agriculture. The second key commodity focus is seen to be livestock production.

In summary, the MP:

Is formulated to move the country rapidly towards a high growth rate, rapid reduction in poverty and substitution of poppies. The plan starts with agriculture as the basic engine of a high proportion of overall growth and dominating poverty reduction. It sets commodity priorities to ensure food security, massive growth of exports...the result will be an agriculture able to compete on domestic and international markets with the current leaders in the field.

There is without doubt consistency and direction to the argument presented in the MP that elaborates, with some clarity and detail, a set of propositions about how commercial agriculture might contribute to poverty reduction. It is a more sophisticated argument about the role of agriculture than is found anywhere within the policy documentation. But are its arguments correct and its assumptions valid about the role that agricultural transformation can play in poverty reduction? The answer is not necessarily, but this is a debate that is revisited in Section 7.

The point to note here is that in practice this position, or narrative, of market-driven agriculture has led the agenda. But the production position, seen in the 2003 ADB 2003 document, is still visible in the MP's Food Security section.

4.5 Donor influence on policy practice in MAIL

As discussed above, USAID through its RAMP programme has had a fairly major impact on policy content as exemplified by its engagement in the agricultural MP. It has had a major presence in the agricultural sector through: the RAMP, which provided US\$145 million over a three-year period from 2003-2006; the Accelerated Sustainable Agriculture Program, from 2006; and the Alternative Livelihood Programmes.

A number of comments need to be made about these programs. First, in keeping with USAID practice, these are run off-budget and subject to a direct contract and control from the USAID office in Kabul and separate from the MAIL, even though they have been located within the MAIL complex in Kabul. Second, and in keeping with a USAID philosophy, they have focused on delivery. As one external observer noted,⁶⁹ USAID has been a big player in terms of disbursement of funds, but it is less clear how much of those funds actually stayed in-country (given contract implementation by commercial companies) or to what extent project activities have contributed to government capacity.

A USAID official, in response,⁷⁰ contrasted the US and European approaches, arguing that the European position was essentially hypocritical and an act of ventriloquism that gave the pretence of giving ownership, but was in practice controlling. His view was that with no capacity in the government, money was not spent through it. As an example, he pointed to the Counter Narcotics Trust Fund, which accumulated some \$20 million over two years and had managed to spend only 5 percent of its resources. He argued

69 Informant IF05, interviewed 7 July 2007.

70 Informant IF18, interviewed 10 August 2007.

that there was greater merit in learning by doing, that the US was more concerned with generating impact and that one would not develop the private sector by working with the Government.

What “impact” means is clear from the RAMP final report. The programme’s overall objective was to generate a \$250 million increase in the marketable value of five commodities. The report claimed that this was exceeded by a factor of seven, generating marketable output of more than \$1.7 billion following a market-driven, value-chain approach.⁷¹ Claims are made about its impact on food security and farm production, its support for the livestock sector and its overall contribution to the revitalisation of Afghanistan’s agricultural sector and rural economy. As Informant IF18 commented, issues of attribution may be considered in these claims, and many might wonder at the evidence base to support such assertions. Perhaps the more significant issue is the fact that these claims focus on market growth as the significant measure of impact.

There is, however, a consistency in the USAID position—the Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program (ASAP) continues the focus on private-sector development⁷², emphasising its consistency both with RAMP and the Agricultural Master Plan, and noting that the MP reflects a commitment to economic growth through the promotion of a dynamic, market-led agricultural system. To be noted is the somewhat brief assessment of the context,⁷³ which claims that “new agricultural technologies have not been adopted for decades,” “improved varieties lost their yield potential and succumbed to new diseases,” “rural financial systems were non-existent,” and Afghanistan was “a country which...was now heavily dependent on food aid from international donors.” As noted earlier, these claims are not supported by the evidence. However, in this context, the following assertions are made:

- “ASAP will be expected to contribute to Afghanistan’s economic growth by stimulating the private sector, demand-driven agricultural growth within open and competitive markets”;
- “The purpose of ASAP is to accelerate broad-based, market-led growth in agricultural development capable of responding and adapting to market forces in ways that provide new economic opportunities for rural Afghans”;
- “A dynamic agriculture sector raises labour productivity in the rural economy, pulls up wages and gradually eliminates the worst dimensions of absolute poverty.”

A market-led, value-chain approach⁷⁴ is seen to be central to applying a set of interventions designed for maximum value-added benefit at all levels. The linkage between agricultural growth and poverty is seen to be achieved through gradual trickle-down effects, although how these will “eliminate the worst dimensions of absolute poverty” is not clear. This is most certainly not an argument for pro-poor growth or for attention to the circumstances under which the poor can benefit from growth. In addition, although arguments can be made as to why agricultural growth can reduce poverty at the farm, rural and national levels—both directly and indirectly, in the short and the long term—such benefits are not

71 USAID, “Rebuilding Agricultural Markets,” RAMP Final Report, 10 (Chemonics International Inc., 2006).

72 USAID Accelerating Sustainable Agricultural Program (ASAP), Request for Proposals, RFP no. 306006-006APSO, (2006).

73 ASAP, II.1 Overview of the Agriculture Sector, 5.

74 But see Pain and Sutton, *Reconstructing Agriculture*, 237, which considered that “the RAMP model [of value chains] is a stripped-down version that ignores social relations governing trade, distributional outcomes and power structures” in markets.

guaranteed. There are critical conditions or assumptions that have to be met if linkages between changes in agricultural productivity and effects on poverty can be created. Many of the positive effects of agricultural growth depend on small farms playing the major role in agricultural growth, and this cannot be guaranteed.

4.6 Conclusion

Three major policy narratives have driven the development of policy within MAIL. The first is a “productionist” focus that is largely concerned with crop and livestock production and a return to the pre-war status of the Ministry of Agriculture. Various policy documents, most notably the 2003 ADB sector analysis, partially support such a position; however, the donor support to the ministry—most notably in the development of the MP—has had more of a “developmental” vision. This focuses on the contribution of agriculture to livelihood support, albeit with a larger role for the private sector than that envisaged by the “productionist” narrative. A third position, which can be most clearly linked with USAID, has pushed for a more explicit market development and commercial perspective and has been active in getting its views onto the policy agenda and in arguing for the critical role of agriculture in commercial development and growth generation.

These policy narratives have largely not engaged with each other, indicating rather limited discussion between key actors in the policymaking process. MAIL ownership of the policy process appears to have been minimal. The somewhat marginal MAIL engagement in policymaking processes has been compounded by the relatively small core budget of MAIL and the size of the off-budget programmes. The off-budget programme has been largely USAID-funded projects that have facilitated USAID’s somewhat independent and entrepreneurial approach to policymaking.

5. Policymaking in the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)

The development of the policy agenda in MRRD has followed a rather different route than in MAIL. In part, this reflects the differing mandates between the two ministries, but it has also been determined by the programme structure that the two ministries chose to follow. MRRD may have had an advantage in that it started with a relatively clean slate after 2001 and had none of the legacy of history or weight of staff (12,000 staff members) that MAIL had. Only the water and sanitation programme (WatSan) showed a clear continuity with pre-2001 programmes and the work of NGOs in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition, the programmatic content of MRRD's portfolio has lent itself to a different and arguably more tangible and focused delivery. Much, although not all, of MRRD's portfolio has focused on delivering public goods and visible technical interventions that have addressed structural poverty (lack of access to roads, water, schools and so forth).

From the discussion that follows, it seems clear that MRRD, for a number of reasons, has led and gained control of its programmes in a way that does not seem to have happened in MAIL. One of the outcomes of this process, as noted in the Introduction (Table 1), is that the total budget of MRRD has rapidly outpaced that of MAIL and that MRRD has had direct control of a far greater portion of its budget than MAIL. But does this mean that the Ministry has had a greater say in policymaking and driving the policy direction in comparison with MAIL?

A reading of the MRRD 2007 Statement of Strategic Intent (1386-1388) states that “the over-arching mandate is to improve rural livelihoods throughout the country” and that this is “reflected in a pro-growth and pro-poor approach.” What is striking is that the programmatic content of MRRD has been sequentially built up from focused programme activities originating from the National Priority Programmes identified in the 2002 National Development Framework. Has this amounted to the pro-growth and pro-poor approach that MRRD claims and the addressing of rural livelihood needs?

As will be seen from Table 3, general policy statements by MRRD are few—just two, and both of these are rather brief documents. Much of the actual content of policymaking is to be found in the discussion of specific programmes. This section will therefore selectively focus on two of these, the National Area Based Development Programme (NABDP) and the National Solidarity Programme (NSP). In investigating the policy processes around these programmes' development, this report draws on a range of documentary material including programme evaluations as well as interviews with key staff. This section starts with an overview of the means by which MRRD built its programmes before moving on to discuss the two flagship programmes. As will become clear, the case will be made that MRRD essentially has had a developmentalist vision and a strong belief in the possibilities of reconstructing the rural landscape—both physically, through the provision of public goods, and socially, through the reordering of society through its NSP programme.

