

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

Since 1992, UN-Habitat has been working in Afghanistan in partnership with communities and government. It has provided basic services and worked with the Government of Afghanistan (GoIRA) and local authorities on various projects which include policy support and institutional capacity strengthening. UN-Habitat regards communities and government as partners and not beneficiaries in the planning and implementation of activities. UN-Habitat is present in ten provinces and five cities of Afghanistan including Kabul.

Following the ToR, “this evaluation intends to look at the effects of the UN-Habitat Country Programme in Afghanistan, with a wider strategic focus about accumulated effects over a longer time frame. It is conducted by UN-Habitat based on ROAP’s agreement with Senior Management Retreat recommendation for a Country Impact Evaluation in the region”. This evaluation is in-line with UN-Habitat’s evaluation policy (2013) and the 2015 Revised UN-Habitat Evaluation Framework document and UN-Habitat’s Strategic Policy on Human Settlements in Crisis and Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction Framework (2008).

The purpose of the evaluation is to document and assess the results and accumulated effects of the UN-Habitat programme in Afghanistan covering the period from 2012 to 2016. This evaluation will provide UN-Habitat management and stakeholders with an independent assessment of the value-added by UN-Habitat, achievements, lessons, challenges and opportunities for UN-Habitat’s operations in Afghanistan. These findings should inform future strategy, opportunities, collaboration, replication and expansion. These are all important in future mainstreaming, especially given that the Afghanistan programme has had the largest portfolio country programme of UN-Habitat for more than a decade.

Five programmes were reviewed in-depth (based on different characteristics), reflecting UN-Habitat’s vision on the three-pronged approach and its country mission, as well as focus on improving livelihoods, cross-cutting issues, and availability of data, donor, and collaboration with other UN agencies. These five programmes are:

1. National Solidarity Programme (NSP):

a. National Solidarity Programme Phase III (NSP III), 2012-2016

2. Urban Solidarity Programmes (USP):

a. Community-Based Municipal Support Programme (CBMSP), 2013-2015

b. Community-Led Urban Infrastructure Programme (CLUIP), 2015-2016

3. Strategic smaller programmes:

a. State of Afghan Cities Programme (SoAC), 2014-2015

b. Future of Afghan Cities Programme (FoAC), 2014-2016.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND INTENDED AUDIENCE

The specific objectives are:

1. To assess the relevance of UN-Habitat Afghanistan’s programme between 2012 and 2016 to attain accumulated positive results, for beneficiaries, local authorities, government institutions, that are supportive to UN-Habitat’s strategic objectives.

2. To assess the efficiency and effectiveness of UN-Habitat projects in Afghanistan in achieving results and the accumulation of results.

3. To identify what successful approaches and strategies worked, and which did not, drawing out key findings, lessons from UN-Habitat’s experience in Afghanistan.

4. Taking into account the intended users of the evaluation, make recommendations to effectively deliver, develop and expand UN-Habitat’s portfolio in Afghanistan.

The intended audience is UN-Habitat staff at country office, regional office and headquarters as well as donor and other key stakeholders of the projects evaluated.

1. <https://unhabitat.org/afghanistan/>

METHODOLOGY

Multi-faceted, mixed design and participatory methods were used to obtain both primary and secondary data for the evaluation. A total of 54 persons were interviewed and 114 persons consulted through focus group discussions, representing UN-Habitat staff (country, regional and headquarter offices), previous UN-Habitat staff, government, donors, UN agencies, partners, and beneficiaries. The data was collected through the following methods:

- Desk review
- Key informant interviews (KIIs)
- Focus group discussions (FGDs)
- Observation
- Site visits
- Photos
- Videos
- Validation workshops.

This data collection took place in Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and via Skype for those in Nairobi, Japan and elsewhere in the world.

The quality of evidence was addressed through the following evidence criteria:

- Beneficiary Voice and Inclusion (especially, the most excluded and marginalized groups)
- Appropriateness
- Triangulation
- Contribution
- Transparency.

Following the UN system evaluation criteria, this evaluation used the five evaluation criteria of: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability.

The evaluation was conducted by external consultants Dr. Stephen Van Houten and Mr. Shakir Ullah Shakir in close consultation with the UN-Habitat Evaluation Unit, the Regional Office for

KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation is the first ever UN-Habitat Afghanistan Country Programme evaluation. The findings from the five programme evaluation show that UN-Habitat has achieved excellent results in the fields of service delivery and technical assistance in both rural and urban areas. A summary of the five evaluation criteria is provided below.

