

## Urban Safety:

# A Review of the Afghanistan Urban Peacebuilding Program

### Introduction

The notion of urban safety is relatively new in policy environment, off and on-budget municipal programming and administrative rules and practices in Afghanistan. The rapid urbanization of the last 16 years has generated specific vulnerabilities, exclusions and insecurities. The urban social fabric that existed in the past and ensured a relative solidarity and a sense of security is broken in most major urban centers. As a result, women and youth are subject to specific safety risks. Most major cities are home to informal settlements and IDP camps. Citizens are not taking part in improving urban safety. Municipal service delivery capacity has not been able to adjust to growing urbanization and municipal governance policies are still in the making.

In late 2016 the High Council on Urban Development adopted an Urban National Priority Programme (U-NPP) that now serves as the programmatic and policy blueprint for the urban sector for the coming decade. The U-NPP is an ambitious agenda for inclusion, growth and stabilization. It has three pillars: strengthening urban governance and institutions; providing adequate housing and basic urban services for all; and strengthening urban economy and infrastructure. U-NPP has adopted the urban safety as a core agenda theme in urban planning and spatial design. Its governance approach emphasizes community-based deliberation and development of security and safety plans and the creation of security and safety sub-committees in the Municipal Advisory Boards.

The Afghanistan Urban Peacebuilding Program (AUPP) has been a pioneering initiative by UN-Habitat focused on urban safety and security in eight provinces since early 2015. It does so by addressing the challenging capacity gap in service delivery and limited citizenry participation. AUPP is based on the liberal theory assumption that a state cannot function without a social contract. As a result, it works with communities and municipalities to ensure they both work together and enhance joint planning and provision of services. AUPP theory of change assumes that subnational administration and communities can trust each other to bring in safety and security in urban areas.

The objective of this policy note is to summarize the findings and recommendations of the review of the first phase of AUPP, conducted by AREU and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC).

### Methodology

A desk review of existing documentation on the program and broader literature on urban governance in Afghanistan allowed for identification of issues and questions that were further explored during the interviews of key stakeholders (12 in total: donors, government, partners) and two focus group discussions with beneficiaries. The desk review included project documents, operational and annual reports, baseline surveys, external audits, visibility and capacity development material, policy documents, research reports and national surveys. This enabled the research team to analyze how data is collected and used in program implementation. The impressive documentation highlights the multiple aspects of the urban governance, strength and weaknesses of the intervention and challenges that need to be overcome. It further indicates that urban safety and security are broad themes that constitute an interesting approach for many urban governance interventions.

## Key Findings

**Policy relevance:** AUPP approach, goals and outputs are relevant and in line with current policies—notably the ANPDF, U-NPP and, to some extent, the Citizen Charter model in urban areas. The community-centric approach that emphasizes inclusiveness—women, youth, IDPs—and the linkages with upper levels (Gozar Assemblies, District Plans) contributes towards policy goals pursued by the Afghan government.

**Lessons learned integrated:** In addition, AUPP has integrated lessons learned from NSP, its own past experience in urban solidarity work and other urban programmatic interventions. AUPP, therefore, constitutes a model for future urban development programs that rely on community-based programming linked with district level and citywide plans and institutional design.

**Broadening the views on safety and security:** AUPP has been able to broaden the views within police, communities and policy decision makers about urban safety and security beyond policing. It has contributed to the idea that challenges security as a notion defined top-down and often highlighting the role of armed insurgency rather than softer issues relevant to community needs.

**Concrete contribution to urban safety:** AUPP has established a strong link between specific small to medium size infrastructure projects and urban safety. The latter is often an abstract idea. However, AUPP's approach of diagnosing the problem and coming up with infrastructure building solutions from a given community perspective has been highly effective in making urban safety a concrete notion. Thus, AUPP creates a working agenda for human security in urban areas.

**Added innovations:** The active participation and contribution of communities to infrastructure projects' design and implementation has often opened the possibility of bringing more innovation to the projects, adding safety features for children, women, municipal or police officials, etc. These include seating, recreational and sports spots for women and children, street lights for all, family parks, mixed areas for men and women or women-only parks/centers, larger road passages for police patrols, etc.