Table 3. National Programmes and Policies of MRRD

Acronym	Title	Start	Objectives
Table 1: National Programmes			
NABDP	National Area-Based Development Program	2002 2005	Immediate recovery support, capacity development and macro-economic regeneration Community empowerment, economic regeneration, institutional development and implementation support
WatSan	Rural Water Supply & Sanitation Programme	2002	Provision of basic services for water supply and sanitation facilities
NRAP	Formally National Emergency Employment Programme (NEEP) National Rural Access Programme	2002 2005	Increase access to rural infrastructure for local communities and employment for rural labour Developed to focus on rural access roads
NSP	National Solidarity Programme	2003	Support to communities to identify, plan, manage and monitor their own development projects Empowerment of communities
MISFA	Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan	2003	Flexible financial services for poor people throughout Afghanistan
AREDP	Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program	2008	Enterprise facilitation in rural communities Policy-based lending to communities and enterprises Providing support to businesses
Policy Statements			
MRRD	Strategic Plan 1381-1385	2002	Unknown
MRRD	A Strategic Intent. 1386-1388	2007	Provides direction for the overall implementation of ministry activities Framework for programme development

5.1 Ministry development

As noted earlier, the 2002 NDS identified a number of priority programmes as part of addressing the humanitarian agenda post-2001 and to begin the task of rebuilding the Afghan state. It had three key strands: first, “use humanitarian assistance and social policy to create conditions for people to live secure lives”; second, use external assistance to build physical infrastructure to lay the basis for a private-sector led strategy of growth; and third, create sustainable growth.⁷⁵ Already identified within this NDS was the NSP or national community empowerment programme, which intended to deliver a series of block grants to communities. Shortly after this, five other national priority programmes were identified, including the National Emergency Employment Programme (NEEP). Both NSP and NEEP, as well as the National Area Based Development Programme (which was added later), came under the portfolio of MRRD.

This was no accident. The design of the NSP was heavily influenced by the then Minister of Finance, Ashraf Ghani and the Minister of MRRD, Hanif Atmar. It drew on a concept

75 NDS, 2.

of community-driven development that has had wider application⁷⁶ and the specific experience of the Kecamatan Development Program (KDP), funded by the World Bank in Indonesia, with which the Finance Minister had had direct experience. It offered a model of a programme structure and modality of implementation that was consistent with the views of the MRRD Minister and his senior staff. They believed the Ministry needed to move out of programme implementation⁷⁷ and focus on policy quality, monitoring and evaluation and leave the implementation of programmes to contracting partners, which in the case of the NSP were local and international NGOs.

This model of programming, reinforced by a decision to reduce the MRRD ministry staff by a third—to about 2,000 posts from its post-2001 staff complement—and to focus on quality from the top level down, sowed the seeds of a transformation in ministry practice. A senior ministry official⁷⁸ commented on the previous government bureaucratic culture that had to be overcome and which he characterised as the signing of papers and the passing of responsibility. But central to the change was the experience of working within NGOs during the 1980s and 1990s that many of the new key staff brought to the MRRD.⁷⁹ As one external observer commented:⁸⁰ “It was soon very clear that there was a policy development process evolving indigenously within the ministry that began to drive the donors to fit into the MRRD agenda.”

Initially, and at the insistence of donors, the management of the national programmes were contracted out to oversight consultants—for example, the first phase of NSP was managed by a German oversight consultant and NABDP was managed by UNDP. As ministry capacity developed, the Ministry felt more able to bargain with donors and gain more control and management of the funding. Thus, although the first phase of NEEP was managed by the United Nations Operational Services (UNOPS), by the time it came to negotiations on the second phase and its transformation into the National Rural Access Programme (NRAP), it had achieved agreement with both the EC and DFID to fund the Ministry directly. Such a change in management was also affected by the second phases of the NSP and the NABDP. Also to be noted is that from 2005, the advisors who had worked on donor contracts were all shifted to ministry contracts, although the NABDP programme manager remained on a direct contract with UNDP.

Box 2. NABDP: Phase 1-3 Main components

1. Immediate recovery support: Immediate recovery needs met in priority areas through community-led planning and implementation
2. Capacity development: Accountable and effective structures and systems of public administration in the planning, financial accounting and management of development interventions are established and functional
3. Macro-economic regeneration: Regional rural economic regeneration strategies formulated and implemented

⁷⁶ World Bank, “Community Driven Development in the Context of Conflict-Affected Countries: Challenges and Opportunities” (Washington: World Bank, 2006).

⁷⁷ Interview IF19, interviewed 15 August 2007.

⁷⁸ Informant IF29, interviewed 24 January 2008.

⁷⁹ A former Ministry advisor (informant IF28, interviewed 23 January 2008) also agreed with the significance of the NGO background in contributing to a different work culture within the Ministry, as well as a practitioner’s approach to getting results.

⁸⁰ Informant IF05, interviewed 31 July 2007.

This gradual gaining of control by MRRD, at least of the management of its programme, and of bringing the funding under its authority—and this is a notable contrast to MAIL—might suggest an increasing degree of authority of the Ministry over programme content and direction. To some extent, as the discussion of the individual programmes will illustrate, this is true, but there are also limitations to ownership when the funding is external. The World Bank has been, for example, very difficult to negotiate with,⁸¹ and informal comments from a number of sources within the Ministry point to heavy intervention in the NSP programme. Comments were also made about USAID pulling out of the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA) programme to set up their own microfinance facility for small and medium enterprises⁸² and similarly funding⁸³ the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), who have not been supportive of the Community Development Council (CDC) programme under the NSP. The IDLG has also reportedly directly funded some of the old authority structures in villages, which the NSP has been specifically designed to challenge.

Equally, the decision by DFID to pull its funding out of Badakhshan in order to focus on Helmand in 2005 had consequences for MRRD. It highlights a wider issue for MRRD: donors funding in provinces where they have a significant security presence or their reluctance to fund “insecure” provinces, to the detriment of MRRD’s strategic plan for provincial coverage. Donor priorities have also left key MRRD programmes underfunded, such as the WatSan programme because water supply is not a priority for donors. Some funding has been tapped from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), but this has not been sufficient to meet ministry needs.

There is a picture, evidenced by the budget, of a ministry gaining control of its agenda and direction, which the development of the recent Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program (AREDP) supports. However, more specific examination of programmes is needed to explore the details of policymaking and agenda-setting.

5.2 National Area Based Development Programme: Phase I

The first mention of the NABDP is to be found in President Karzai’s speech to the Tokyo Conference in January 2002. The idea appears to have come from the Afghanistan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACA), led by Ashraf Ghani, but in consultation with MRRD. UNDP was asked, through a letter written on 25 February 2002,⁸⁴ to support the design and management of the programme. The programme was launched, under the NDF National Priority Programmes framework, in July 2002. There were three main components to the programme (see Box 2). The second component should be noted, with its specific focus on supporting the institutional and capacity development of MRRD through the provision of technical support and resources to plan, implement and manage investment funds.

The NABDP initially focused on ten priority areas, covering 17 provinces. These were argued to be in particular need during the post-conflict and transitional period. These priority areas were the Shomali Plains (Kabul Province), Dari-Suf (Samangan Province), Yak-aw-lang and Central Bamiyan (Bamiyan Province); Khawajaghar-Hazarbagh (Kunar Province); Takhar-Badakshan (Takhar and Badakhshan Province); Mazar (Balkh Province);

81 Informant IF19, interview 15 August 2007.

82 Informant IF19.

83 USAID provided \$94.6 million to the IDLG in September 2008, <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Article.373.aspx>, accessed 15/11/08.

84 Local Project Appraisal Committee Report, LPAC, 24 July 2002.

Herat and Ghor (Herat and Ghor Province); Kandahar (Kandahar Province); Paktia-Paktika (Paktia and Paktika Province); Eastern Nangarhar (Nangarhar Province) and Nahreen (Baghlan Province).⁸⁵ It is not clear who was actually responsible for this selection or how the ranking and prioritisation was decided.

Afghan programme staff questioned why these areas were selected as priority areas.⁸⁶ They felt that all the provinces of Afghanistan were facing an emergency and that the Government's overriding priority was to make its presence felt in all parts of the country through tangible forms of assistance to the population. They discussed the issue with the then Programme Manager, an international consultant, who supported them and successfully lobbied the Country Director of UNDP and Ministry authorities to bring the entire country under the programme's coverage.

NABDP Phase 1 was implemented in two ways: direct execution (DEX) by UNDP and national execution (NEX) by MRRD. UNOPS and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) implemented three projects under the DEX programme beginning in 2002: immediate recovery, shelter construction in Shomali Plains and fertiliser distribution, respectively. Under the NEX programme MRRD, with support from UNDP, executed projects to establish infrastructure and developed the capacity of the central and local government authorities to plan and manage recovery and rural livelihood projects. Figure 8 summarises the details on project and programmes under Phase 1 (April 2002 to December 2005). Under the immediate recovery project, more than 320 subprojects, concerned with construction and rehabilitation of infrastructure (roads, bridges, health facilities, schools, irrigation, water supply, etc.), were undertaken. The capacity development project trained over 700 MRRD staff in programme and financial management, both at central and provincial level. The Macroeconomic Regeneration component had, by its own recognition, made rather little progress.⁸⁷ On the basis of interest shown by private investors, feasibility studies on the niche industry of rose oil production and the development of the Spinzar Cotton Gin in Kunduz were carried out.

Policy issues

Early staffing problems in key management positions led to delays in the development of project proposals for donors, a shortfall in funding for infrastructure projects and the suspension of training programmes for staff. The Capacity Building programme of the MRRD faced some problems of a political nature. First, because the then-MRRD Minister, Hanif Atmar, had a good reputation with the international community, MRRD was seen as a logical choice to support the rebuilding of rural infrastructure. However, other ministries apparently expressed resentment⁸⁸ at the investment in capacity-building in and through MRRD at their apparent expense.