CRITERIA	ASSESSMENT
1 RELEVANCE	UN-Habitat's work was, and is, aligned to global, regional, national, provincial, and local priorities, and the five programmes were relevant and useful, especially given the national urban development priorities and the political-social-economic challenges facing Afghanistan over the last five years of review.
2 EFFECTIVENESS	Programme results were achieved in a coherent manner, and positive changes to beneficiaries resulted from the various products and services, and the transfer of beneficiary ownership had a constructive impact on the effectiveness of the projects.
3 EFFICIENCY	The five programmes: acquired appropriate resources (expertise and equipment) with due regard for cost; implemented activities as simply as possible; attempted to keep overheads as low as possible; achieved deliverables on time and budget; and addressed duplication and conflicts. UN-Habitat's progress and efficiency gains worked through the government's national programmes with respect to design, management, implementation, reporting, and resource mobilization.
4 IMPACT	The programmes attained clear development results to the targeted population, beneficiaries, local authorities, and government institutions, as well as addressed national priorities that are supportive of UN-Habitat's strategic objectives.
5 SUSTAINABILITY	UN-Habitat clearly engaged the participation of beneficiaries in the design, implementation, monitoring and reporting phases of the programmes. National project staff's capacity was built to enhance and sustain their involvement in urban development. All five programmes show that UN-Habitat's Country Programme was aligned with National Development Strategies and contributed to increased national investments to accelerate the achievement of priorities at national, provincial and local level.

2. The UN system evaluation criteria are similar to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria.

Details of the key findings include:

- UN-Habitat's long-term engagement in Afghanistan has given it a unique and strong relationship with communities and government.
- The methods (People's Process and CDCs) utilised the expertise and local knowledge of national and international staff who are largely responsible for the trust that exists between UN-habitat and the government and communities.
- UN-Habitat has actively contributed to the physical and social reconstruction of Afghanistan.
- UN-Habitat's legacy in Afghanistan was largely established through its contribution to the NSP with its focus on the People's Process and the formation of the CDCs.
- The placement of project teams and technical advisors within the government agencies, ministries, and municipalities has strengthened mutual trust, collaboration, and capacity building of government staff.
- Since 2013, UN-Habitat has been involved in technical cooperation with the government to ensure that skills are developed, maintained, and strengthened across various operational areas for local staff.
- One of UN-Habitat's key future challenges is to decide how to move forward with technical cooperation while not forgetting the power and impact of service delivery projects.
- The Country Programme and ROAP staff were, and are, central to UN-Habitat's success in Afghanistan.
- UN-Habitat has been successful in capacitating local staff; some have remained in the Country Programme and others are now making significant contributions to Afghanistan through working for the government.
- Despite Afghanistan's ongoing challenges UN-Habitat has managed to remain relevant and sustainable.
- UN-Habitat's work is aligned to global, regional, national, provincial, and local priorities.
- UN-Habitat, based on its history, current and planned work, is well placed to remain relevant and useful not only to Afghanistan but to other countries facing similar urban challenges.
- The country programmes are effective and efficient.
- Positive changes to beneficiaries resulted from the various products and services, and the transfer of beneficiary ownership had a constructive impact on programme effectiveness.
- UN-Habitat acquired appropriate resources with due regard for cost; implemented activities as simply as possible; attempted to keep overheads as low as possible; achieved deliverables on time and budget; and addressed duplication and conflicts.
- UN-Habitat's progress and efficiency gains worked through the government's national programmes with respect to design, management, implementation, reporting, and resource mobilization.
- The involvement of the gender and human rights aspects in the project design, planning, implementation, reporting and monitoring was strong across all five programmes.
- UN-Habitat has developed a committed, robust and diverse donor base.
- UN-Habitat must ensure that specific donor interests and requirements are met, some preferring service delivery, with others preferring technical assistance.
- The programmes attained clear impacts on the micro-, meso- and macro-levels to the targeted population, beneficiaries, local authorities, and government institutions.
- The somewhat unique structure, linkage, and succession of these projects meant that there were individual and accumulated impacts. These five programs are now part of the next 10 years as the Citizen's Charter (CC) is rolled out.
- UN-Habitat engaged the participation of beneficiaries in the design, implementation, monitoring and reporting phases of the programmes.
- UN-Habitat's Country Programme was aligned with National Development Strategies and contributed to increased national investments to accelerate the achievement of priorities at national, provincial and local level.
- The programmes were assessed to be replicable and encouraged collaboration between cities at the provincial level.