**Enhanced urban community solidarity and cooperation:** The research found evidence that urban solidarity was created in areas that have experienced significant settlements of different geographic, linguistic and ethnic groups. It has also enhanced trust between community members, men and women, which had limited interaction with each other before AUPP interventions. This has led to empowerment of community vis-à-vis municipality and police officials. Women and girls have found voices and platforms to contribute and obtain safety measures. Cooperation has been enhanced within the community. For instance, representatives of the community have been able to work with some of the younger male members to abstain from acts that create street harassment for girls and women. Cooperation between communities has also increased when projects (such as water supply) created mutual dependency between communities.

**Enhanced cooperation with municipality and police officials:** Interviews and documentation provide ample evidence that cooperation between communities and subnational government officials have improved. As a result of consultations and other interactions, community members have been able to call district police, municipality officials in charge of solid waste management, etc. On the other hand, police officials have asked community representatives to help them better patrol the streets, notably by improving streetlights. Finally, anecdotal evidence suggests that bribery extortion by low-level police and municipality officials—especially for allowing house building—has ceased after community leadership established regular communication channels with the higher levels of police and municipality.

**Efficiency in service delivery and responsiveness of officials:** In one example, the added innovation of specific sites for solid waste collection enhanced the efficiency and responsiveness of municipality officials. Dedicated sites for solid waste first created a sense of responsibility among the households that no longer dispersed their garbage in every corner. Within the community, the leader took the responsibility to call in municipality officials when sites were full. Such dedication from the community prompted municipality district officials in collecting waste. Their performance also increased, as they no longer had to collect waste from different points. In general, improvements in infrastructure often resulted in better access for officials delivering services to areas where these communities lived: ambulance, police patrol, fire fighters etc.

**Institution-building and sustainability:** AUPP is an off-budget program. If it were to become on-budget, the municipalities that would become the key implementers would face significant challenges from financing to service delivery, administration, oversight, public outreach and responsiveness. AUPP has adopted, so far, a narrow focus on capacity building by training officials through workshops that will not result in institutional capacity. But, it has a decent level of municipal ownership, although varied across cities. And it has started to engage in institution-building, for instance, by setting up Municipality Advisory Boards. However, institutionalizing AUPP objectives into the work of municipalities will require further steps. There has been some advocacy work with municipalities to ensure maintenance budgets are in place for future maintenance of infrastructure projects. Nonetheless, programmatic sustainability is an issue that needs further consideration.

**Reduced social stigma and reputational risks:** Social stigmas tied to urban insecurity specific to certain areas or population groups have progressively disappeared. But, respondents also suggested that areas perceived as insecure improved their safety reputation as a result of improvements made under AUPP and enabled the return of households who had initially fled.

**Urban safety as a driver of economic growth:** Many respondents suggested that economic activity has flourished as a result of enhanced safety. Streets with lights often become the arena for social life, which did not exist previously. As a result, shops, restaurants, beverage and ice cream sellers, pharmacies and educational centers can operate longer hours while households allow their girls and boys to return to homes later at night. The link between growth and urban safety, however, still needs to be explored further.

**Urban safety requires a change of mindset that takes time:** Municipality buy-in has varied across cities. While the policy environment is supportive of the program objective and approach, administrative practices are often in conflict or resistant to safety defined from a community perspective. Often, municipality officials do not want to engage with vulnerable groups such as IDPs out of the fear of legitimizing their settlements. There has been some resistance by mayors to Municipality Advisory Boards that is an integral part of the design of programs such as AUPP. Women are often the most affected by urban insecurity. Yet municipalities lack female officials and are less responsive to their voices and demands. Reaching out to police often does not result in solutions that correspond to women expectations of safety.

## Recommendations

**Mainstream urban safety in urban programming:** urban safety is now inscribed in urban policy, but has to be streamlined in off and on-budget urban programs. Safety considerations are key to establishing trust between citizen and the state, a goal sought by most programs. AUPP offers lessons that can be integrated into many programs.

**Explore the link between urban safety and growth:** The correlation between urban safety and growth is not yet explored in Afghanistan. Further research is necessary to establish the link between the two and gather evidence.

**Explore the link between education and urban safety:** The review provides some evidence that opportunities for learning have increased, especially through increased time and space for the younger generation. The choice of streetlights by households has often resulted from an expectation that children could attend classes later at night. The link between access to education and urban safety, however, needs to be established through solid research.