The uneven distribution of donor funds across the ministries, based partly on Ministry of Finance and donor perceptions of the capacity to manage the money, also caused problems. MRRD attracted greater funding in its core budget compared to other ministries (see Table 1). The Ministry of Finance argued that the core budget of each ministry depended on the willingness of donors to fund them, government strategy and ministry execution capacity. The MRRD was seen to score well on all three counts, but the disparity

85 NABDP Programme Document (Annual Reports 2004, 2005 and Evaluation Report Phase I).

86 Interview with NABDP staff from the Community Empowerment Section, NABDP on 25 September 2007.

87 NABDP Annual Report, 2006.

88 Evaluation Report of first phase of NABDP, "Findings, Conclusions & Recommendations from the Independent Evaluation of the National Area Based Development Programme" (Kabul: 2004), 28.

in funding levels between ministries apparently caused some inter-ministerial friction.⁸⁹ As one informant commented,⁹⁰ under the Transitional Authority the Government had power but after the presidential election and the establishment of a cabinet, cabinet lobbying and inter-ministry competition became more pronounced.

Table 4. NABDP Phase 1

NABDP MRRD-related projects				
Thematic Categorisation	Project Title	Donors	Implementing Agency	Implementation Modality
NEX Core	NABDP Immediate Recovery Capacity Development Economic Regeneration	Italy, Canada, Japan, DFID	MRRD	NEX
Water and Sanitation	Water for IDPs/Refugees	UNHCR	MRRD WatSan Dept	NEX
	Rural Water Sanitation	USAID	MRRD WatSan Dept	NEX
Reintegration	IDP & Refugee Reintegration	UNHCR	MRRD Reintegration	NEX
	Durable Solutions for IDPs Project	UNHCR-BCPR	UNDP/MRRD Reintegration	DEX
NABDP UNOPS executed Projects				
Thematic Categorisation	Project Title	Donors	Implementing Agency	Implementation Modality
Rural Infrastructure Support	Recovery Support Project	Italy/Malaysia	UNOPS	DEX
	Winterisation	USAID	UNOPS	DEX
	Shamalan Canal/Feeder Roads (Integral part of NABDP)	Sweden	UNOPS	DEX
PRT	PRT in Bamiyan	New Zealand	UNOPS	DEX
	PRT	USAID	UNOPS	NEX

The issues of friction were not just money. Various ministries, notably the ministries of Health, Education and Agriculture, resented the scope of MRRD's mandate and saw it as an infringement on their activities. During NABDP Phase 1's Immediate Recovery component, there was spending on public construction works. The Ministries of Education and Health wondered why MRRD was building schools and clinics that they saw as within their mandate. MRRD officials, in turn, insisted that there was adequate coordination with concerned ministries on those projects, and that they only did "their" work with the ministries' agreement in writing.⁹¹

The decision to broaden the scope of NABDP to cover all provinces, rather than just concentrating on the ten areas of special need, was taken for reasons of equity and to push the reach of central government into the provinces. However, it diluted the original purpose of the NABDP and left little to assist populations in the originally designated

89 NABDP, "Findings, Conclusions & Recommendations," 6.

90 Informant IF28, interviewed 23 January 2008.

91 NABDP, "Findings, Conclusions & Recommendations," 28.

areas. It is estimated that about a third of the funding originally intended for the infrastructure subprojects was diverted to pay for building up the Ministry's capacity⁹² (although money earmarked by donors was spent as stipulated in their contracts).⁹³

5.3 National Area Based Development Programme (NABDP) Phase II

The re-organisation of NABDP and preparation for the second phase took place in 2005 and the process of drafting the programme document is revealing of the extent of MRRD's engagement in its development. A Local Programme Advisory Committee (LPAC) meeting was held in December 2004 and consultations were made with MRRD, UNDP, bilateral donors and other relevant ministries to develop NABDP Phase II. A major re-organisation of the programme took place around this time and the process involved consultations with the Minister, Deputy Minister, key staff of MRRD and the international staff (consultants) of other programmes in the Ministry. An international expert was recruited in consultation with MRRD to review the original draft and lead the finalisation of the Phase 2 programme document.

In June 2005, the revised Phase 2 document was ready in its current form and was submitted to UNDP for final review. The UNDP Country Director considered the programme to be UNDP's key development programme and hired a consultant to work on establishing links with other relevant UN agencies and programmes and to finalise the document accordingly. The final draft was prepared and presented to the major stakeholders in the NABDP Phase 2 Consultative Meeting held on 7 December 2005. A final version of the programme document was submitted to the second LPAC meeting for approval in February 2006.

NABDP Phase 2 (2006-2008) was formally launched in 2006 (see Box 2 for an outline of its components). The key change was to seek greater integration between the components and work towards a Comprehensive Rural Development Programme structure. The NABDP Phase 2 was seen to support the Government, in particular the MRRD, in working towards

Box 3. Main Components of NABDP Phase II

1. Community Empowerment: Participatory and consultative mechanisms established at district/provincial level, resulting in a comprehensive rural development planning process.
2. Economic Regeneration: Capacity in MRRD/Government established to formulate and regularly update comprehensive regional economic regeneration policies and strategies, identifying viable interventions for economic investment, poverty reduction and improving livelihoods
3. Institutional Development: Institutional capacity and technical capabilities of MRRD and strategic partners strengthened to fulfill its mandate of promoting rural regeneration and livelihoods
4. Implementation Support: MRRD's implementation capacity strengthened, private and public resources mobilised and implementation arrangements among partners/stakeholders coordinated to deliver economic regeneration and rural development projects.

92 NABDP, "Findings, Conclusions & Recommendations," 13.

93 NABDP, "Findings, Conclusions & Recommendations," and Annual Reports 2004 and 2005.

a goal of community empowerment, in line with the national priorities spelled out in the five-year Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS), the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2006-2008 and the UNDP Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) 2006-2008.

In its various components, NABDP has linked with several of MRRD's other programmes, including NSP, NRAP and WatSan as well as the ANDS secretariat. In all, 276 District Development Assemblies (DDAs) were established under Community Empowerment by the end of 2007 and these districts formulated the District Development Plan (DDP). During the same year, NABDP led the process of subnational consultations for the ANDS and the preparation of Provincial Development Plans (PDPs).⁹⁴

NABDP Phase 2 continued infrastructure development, undertaking a total of 391 projects (224 projects completed) in school and health centre construction, transport projects, water supply, public buildings and irrigation projects. A country-level analysis on Regional Rural Economic Regeneration Strategies was conducted, and an inception report was completed in October 2006. The report identified potential rural sectors in various provinces in the hope that they would lead to small business enterprises. A sector- and province-specific feasibility analysis and business plan development study has been initiated and two NGOs have been contracted for this purpose as implementing partners.

Under the Institutional Development component, technical assistance was provided to directors of MRRD departments to draft the MRRD Strategic Intent (SI) Implementation Plan for 1386-1388. SI operationalisation workshops were piloted for the Planning, Community-Led Development, Rural Infrastructure and Technical Service, Rural Livelihoods and Energy, and Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Departments. Advisors together with key employees from those departments developed logical frameworks and annual work plans.

Policy issues

The lack of external financial assistance to particular provinces prevented the programme from reaching all provinces. Various donors provided financing for NABDP Phase 2, but funding was often earmarked for provinces in which they had specific interests (such as a military presence in the Provincial Reconstruction Team). This created inequality between provinces with donor support and those without.⁹⁵ Considerable resources have been allocated to the South, rewarding insecure areas and therefore neglecting Northern and Central regions where DDAs and DDPs are in place and funding is needed. The NABDP annual report 2007 illustrates the issue of provincial funding by donors:

Proposals were submitted to Japan for funding activities in Ghor, Daykundi, Bamyan, Nangarhar, Balkh, Kandahar and other border provinces. A proposal was submitted to Canada for continuation of support to Kandahar and other provinces. The Belgian government approved the reallocation of funds to Takhar, Kunduz and Badakhshan and requested a proposal for supporting comprehensive development for the next three years in those three provinces. Norway extended its support for Faryab, and agreed to fund activities in other provinces. The Netherlands agreed to increase its funding for Uruzgan. The UK started funding NABDP through the Helmand Agriculture and Rural Development Programme (HARDP). USAID funding for post-battle reconstruction and emergency works in Kandahar was phased out in October 2007. However discussions were held with USAID regarding funding for programme activities in provinces along the Pakistani

94 Annual Reports 2006 and 2007 and Quarterly Report 2008.

95 General comments from various interviews; Farah was cited as an orphan province in one case.

border. Initial contacts were made with Finland and Sweden (for Jawzjan and Samangan), with Iran (for Nimruz, Badghis, Herat, Farah) and with Australia (for Uruzgan).⁹⁶

This donor-driven funding to provinces has not only resulted in a lack of funding in certain provinces (although it is not clear which these are) but also limited the control that MRRD has had over its own programmes.

Working in insecure areas has been a challenge and NABDP has been working on developing approaches that allow implementation in such areas. The approach used so far is, if a DDA can be established and guarantee the security of engineers and other technical support, then the staff will assist the implementation of a project—where possible by the DDA directly rather than through an external contractor.