- UN-Habitat projects have fostered innovative partnerships with national institutions, NGOs, and other development partners.
- UN-Habitat needs to reassess the way it engages with the government, in that the working relationship should be based on equal partnerships and results-based outcomes. Government feels stronger and more able and UN-Habitat's evolving relationship with them should reflect these changes.
- UN-Habitat's Country Programme in Afghanistan has achieved an enormous amount of success. The strong country and regional teams are well placed to continue developing its collaboration with government and to guide and support other UN-Habitat Country Programmes.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

AREA	RECOMMENDATIONS	ADDRESSEE	
1	ACHIEVEMENT	Consolidate gains and deliver on targets made with government and donors for the next three years, and, in 2020, use these gains and new strategic direction as a foundation for the next five years. New programmes to focus on designing innovative follow-up phases.	CP, ROAP
2	INTER-OFFICE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS	Arrange an externally facilitated workshop with the country and regional offices within the next three months to discuss how to enhance HQ expertise inputs to ongoing or future projects or programs in Afghanistan and the working relationship between HQ and the regional and country offices.	CP, ROAP, HQ
		Maintain HQ quality inputs at the project conceptual level and improve HQ support to project start-up and operational phases as non-delivery of UN-Habitat can have a broader impact on the UN system in the eyes of GoIRA.	CP, ROAP
		The Country Programme, supported by ROAP, should share the vast experience with HQ colleagues through a one-day workshop or similar in Nairobi, to lay the foundations of a common understanding about the Afghanistan programme, and help identify areas of potential cooperation.	CP, ROAP
		Improve HQ feedback and acknowledgement systems.	HQ
		Review and discuss HQ expert missions to Kabul and the provincial offices.	CP, ROAP, HQ
		Review and streamline the system of HQ branches asking for payment for services provided to the regional and country offices.	HQ
		Review and discuss the Cost Recovery Plan with full consultation and endorsement of the donors and the GoIRA, as allocating such charges on ad-hoc basis can be counterproductive if donors make those payments as ineligible during the verification stage.	CP, ROAP, HQ
		Discuss what the PSC means to donors at the high level and the country office on the ground and provide detailed report how such programme support costs are supporting respective project directly or indirectly as repeatedly requested by the donors in Kabul.	HQ
3	PROGRAMME IDENTIFICATION	Identify new programmes like SoAC and FoAC for future work and collaboration.	CP, ROAP
4	RESOURCE PLANNING	Ensure adequate financial and human resources as well as time for shorter projects like SoAC and FoAC.	CP, ROAP
5	STAFF TRAINING	Continue with the recently initiated training programme of local and international staff on standard organisational requirements and skills, and branches training on new action areas and corporate initiatives.	CP, ROAP, HQ
6	LOCAL STAFF	Develop and implement a long-term capacity development programme of local staff.	CP, ROAP
7	SECURITY	Review and strengthen security. While security costs should be adequately built into the projects' budgets, there is a need for facilities that adheres to the minimum operating security standards (MOSS), with HQ support.	CP, ROAP, HQ
8	COMMUNICATION PLAN	Develop a clear and consistent communication plan for organizational information relating to internal and external finances and human resources.	HQ
9	UMOJA	Review the UMOJA system to highlight its strengths and weaknesses considering future programmes.	CP, ROAP, HQ
10	IMPACT INDICATORS	Develop a specific impact measurement strategy for all current and future programmes.	CP, ROAP
11	RELATIONSHIP WITH GoIRA	Discuss GoIRA'S needs and the nature of future collaboration as the nature of the relationship shifts to greater collaboration and support.	CP, ROAP
12	RETURNEE AND IDP ISSUES	Strengthen the integration of returnee and IDP issues into programmes as a central cross-cutting theme.	CP, ROAP
13	SERVICE DELIVERY – TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	Build on the model that exists in ongoing programmes (e.g. CFA, LIVE-UP, AUPP) that balance service delivery (e.g., block grants for communities) with technical assistance and support to GoIRA partners.	ROAP