**Study the nexus between urban safety and service delivery:** The review shows that service delivery has become more regular and efficient while officials have become more responsive. This aspect of the program needs to be explored for every community.

**Urban safety and revenue generation:** The review also found indications that safety projects led to registering of houses with municipality offices, therefore increasing the basis for taxation. This link needs to be explored beyond individual examples.

**Better use information technology:** Future programming needs to better utilize the information technology that is highly relevant to urban youth that are now regularly using social media and digital technologies, but also the Afghan government in the context of Open Government Partnership and access to information legislation. Technology can be used to fight street harassment, report crimes, solicit municipality interventions, improve service delivery or get feedback.

**Better integration of youth and other vulnerable groups:** Youth constitutes a higher proportion in urban areas than it does in rural areas. It has specific urban safety challenges that cannot be addressed through community-based approach alone: for instance, young populations that come to cities for higher education or jobs, often residing in dormitories and places outside of campuses. The same is true for IDPs. Such vulnerable groups, therefore, need to be better integrated through program conceptions that meet and respond to their vulnerabilities.

**Better communication on the outcome and potential of urban safety programs:** AUPP and similar programs need to communicate better about the outcome and potential of urban safety to enable other communities or government officials to become aware and adopt similar strategies.

**Pilot capacity building initiative:** Urban safety programs depend on municipality and police officials to understand the notion and integrate it into their work. Current efforts have reduced capacity building to narrow, poor and ineffective concepts of training workshops. Future programs need to find imaginative solutions, jointly with the government, to create human and institutional capacity for urban safety in relevant institutions.

**Implement sustained institutional capacity for urban safety:** Going beyond small-scale institutional build-up and training, AUPP can pilot a quasi full-fledged implementation role to a few municipalities by building institutional and human capacity and mentoring municipality officials, but retaining control over administration and oversight functions at least until fiduciary risks are reduced within targeted municipalities. Lessons learned from the pilot can be used for scaling up.

**Broaden the scope of urban safety:** AUPP has been able to identify multiple safety risks. However, many such risks like electricity cables without sheaths or gas balloon explosions are not highlighted. In addition, there may be a need to teach the communities about the environmental safety risks that are less tangible, but for which local remedies can be effective.

**Develop convincing ways of capturing impact:** Urban safety programs and AUPP in particular will need to explore ways of developing a more compelling mix of data on the impact of the safety projects. For instance, programs can try to assess the impact of the safety projects on the extent of service delivery or the level of economic and social activity before and after the projects.

**Enhance program coordination:** There are multiple urban governance programs that need to be coordinated in an effective manner. Many are not aware of the details of the work of each other. They can get together in learning sessions. The Technical Working Group can meet more often, with something like an online coordination platform that can be fed by programs. Programs can use geospatial data to be centralized in a database. At the least, an update of the mapping exercise will clarify who is doing what, when and where.

The information and views set out in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of AREU, SDC or IDS.

Publication Code 1802E

Editor Matthew Longmore

## About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research institute based in Kabul that was established in 2002 by the assistance of the international community in Afghanistan. AREU's mission is to inform and influence policy and practice by conducting high-quality, policy-relevant, evidence-based research and actively disseminating the results and promote a culture of research and learning. As the top think-tank in Afghanistan and number five in Central Asia according to the Global Go To Think Tank Index Report at the University of Pennsylvania, AREU achieves its mission by engaging with policy makers, civil society, researchers and academics to promote their use of AREU's research-based publications and its library, strengthening their research capacity and creating opportunities for analysis, reflection and debate. AREU is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of representatives of donor organisations, embassies, the United Nations and other multilateral agencies, Afghan civil society and independent experts.

AREU's core donor is the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Specific projects in 2018 are being funded by the European Commission (EU), United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Overseas Development Institute (ODI-UK), Promundo (US), Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and Economic and Social Research Council United Kingdom (ESRC-UK) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

AREU holds memberships in multiple international development consortiums including the RESOLVE Network, Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) and A Conflict Sensitive Unpacking of The EU Comprehensive Approach to Conflict and Crisis Mechanism (EUNPACK), Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA), Environmental Natural Resources Monitoring Network (ENRMN), Mining Watch Afghanistan