There have also been political pressures on the selection of projects. The number of petitions for projects submitted to the Minister by local parliamentarians⁹⁷ and other groups has placed a significant strain on resources and challenged the bottom-up, participatory approach to development envisaged by NABDP.⁹⁸

Summary

A number of points can be drawn from this discussion on the NABDP. The first is the strategic use by MRRD of the programme to build its managerial capacity and gain control over the programme's content. It appears to have used external advisors to support and develop its position. Much of the programme content has focused on delivery of public goods and the Ministry has been successful in attracting a wide range of donors to support it. However, it is clear this has come at a price, because donors have reportedly sought to steer funding towards the provinces in which they are working; although it is difficult to prove, this is possibly to the detriment of regional balance. It is also evident that MRRD has had to contend with inter-ministerial conflicts over its funding levels and mandate and political pressures from parliamentarians in implementing the programme.

5.4 National Solidarity Programme

The second programme considered here is the National Solidarity Programme (NSP). Introduced originally as part of NEEP, in 2003 it was established independently as one of the six National Development Programmes. The NSP can be broadly described as a community-driven development programme with two clear goals: first, to develop and improve community-level governance and, second, to support the delivery of public goods through community-managed projects. It has had four core elements.

The first has been to provide support to communities (either villages or subdivisions of villages depending on size) to assist them in establishing, through elections, community institutions (CDCs or community development councils) so that agreement on development priorities and project activities can be reached. This, it was believed, would then lead to the development of project proposals that met the NSP appraisal criteria and that, once approved, would be implemented through the CDC. The second aspect of the programme has been a system of block grants to support the agreed-upon projects, which have then been implemented by the CDCs. The block grants have been allocated at a rate of \$200 per family up to a maximum of \$60,000 per community, so these have represented a considerable transfer of funds.

96 NABDP Annual Report 2007, 27.

97 Annual Report (Kabul: 2007), 34.

98 NABDP Annual Report 2007 and Quarterly Report 2008 (Kabul).

The third part of the programme has been a range of capacity-building activities. These have developed the competence and skills of members of the CDCs and the wider community (both men and women) in the processes of participation and consensus-building. They have also helped develop management skills in relation to finance, procurement and general technical areas (design, planning, etc.). The fourth part of NSP has been to undertake activities linking CDCs to government departments, NGOs and donors in order to improve access to services and resources.

The programme has run through two phases. A first three-year phase (NSP I) ran from 2003 to 2006 and a second phase of three years (NSP II) started in August 2006. In keeping with MRRD's practice, MRRD has maintained a managerial role in the programme, contracting out the delivery to at least 28 NGOs (both international and Afghan) called, in the NSP terminology, Facilitating Partners (FPs). In NSP I, the management of the programme was through an oversight consultant, but in NSP II the MRRD itself took on this role.

The NSP has been rolled out across the country in phases and, by the time of its mid-term review,⁹⁹ covered 193 districts in all 34 provinces. It had created at least 15,000 CDCs in 22,500 rural communities formed out of 38,000 rural settlements. A total of just over \$166 million in block grants had actually been disbursed with a further \$214.6 million committed for disbursement. Over 4,000 community level projects had been completed.

Undoubtedly, the scale of the programme and the level of community funding has delivered a substantial improvement in village-level access to public goods where it has been operational. These have included clean drinking water, better roads, irrigation systems, schools, electricity supply through micro-hydro systems, the distribution of small livestock and training programmes. The delivery of these public goods, as the programme design had hoped, made the presence of government more visible at the village level and led to an appreciation of the benefits such a presence could deliver to the village¹⁰⁰, an experience that many villages had not encountered before in their history.¹⁰¹

But NSP has been burdened with more than simply the delivery of public goods. Underlying the programme has been a massive attempt at social engineering and the reconstruction and reordering of society. In its intent, it follows a World Bank model of Community Driven Development (CDD) that seeks to:

*Empower local community groups, including local government, by giving direct control to the community over planning decisions and investment resources that emphasises participatory planning and accountability.*¹⁰²

Underlying such a model is a set of assumptions as to why such an approach may be better than top-down or non-participatory interventions. These include:

- that mobilising communities and increasing their capacities will lead to a reduction of poverty;

99 University of York Post War Reconstruction and Development Unit (PRDU), "Evaluation Report of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) Afghanistan" (York, UK: May 2006).

100 PRDU, "Evaluation of the NSP."

101 Recent fieldwork in Badakhshan at the village level collected accounts of a government presence pre-1978 that was entirely concerned with extracting taxes and enforcing order but little else (Adam Pain, unpublished field notes, November 2008).

102 World Bank, "Community Driven Development in the Context of Conflict-Affected Countries: Challenges and Opportunities" (Washington DC: World Bank, 2006), 6.

- that community participation and exercise of choice can improve service relevance, responsiveness and delivery by matching provision to articulated demand;
- that community participation will lead to more democratic outcomes and the inclusion of the poor, creating “voice” and increasing the access of the poor to government;
- that the articulation of community priorities will lead to a better fit of service delivery with community needs and therefore better targeting of the poor and at-risk groups within the community.¹⁰³

The NSP most clearly shares these assumptions, an investigation of which will be returned to below. While it has drawn on the World Bank model, and, as noted earlier, most directly from the World Bank Kecamatan Development Program (KDP) in Indonesia, its modalities depart from that of KDP in a number of distinct ways, reflecting the strength of the Afghan input into the programme design. Arguably, these inputs deepen the assumptions and raise the expectations of what CDCs will be able to do within the context of Afghanistan.

Specifically, the NSP has incorporated an electoral process into the setting up of the CDC that was not present in KDP. Further the NSP model has been built on the use of external facilitating partners (FPs), while in KDP there was direct involvement of government employees. However, the NSP appears to be moving toward using district-level MRRD employees to support the CDCs as the involvement of FPs winds down.¹⁰⁴ Finally, in KDP, the communities undertook all their own construction work, while in the NSP model there has been considerable use of contractors. The level of funding to NSP noted above—\$200 per family—contrasts with the \$1 per family under the KDP programme. Finally, while NSP is being implemented in a context of considerable insecurity and risk and under a very centralised system of government, the KDP programme was implemented under conditions of political and fiscal decentralisation.¹⁰⁵

5.5 Issues for debate around NSP

This is not the place for an exhaustive discussion of NSP and an evaluation of its claims of achievement or what it will contribute in the longer term. As noted earlier, the scale and impact of the public goods delivered to villages through the programme are visible and notable. What is less clear is whether some of the transformative effects hoped for through the programme are being achieved or are likely to be gained in the long term. The underlying assumption that mobilising communities will lead to a reduction in poverty is based on the view that lack of capacity to create demand and act, or exert “agency” is the constraint on individuals or communities moving out of poverty. This viewpoint gives little acknowledgement to the structures of inequality that create poverty and keep people poor in the first place.

The NSP assumes that elections at the community level and the establishment of democracy can lead to a changing of the old structures and more inclusive processes. How this is expected to happen within a context marked by deep inequalities of power

103 World Bank, “Community Driven Development.”

104 PRDU, “Evaluation of the NSP,” 4.

105 Jennifer Brick, “Investigating the Sustainability of Community Development Councils in Afghanistan,” 2008, <http://polisci.wisc.edu/users/brick/files/brick-cv.pdf>, 10 (accessed 15 November 2008). This section draws heavily on the material in this report.

between villages, within villages and between villages and the district and provincial authorities is far from clear.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the evidence from the elections to the National Assembly points to continuity of power and elite capture, with a significant percentage of the elected members being former commanders or warlords.¹⁰⁷

Two points are to be noted here about the elections of the CDCs. The NSP operational manual is clear on election procedures, but what happens in practice often departs significantly from its rules. In a review of one rural development programme,¹⁰⁸ it was evident that the formation of CDCs was more incomplete than formal reporting had indicated and had merely been stitched in place over previous village structures. Another study¹⁰⁹ found that in only about half of the communities studied (16) had the requirements outlined in the manual for community elections actually been met. This point is not made to criticise, but to point out that what policy says and how it is practiced are often different and this needs to be understood.

Further, if one were to look closely at the membership of CDCs after election, there is often continuity with the past, in that the old elite and powerholders have been elected, as with the national elections, into the village structures.¹¹⁰ What this may point to is the fact the old does not disappear with the new, and in fact the new structures may co-opt or be co-opted by the old structures. In part, this may reflect a deeper reality, because it is the old elite who hold the critical connections between the village and the outside world; where the outside world is still run on the basis of strong patron-client relations, there may be little choice. Election processes do not necessarily lead to a transformation of social structures in the way that the NSP has hoped for.

This introduces the second question: will the CDCs last into the future? And, if so, what might that mean? Brick suggests that there are three ways in which the sustainability of the CDCs could be considered.¹¹¹ The first is an organisation that mobilises its community members, fosters participation and builds voice and choice or, to use the terminology, empowers people.¹¹² There must be considerable doubt, given the speed with which the CDC programme has been implemented and the degree to which it has been lubricated by high levels of funding, that participatory practices in this sense have become enshrined in the way that CDCs work.

A second perspective on sustainability would see the CDC as having the ability to coordinate projects and funding within the community—a way of doing business with the outside world. Indeed, the whole history of village-level structures in Afghanistan driven by outside agencies points clearly to the fact that this is a role that they have fulfilled. But critically, such village level organisations have risen and fallen as the agencies have

106 See Pain, “The Diffusion of Opium Poppy in Balkh,” (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007), for a detailed discussion of village inequalities in relation to water management in the Balkh irrigation system.

107 Andrew Wilder, *A House Divided? Analysing the 2005 Afghan Elections* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2005): Various estimates on the large number of newly elected members of the National Assembly who had ties to armed groups.

108 Adam Pain, “Rural recovery and Rehabilitation Programme for Faryab Province. Phase II. Final Evaluation,” (Report for Christian Aid, Herat, Afghanistan, 2007).

109 Brick, “Investigating Sustainability,” 54.

110 Brick, “Investigating Sustainability,” 44-5; Pain, “Rural Recovery,”; and Field Observations in Badakhshan, 2008.

111 Brick, “Investigating Sustainability,” 12.

112 Fazala Mansuri and Vijayendra Rao, “Community-Based and Driven-Development: A Critical Review” *The World Bank Research Observer*, 19 no.1 (2004), 6.

come and gone and have been dependent on external funding to keep them in business.¹¹³ The CDC formation and activity has been driven by considerable funding, the level of which cannot be expected to last into the future. Without that funding, CDCs will not necessarily continue to function, even if they exist formally.

The third dimension of sustainability is to establish the CDCs as formal entities and incorporate them at the bottom end of the governmental structure. Indeed, it is argued¹¹⁴ that MRRD has followed this view of sustainability by creating a bylaw to legalise the basis of their existence. But as Brick points out, this is only an administrative regulation, subject solely to the authority of MRRD and not other ministries. There is debate and uncertainty over the bylaw, but the point to be made here is that formalising a structure is not the same thing as building real local governance, although it might be a step in that direction.

In summary, it is not clear that the transformational role that MRRD envisages for the CDCs will be achieved. There are formal claims by MRRD for the success of the programme, and there are areas in which success is visible. However, the reality indicates that social transformation undertaken by a strong developmental vision from above—and this programme is particularly to- down—will be much more difficult to achieve and will not be accomplished in the short term.

5.6 Conclusion

This analysis of MRRD, through a review of the establishment of the ministry and consideration of two of its key programmes, has argued that MRRD can be considered as having a “developmental” vision. That is, it can be said to have developed a leadership and capacity to seek to bring about a positive transformation of rural society within a short period of time.¹¹⁵ A reading of its 2007 policy position¹¹⁶ confirms that it has this view of itself—in its wish to transform rural well-being through the provision of basic public goods, support self-help initiatives, be pro-poor and promote local governance. It has established a convincing programme agenda, built ministry capacity, been successful in attracting funding and through effective management of contractor relations, established a record of delivery. This stands in contrast to the assessment of MAIL made in the previous section.

But a critical reading of policy and policy practice, and looking at implementation and its effects, raises questions as to whether MRRD’s policy models are leading to the effects that they claim. In this sense, there are policy assumptions that are not validated, reflecting gaps in the policy position and a failure to draw on evidence and question assumptions that would challenge the policy narrative. In this sense, there is a wider debate that the developmental narrative has not engaged in. Part of MRRD’s success as a ministry could arguably be attributed to the synergy that exists between MRRD’s policy view of what should be done with the donor consensus on what is required to reduce

113 See Adam Pain, K. Kampenaar and T. Silkin, “DACAAR Mid-Term Review,” (Unpublished: June, 2002); and Brick, “Investigating Sustainability,” 24.

114 See Brick, “Investigating Sustainability,” 13.

115 Adapted from Verena Fritz and Alina Rocha Menocal, “Developmental States in the New Millennium: Concepts and Challenges for a New Aid Agenda,” *Development Policy Review*, 25, no.5 (2007): 531-552.

116 Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, “A Strategic Intent: Building on Success,” (Kabul: MRRD, 2007), 1386-1638.

poverty: good governance, social development and growth.¹¹⁷ If so, MRRD's policy is essentially reflective of donor policy. In this, it shares a somewhat managerial approach to rural development, by emphasising the capacity of the poor to act but giving limited attention to the structures of inequality and power that give rise to poverty in the first place.

The discussion above on the NSP programme, in relation to CDC formation and their sustainability, illustrates this. Equally, the microfinance programme MISFA, for which much has been claimed,¹¹⁸ focuses largely on the public text of success—what can be measured and issues of growth, coverage and financial sustainability. There is another reality: field research¹¹⁹ reveals the ways in which access to and use of formal microcredit is regulated by village power structures and social relations. Microcredit interacts in complex ways with informal credit systems.

In summary, there is much to admire about MRRD's achievement, given a context where most households achieve welfare through informal means via patron-client relations rather than through the state or the market. It cannot be assumed, though, that what policy thinks needs to be done, and what it thinks it achieves, is actually happening in practice. There is much more disorder and disjuncture between policy ideas, policy practices and the outcomes that are achieved¹²⁰ than the developmental narrative allows.

117 Weiss, "Aid Paradigm," 2008.

118 See for example: Geetha Nagarahan, Henry Knight and Taara Chandani, "Mid-Term Review of the Microfinance Sector and MISFA in Afghanistan" (Commissioned by MRRD, Ministry of Finance and MISFA Donors, 2006).

119 See, for example, Erna Andersen, Paula Kantor and Amanda Sim, "Microcredit, Informal Credit and Rural Livelihoods: A Village Case Study in Bamiyan Province" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008).

120 Mosse, "Good Policy," 666.

6. The Making of the ARD Policy in the ANDS

The review of policymaking processes in MAIL and MRRD has identified three broad policy positions that have been characterised as “productionist,” “developmental” and “market-driven.” What underlies these contrasting positions are different definitions of what problem the policy is responding to. For the “productionists,” a decline in agricultural production since 1978 is the central problem to which the solution is a focus on increasing production. To the “developmentalists,” the issue is lack of public goods and community governance structures and more generally an enabling environment to support a transformed rural economy. To the market-driven and commercial agriculture proponents, the problem is the lack of an active, free market responding to world demand. The reality for rural Afghanistan simply serves as a backdrop from which to establish these positions.

In many ways, the development of the Agriculture and Rural Development Sector Strategy for the ANDS made more visible the various interests and divisions of position in relation to the content and direction of policy for Afghanistan’s rural economy. It also reveals how deeply entrenched these policy positions were and how limited the debate on reconciling the different narratives was. There were most certainly divides between the two ministries and tussles over the content and prioritising within the sector strategy. In part, this reflected different visions of what needed to be done, but underlying this was also a question of mandates and ministerial turf battles; relations between the ministries could be characterised more by the differences between them than by their common interests. There was also the relationship between the ANDS Secretariat and the two ministries, with the former trying to build a common sector view between the latter.

However, the ANDS Secretariat was most certainly not neutral in its interests and, as will be seen, the Chair of the ANDS, Professor Nadiri, had his very specific view on what the policy agenda for the rural sector should be. In this, he found an ally in USAID. This organisation used its connections to the ANDS Secretariat, partly derived from its contribution to the funding of it and the location of ASAP within MAIL, to drive its agenda very hard to determine policy content in the ANDS.

This section summarises the evidence on the process behind the development, drawing from both what people involved in the ARDS thought about what was happening as the policy was developed as well as documentary evidence. In particular, the following discussion draws from the following documents, having selected just two of the draft versions although the strategy in fact went through multiple drafts:

- The Draft Sector Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development, dated 22 October 2007, hereafter ARDSS Draft 1;
- The Draft Sector Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development, dated 10 January 2008, hereafter ARDSS Draft 2;
- The Final Agriculture and Rural Development Sector Strategy, released in September 2008, hereafter the Final ARDSS;
- The sector strategy incorporated into the final version of the ANDS,¹²¹ hereafter the ANDS ARDSS;
- The summary of the Agriculture and Rural Development Sector Strategy to be found in the Executive Summary and referred to as the Summary ARDSS.

121 ANDS, 87-93.

6.1 Developing the ARDSS

It is difficult to fully disentangle the precise sequence of events behind the ARDSS and perhaps not really necessary to do so. From 2006, it is clear that the two ministries started work on their respective sections or visions of what the ARDSS should be. These appear to have been largely developed in parallel with sector policy, essentially amounting to the addition of the two ministry policy and programme positions as separate from each other, rather than an engagement between the two ministries to think through from first principles what an actual integrated rural development strategy should be. A more integrated approach would have had to begin with an agreement over an understanding of rural poverty and its causes, especially since this was a sector strategy for poverty reduction. This did not happen and indeed, as is evident from the final ARDSS and the ANDS ARDSS, such a discussion was never entered into. Poverty remained largely a descriptive backdrop on a stage where a debate was played out between the different programme structures, objectives and designs. There were also differing positions on what should be done without actually addressing what the sector strategy was trying to do.

From the MAIL side, it appears that the 2005 Master Plan was largely seen to set the content of Agriculture's contribution to the ARDSS, with further reference back to MAIL's 2004 Agriculture and Natural Resources Strategy. Various drafts were developed that largely resembled a distillation of the Master Plan.

However, at the same time, a separate strategy from that pursued by MAIL was being drafted,¹²² interestingly called an Agriculture Sector Strategy. Although it purported to cover MAIL and MRRD, with MAIL authorship in its name, informal sources state that it was effectively drafted within the USAID ASAP project and not widely debated within MAIL. The word "poverty" appears in this document just four times, in terms of reducing poverty at a goal level with no explanation of how that will happen. The focus of the document and the ordering of priorities give primacy to the development of commercial agriculture, increasing productivity, infrastructure and capacity-building within MAIL.

Early drafts of combined contributions from MAIL and MRRD have not been seen, but evidently by June and July of 2007 the drafts of the ARDSS reaching the ANDS Secretariat essentially amounted to a packaging of two separate positions into one document. Not only was this not a coherent policy or acceptable to the ANDS Secretariat, but it is also evident that Professor Nadiri had a very particular view of what the ARDSS should be.¹²³ One informant¹²⁴ referred to a culture in the ANDS Secretariat of considering itself to be in control of the process and a willing listener to those who could sell it big ideas. Whether the notion of an "agricultural revolution" came from within the ANDS or was an idea sold from the outside is not known. What is very clear is that a strong push came from the ANDS for a very hard commercial approach to agriculture to lead the ARDSS. What this probably reflected was a clear divide between those who saw private-sector development as the way forward and those who saw a greater role for Government in supporting change.

One informant¹²⁵ who attended a meeting at the ANDS Secretariat reported that USAID

122 Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), "Agriculture Sector Strategy Draft," (Kabul: MAIL, 29 April 2007).

123 Informant IF08 was of the view that Professor Nadiri had his own understanding of what Agriculture and Rural Development was all about although he had little background in the field.

124 Informant IF09, interviewed 7 August 2007.

125 Informant IF01, interviewed 29 July 2007.

was asked to take the draft sector strategy and rewrite it to meet ANDS requirements and this task was apparently delegated to someone working within the ASAP project at MAIL. At the same time, apparently at the behest of USAID, an additional paper¹²⁶ was drafted by a consultant to develop the notion of Comprehensive Agricultural Rural Development (CARD), although the subtitle of the paper, an “Afghan Agricultural Revolution,” is more revealing of its actual content. It explicitly presents the position that large-scale commercial agribusiness is the route for rural economic development. Specifically, it states:

Given that the consensus within the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) and the International Community (IC) is for ‘commercial agriculture’ what does this look like? Assuming that the multinational Dole Corporation moves forward with its large investment in Northern Afghanistan, how would we adapt this model to be replicated by way of a model of the so-called ‘Baby Doles’ or regional agribusiness centers throughout Afghanistan? How would international agribusiness investments provide viable alternative livelihoods for opium poppy and subsistence farmers?’¹²⁷

The paper overstates the level of consensus around commercial agriculture, although it evidently reflects a strand of opinion on agricultural development. But the quotation above captures well the “commercial model” of agricultural development and the “Dole model”¹²⁸ that started to circulate during 2007 and was pushed very hard by USAID, although apparently Dole did not make an investment in Northern Afghanistan as hoped. But the existence of the paper also points to the parallel processes of policymaking and policy-directing at play in the making of the ARD strategy and which are visible through to the final product. An informant¹²⁹ commented on the way the ministries were pressured toward a joint strategy, while at the same time ANDS was commissioning USAID to write a strategy and report back to the ANDS without consulting the ministries. He saw the ANDS as “very pushy” and believed that MAIL was not ready for it. He was also concerned that USAID had a single model and was simply being opportunistic in its behaviour.

There is little doubt that many in both ministries found the development of the ARDSS to be a deeply problematic process, given their perception of the speed at which it was driven and the way in which policy content was being set. One ministry informant¹³⁰ graphically described the experience of being asked to deliver in impossible deadlines—he described his ANDS contact point as “Mr Two Hours” and “how new bombs from ANDS were always exploding.” This informant was also highly critical of the restricting benchmarks that were applied to the ANDS. He questioned how benchmarks could be created before programmes were established and explained that many of them were both ambitious and confusing. Many informants commented on the rigidity and seeming relevance of the benchmarks.¹³¹ Others had more reserved positions¹³² and, while seeing the ANDS process as necessary, stated that there had been little ownership by the ministries of the

126 Anon, “Proposal Paper for Program for Comprehensive Agricultural Rural Development (CARD) or an Agricultural Revolution (AAR)” (Unpublished, 2007).

127 Anon, CARD, 2.

128 Dole is a US-based multinational agribusiness, which according to its website (www.dole.co.com), is the world’s largest producer, distributor and marketer of fresh fruit and vegetables.

129 Informant IF08, interviewed 5 August 2007.

130 Informant IF11, interviewed 7 August 2007.

131 Informant IF25, interviewed 18 January 2008 commented how these benchmarks had been done at high level, at short notice and the donors had had a major influence on them but saw them now as irrelevant.

132 Informant IF29, interviewed 24 January 2008.

document. In his view, the process has been subject to so many changes, complications and shifts in guidelines, all reflecting the way in which it had been driven, that the product was of limited value.

The redrafting of the ARD policy in July 2007 led to the emergence of a further draft that was apparently widely contested and led to further drafts. By October 2007 the structure of a strategy was emerging. This paper now looks in greater detail at the context setting and content of the strategy and how it changed before it reached its final form.

The description of the context in the ANDS Strategy shows a very clear lack of analytical engagement in understanding rural Afghanistan or the dimensions of its poverty. Instead, the focus is on establishing positions to justify policy responses. All four documents have in common a statement that remains largely unchanged across them, about the background¹³³ to the current state of agriculture and rural development. It largely plays to a story of disaster and decline around statistics on crop area, production, livestock numbers and points to a long-term decline in cereal production of 3.5 percent between 1978 and 2004¹³⁴. This generalisation ignores the rise in production from 1992 until the drought in 1998 and the peak in production in 2003. Afghanistan's food security, it is claimed, "is largely dependent on the level of cereal production".¹³⁵ This perspective would indicate that the persistence of a "productionist" thread ignores the evidence that most rural households have insufficient production capacity to achieve food security and therefore rely on market purchases for the bulk of their grain requirements.¹³⁶ Poverty is described in general terms, using summary National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment statistics, but describing poverty is not the same as understanding it and its causes. The effective landlessness of a majority of the rural population¹³⁷ remains unaddressed.

The final version of the ARDSS background chapter finishes with two sections. The first is the Challenges and Constraints section, which is concerned with implementation issues around Policy and Law, Accountability, Institutional Reform, Prioritisation and Funding for Investment. The prioritisation section focuses on the problem of prioritising what to deliver and how to deliver it, but simply concludes that it is complex. The constraints section is striking in that it relates entirely to issues of strategy delivery and disregards consideration of strategic choices and challenges in addressing the complex rural development agenda and fails to address in particular what poverty to focus on, where to do so and how.

The final background section, which focuses on achievement, somewhat reinforces this inward-looking perspective. Achievements are expressed in terms of what has been delivered—the delivery of public infrastructure, for example—or what has been produced (wheat and horticulture production coming, apparently, from the "productionist" narrative). The most curious and doubtful claim of success is described as "US\$120 million in commercial agriculture from Mazaar Foods,"¹³⁸ an achievement clearly derived from

133 See ANDS Strategy, 5-12.

134 See "Afghanistan National Development Strategy: Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy" (2008), 1387-91: 7.

135 ANDS Strategy, 8.

136 Jo Grace and Adam Pain, *Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004).

137 See the 2005 MAIL Master Plan, 65.

138 ANDS, Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy, page 12. Supporting evidence for this claim cannot be found. An off-the-record comment from one source indicated that this might relate to a potential investment of that amount to a commercial farm in the North, which failed on appraisal because of water supply issues, leaving the investment funds to be dispersed elsewhere. Whether this amounts to

the market-driven narrative. Nowhere in achievements are poverty effects discussed.

With respect to ARD policy, the focus here is on the overall strategy statements since much of the thematic policy content is to be found in the individual programmes of the two ministries. Evident from a content analysis is that the three policy narratives essentially fail to engage in debate and that the policy drafts reflect the capture of particular drafts by specific narratives and, in the latter stages, most clearly by the “market-driven” position. The result is a strategy that fails to cohere.

There is some shift in content over time in the three documents (ARDSS Draft 1 and 2 and the Final ARDSS). In ARDSS Draft 1, the strategy seeks to link with the National Development Strategy and the ANDS themes. Poverty issues receive priority in terms of the sector vision and reference is made to pro-poor growth in rural areas,¹³⁹ although what this means is not defined. The CARD approach is seen as a key coordination mechanism between the two ministries. It has two components—coordination and industrial agriculture. This is then followed by a list of the components of the programme.

ARDSS Draft 2 contains a more developed version of this. The Millennium Development Goals are posted up front¹⁴⁰ but the statements on pro-poor growth have disappeared. Instead, the focus is more on rural citizens “pulling themselves out of subsistence, increasing their incomes, improving the quality of life and having the means to participate in a liberal free market economy.” There then follows a brief section on the ARD Sector Strategic Intent that is stated as: “To reduce poverty and to stimulate the integration of rural communities within the national economy.”¹⁴¹ One presumes that this is a goal or a vision. Equally, the statement that “the poor are not a homogenous group and...have different needs” does not explore what this might mean, or how priority attention will be focused on the needs of the poorest.¹⁴²

The section on agricultural production very clearly reveals its “productionist” vision:

*The strategic objective is to develop support mechanisms for subsistence farmers, enabling them to improve food security through diversification of crops and livestock production and to increase productivity. The purpose of raising productivity will be not only to increase the competitiveness of products with regard to markets but also to raise the incomes of poor and extreme poor rural households.*¹⁴³

How this will happen for the 37 percent of rural households who—among them—have less than 3 percent of the irrigated land¹⁴⁴ is far from clear.

As it emerges in the final ARDSS, the vision remains the same with an emphasis on households pulling themselves out of poverty. There is a Policy Framework stating that “Comprehensive and Strategically Cohesive Poverty Reduction Programmes” are the same thing as the CARD—with a focus on production to reduce poverty: “Increasing production

commercial agriculture is far from clear.

139 ARDSS Draft 1, 21.

140 ARDSS Draft 2, 15.

141 ARDSS Draft 2, 16.

142 In its discussion of poverty, the strategy largely falls into the same trap as the ANDS poverty profile—see AREU, *ANDS*.

143 ARDSS Draft 2, 16.

144 MAIL, Master Plan, 65.

and productivity through different levels of agricultural production systems is required to alleviate poverty.”¹⁴⁵ The ARD Sector strategic intent remains the same with a focus on CARD as a coordination mechanism.¹⁴⁶ Finally, there is a new section that brings a focus on commercial agriculture and private sector-led growth in the most favourable areas. This is expressed in the terms of an agriculture and rural development revolution. The section on desired outcomes remains the same as in the draft version.

The ANDS ARDSS represents a selective distillation of the sector strategy and brings into focus some of the disconnected thinking in the Final ARDSS. For example: “A central focus is supporting the poorest and most vulnerable segments of rural society and promoting the development of medium and large-scale commercial agricultural activities.”¹⁴⁷ One might wonder which is the central focus—the poor or commercial agriculture? Are both to be focused on, and what is the relation between supporting the poorest and the development of commercial agriculture? The two key priorities are reaffirmed as, firstly, the CARD programme, with its list of 14 subprograms, and, secondly, support for commercial agriculture.

The shifting of priorities toward commercial agriculture is completed by the time the Executive Summary of the ANDS is reached. Here, the ANDS strategic objective for ARD is stated to be:

*To attract private sector investment to transform agriculture to a high-value commercial agriculture sector as a source of growth and expansive means of livelihood. The Government will implement a coordinated agricultural and rural development programme targeting two goals: (i) poverty reduction and (ii) the provision of alternative livelihoods. The CARD Sector strategy articulates a road map for the way forward in which poverty reduction through economic regeneration is the central objective. The overall focus is to support the poorest and most vulnerable segments of rural society.*¹⁴⁸

6.2 Conclusion

What emerges from this discussion of the development of the ARDS strategy for the ANDS and its content, is evidence of a somewhat messy and problematic process of policymaking. There are several causes. In part, it is attributable to the fact that the construction of the agriculture and rural development sector drew in two ministries with different perspectives and understandings of the rural economy, and with differing post-2001 records of funding, programme development and delivery, all of which may have reinforced divisions rather than the similarities that undoubtedly exist. But the push for an integrated sector policy, which on the surface seems like a natural position to seek, does not appear to have been constructive. A large part of the reason relates to the way in which the sector policy development was driven by the ANDS secretariat, which was seen to operate in a very top-down manner. In addition, the ANDS appears to have had its own agenda in relation to sector policy. This in turn appears to have been heavily influenced by one donor, USAID, which did not hold back in pushing its position and manoeuvring to have its agenda reflected in the policy.

145 ANDS, ARDSS, 20.

146 ANDS, ARDSS, 23.

147 ANDS, ARDSS, 87.

148 ANDS, 11.

To some extent it has succeeded, but it would be difficult to argue that the document resulting from the ARDS hangs together as a coherent strategy document, regardless of one's position on the rural development agenda for Afghanistan. Several mutually incompatible positions appear to have been stitched together, but the divisions remain clear. On the one hand, there is the "productionist" viewpoint, largely coming from within MAIL, which one might caricature as "more production is the answer to everything." In part, this is reflected in a productionist view about food security that has persisted right through to the ANDS ARDSS. Linked to this is a view that the 80 percent of households in rural areas are farmers and that farming is what matters.

MRRD's position is less easy to characterise, but doubtlessly involves a strong strand of social engineering in its vision of building village-level governance structures. Its managerial approach to rural development is reflected in its withdrawal from implementation; this is in sharp contrast with MAIL's wish for implementation, and has elements of what might be called a developmental vision. Its focus on the delivery of public goods—in infrastructure and so forth—have clearly done much to address some of the structural dimensions of poverty. But within this position, there is also a set of more normative views, which are consistent with those of the World Bank. These focus on developing support services in financial provision and on the ability of the poor to pull themselves out of poverty through their own actions by creating an enabling environment and securing "agency" for the poor. There is less concern for the structures that make people poor in the first place.

In contrast, the third strand, most clearly represented by USAID, is of full-blown commercial agriculture, foreign investment-led with minimal state involvement as the route for growth and social transformation. This appears to be a vision to which the ANDS Secretariat has subscribed and one largely determined, it would seem, by the views of the ANDS chairman.

The result is an ARDSS that is a muddle, where a focus on poverty and the causes of poverty fall between the cracks of these three different positions. Poverty remains descriptive, remote and something of a sideshow. The description of the Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD) as a comprehensive and strategically cohesive poverty reduction programme fails to convince in terms of being comprehensive, strategic or cohesive. Too much is missing. Before discussing in the final section why certain issues have not made it onto the ARD policy agenda, some of the key issues that have not been discussed must be briefly identified.

7. Missing Dimensions of the Agriculture and Rural Development Policy

This paper has argued that three distinct narratives within agriculture and rural development policymaking represent different positions on what is to be done for Afghanistan's agriculture and rural development. There are champions for each of these narratives, and they have sought through various means to establish their position. Within the MRRD, a fairly consistent and coherent position has been subscribed to by the Ministry as a whole: characterised as a "developmentalist" position, it has focused on rational design, management and social engineering. Within MAIL, there has been a clash between what has been called the "productionist" position, represented by the national staff, and a market-driven agenda for which USAID has most vocally and actively advocated. Somewhere in the middle within MAIL are a group of advisors and donor-funded programmes with international staff who are perhaps closer to the developmental position and who have been working in various ways to lead the Ministry in that direction.

The development of the ANDS ARDSS has revealed some of the fundamental divides between these narratives, driven by different problem definitions. The result is a policy statement where the divisions and contradictions between positions are self-evident. Each position has something to offer an agricultural and rural development agenda in Afghanistan, but the ARDSS does not draw this out. What is missing?

7.1 The gaps in the rural development agenda

Two issues are fundamental to the rural development agenda—poverty and the role that agriculture can play in generating growth and reducing poverty. The reason why poverty matters so much and is so central to the rural development agenda is that most poverty in Afghanistan is rural. Agriculture therefore matters both with respect to the role that it can play in poverty reduction and on its own.

However, there has been no discussion of what "rural" means in Afghanistan or how it is changing. Firstly, there is enormous rural diversity reflecting both agro-ecological potential (a combination of relative soil fertility, water availability, altitude and terrain) and distance to markets. This diversity is selectively recognised in the advocacy for commercial agriculture in the Agriculture and Rural Development Zones implementation strategy of the ARDSS and the focus on agricultural growth zones (in areas of high potential and good market access). It neglects, however, the role that agriculture might play in more marginal areas where poverty levels are likely to be greater.

With respect to change, an account that moves beyond destruction, drought and collapse would focus on a number of points that tell a different story. Not only would it point to agricultural innovation during the 1990s and the rise in wheat yields,¹⁴⁹ but it would also address the rise and fall of the opium poppy economy and its spatial diffusion, as well as raise questions about the challenges a rural development agenda has to meet. One of the key points to be considered, as has been noted elsewhere, is:

"the significant role, and arguably positive one, that opium poppy has played in the rural economy in providing social protection (food security, access to

149 See Fitzherbert, "Rural Resilience," 32.

credit¹⁵⁰), economic growth and, more controversially, as a contributor to conflict resolution processes.”¹⁵¹ From this flows an understanding of where development needs to take place if the benefits of the opium economy are to be effectively substituted.¹⁵²

It would also force a recognition, sadly missing in much of the rural policy debate, that there is much more going on in the rural sector almost despite government—including technical change, access to informal credit and so forth. Moving from crops to people and their livelihoods, the evidence is clear that most rural households are grain deficit and depend on market access for food security.¹⁵³ Many such households are functionally landless and income increasingly comes from off-farm and non-farm sources.¹⁵⁴ Communication, both through improved roads and telecommunications, has improved the connectedness of many rural areas and will encourage even further diversification out of agriculture, particularly by those with marginal holdings. Contrasts between well-connected and poorly-connected areas, with an inevitable increasing commercialisation of production in the better-connected areas, will lead to greater rather than smaller disparities among rural areas.

The case has been made elsewhere that agriculture can be the engine of growth¹⁵⁵ and can contribute to poverty reduction through farm, rural economy and national level effects. But that depends on a number of necessary conditions. Much depends on the quality of that growth and the degree to which it is labour-absorbing. It is far from clear how small farms, particularly in poorer areas, can be part of an agricultural intensification programme.

As the MAIL Master Plan notes from one farm survey, 58 percent of farmers work less than two hectares and are not able to gain even half of their employment or income from that land. So an agricultural growth strategy would, at best, benefit only the 40 percent with land holdings of more than two hectares. For smaller farmers, there are many reasons¹⁵⁶ (including a focus on wheat for self-sufficiency, cash or seasonal labour scarcity) that would limit their potential for engagement in commercial agriculture.

A fundamental question that has to be considered with respect to the agricultural growth model is that of farm-gate prices and profitability. Although there have been recent rises in commodity prices, these have also been matched by an increase in input costs, which are likely to increase. Moreover, the long-term trend has been a decline in agricultural commodity prices. The hopes for a new agricultural revolution around high value crops,¹⁵⁷ while strongly argued and close to USAID’s commercial agriculture position, also ignore some fundamental problems in agriculture, including price instability in free agricultural markets, declining farm sizes and long-term falling prices, let alone natural resource

150 Pain, “Opium Poppy and Informal Credit.”

151 J Koehler and C Zuercher, “Statebuilding, Conflict and Narcotics in Afghanistan: The View from Below” *International Peacekeeping*, 14, no.1 (2007): 62-74.

152 Mansfield and Pain, “Counter Narcotics.”

153 Grace and Pain, “Rethinking Rural Livelihoods.”

154 Witness the critical role of migration outside Afghanistan in response to the combined effects of the decline in opium and the decline in the rural economy in 2006.

155 Xavier Lin, Lin Lin, Colin Thirtle and Steve Wiggins, “Agricultural Productivity Growth and Poverty Alleviation,” *Development Policy Review*, 19 no.4 (2001): 499-66.

156 See Ashley and Maxwell, “Rethinking Rural Development,” *Development Policy Review*, 19 no.4 (2001): 395-421.

157 The World Bank, “Agriculture for Development. World Development Report 2008”, (Washington: World Bank, 2008).

constraints. In short, a commercial agriculture for those with resources and skills might be a route to prosperity, but not for those in more marginal areas.

Totally missing from the Afghanistan rural development agenda is the case for support of smallholder agriculture in more marginal areas. Lessons from the earlier green revolutions show that active state intervention to support the market at critical stages of development was a defining feature of these transformations.¹⁵⁸ This argues for greater intervention in output markets, input delivery and seasonal finance, in order to address some of the high transaction costs of smallholder agriculture. This implicitly requires greater market regulation, not less, and more investment in public goods for agriculture to reduce costs and increase efficiency. This could include social welfare transfers designed to boost production (for example, fertiliser subsidies).

Assumptions that high growth rates are the answer to poverty and that there is just one pathway to poverty reduction—economic growth generated through liberal economic policies—need to be questioned. The evidence shows¹⁵⁹ that there are multiple routes to poverty reduction, with the poor defined as the lowest quintile in terms of income. There are examples of countries that achieved significantly higher-than-average pro-poor poverty reduction¹⁶⁰ through a variety of means that did not include growth as the prime ingredient. Rather, they included progressive redistribution policies. One example was El Salvador, which while newly-emerged from a civil war managed to increase the income of the poorest quintile by 9.5 percent on average, despite an average growth rate of 2.6 percent between 1989 and 1995.¹⁶¹ This was achieved through a variety of measures (including poverty alleviation, spending on social sectors, rural education and support for microenterprises) that provided non-agricultural jobs and improved education for the poor. A key part of this, also found in other positive examples, was an expanded agricultural sector that contributed to poverty reduction but did not substantially promote economic growth in the short term.

The case can also be made for interventions that support the poor in overcoming the many entry barriers in the rural non-farm economy so that they can access more remunerative or productive activities. Such interventions include removing many of the general constraints to growth (investing in public goods), facilitating urban and rural links, and supporting enterprise growth.¹⁶²

In summary, choices to be made in the rural development agenda and trade-offs will be explored between policy objectives of poverty reduction, output growth and inter-regional balance. Different interventions are required for each, but this requires specific discussion and examination of trade-offs and priorities. The ARD has simply failed to discuss these.

158 See Jonathan Dorward, Jonathan Kydd, Jamie Morrison and Ian Urey, “A Policy Agenda for Pro-Poor Agricultural Growth” *World Development*, 32 no.1 (2004): 73-89.

159 See John Donaldson, “Growth is Good for Whom, When, How? Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction in Exceptional Cases,” *World Development*, 36 no.11 (2008): 2127-2143. This analysis re-examines the original data set of Dollar and Kray, 2002, exploring those cases where income growth of the poor was significantly higher than the average and those in which it was significantly lower.

160 Including Colombia, Nepal, Yemen, El Salvador and Costa Rica; Donaldson, “Growth is Good?”, 2130.

161 Donaldson, “Growth is Good?”, 2131.

162 See Daniel Start, “The Rise and Fall of the Rural Non-farm Economy: Poverty Impacts and Policy Options,” *Development Policy Review*, 19 no.4 (2001): 491-506.

8. Lessons and Implications

Four questions have structured this enquiry into the processes of making agricultural and rural development policy in Afghanistan. They were concerned with building an understanding of the policy agenda and how it has been created, the procedures of policy implementation, the allocation of resources, and the targets of policy. What answers can be given to those questions?

On the first, the creation of the policy agenda, the evidence indicates that several agendas have competed for policy space. Each of them has been created from different problem definitions, largely determined by particular views of Afghanistan's rural world and driven by a determination and preconception of what the solution should be. They all appear to accept, to varying degrees, a description of a collapse of rural Afghanistan prior to 2001, the evidence for which is not convincing but allow for the creation of new stories of what rural Afghanistan should become. For what has been called the "productionist" school, which is largely indigenous to MAIL, there is an appeal back to what Afghanistan is seen to have been in the past—a self-sufficient, agrarian economy where the rural population is claimed to have been fully engaged in agriculture. This view sees the Ministry of Agriculture as having played a major role in managing the rural economy. The agenda appears to be largely unreceptive to a view that the rural world has moved on since 1978—that many in rural Afghanistan draw minimal subsistence from agriculture—or a view that the market should play a much greater role in Afghanistan's agrarian economy and the Ministry much less.

Two additional policy narratives are associated with MAIL. The first, largely derived from donor support to the Ministry (except for USAID) has more of a social perspective and concern for poverty in rural Afghanistan. It has a focus on livelihoods and the complexity of rural lives, but accepts the donor agenda on good governance, social development and market-driven development and growth. In this, they are part of what has been called the "developmentalist" school, a position shared with MRRD. It is a fairly managerial view, concerned with bringing institutional reality into line with policy prescription. The ends are narrow and clear: the reduction of poverty and meeting international development targets. The means are wide and:

*Social life is instrumentalised...through policy-driven ideas such social capital, civil society or good governance that theorize relationships between society, democracy and poverty reduction so as to extend the scope of rational design and social engineering from the technical and economic realm to the social and cultural.*¹⁶³

The third position has been occupied principally by USAID working outside and independently (financially and managerially) of MAIL, but seeking, through intervention, to influence policy content. This position has been termed "market-driven." A softer version can be found in the MAIL Master Plan in its focus on commodity-led growth and the case for linkages between such growth and the growth of the rural non-farm economy, which it recognises as critical to perhaps a majority of rural households. However, there has recently been a harder version that interprets "market-driven" as pertaining to international agribusinesses focused exclusively on high-potential agricultural products.

MRRD has been able to maintain a consistent and coherent position in policy, largely

163 Mosse, "Good Policy," 642.

due to the influence of senior management that strategically sought to build ministry capacity and successfully gained control of the policy agenda. This has not, however, been the case with MAIL. Here, a different ministry culture, a division between USAID and others donors in terms of policy position and style of operation—with the former being more overt in policy entrepreneurialism—has led to a lack of coherence and clarity on policy.

What is clear is that the policy narratives have been driven more by interests than evidence. Much of the policy engagement has been concerned with defending those interests, rather than seeking to build or be open to new policy perspectives and debate policy substance. As a result, issues that fall between the three narratives have largely been neglected, as Section 7 discussed. Why have the proponents for each policy narrative been so firmly tied to their views?

The “productionist” position, based on an appeal to history, is understandable in terms of its interests in re-establishing a powerful ministry and the threat that a reform agenda implies for it; it has been a defensive position. The “developmental” narrative has been in tune with much of the donor agenda and therefore found ready support for its position. The “market-driven” position has reflected a very particular cultural view on the role of the private sector.

The attempt to merge these divergent narratives into a coherent ARD sector strategy has largely failed. The strategy has revealed the competition among these positions, rather than an exploration of the potential complementarities. As a result, the opportunity to fully explore the policy choices and develop a coherent strategy in its fullest sense has been lost.

The differences between MAIL and MRRD raise interesting questions about the extent to which a dependency on aid weakens government ownership: what is cause and what is effect? The relative neglect of MAIL by donors in contrast with MRRD could be interpreted in a number of divergent ways. A strong ministry has been successful in attracting funds to the detriment of a ministry that has been seen to be less successful. On the other hand, MAIL has been the stronghold of a donor that has pursued, largely independently, its own agenda. It appears to work both ways.

This study also reveals that effective government leadership is incompatible with a high dependence on aid. Across all programmes, donor behaviour, in the form of funding off-budget or selectively funding provinces, means that the contribution of aid practice towards making an effective Afghan state has not even reached the first stage of harmonisation as envisaged in the Paris Declaration. While there are partial steps toward alignment, in terms of supporting some ministerial agendas and working through Government systems, the lack of alignment is more striking than the degree to which has been achieved. Under such conditions, it is apparent that ownership of the policy agenda does not rest with national ministries.

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