

Legitimacy of Social Change

A Comparison of Public and Privately Funded Development Activities
in Afghanistan

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The author evaluates a major U.S. government development partner operating in Afghanistan to provide a broader consideration for her topic, legitimacy for social change. She attempts to unravel the conflicting goals of military and civilian efforts in a counter-insurgency environment and illustrates how differing goals lead to unwieldy entanglements and compromises. Without stating an equivocal position for or against “change”, she offers an alternate model of pre and post testing of program effectiveness. She contrasts the problematic constructs of a large U.S. development effort with the modest, but more socially grounded, long-term efforts of a small foreign NGO in Afghanistan. Finally, she discusses how careful discussion of the core legitimacy for social change must be thoroughly examined before development interventions are even considered. Readers are also urged to view the documentary film, “Collective Behavior Theory in Action - Afghanistan” (2013) produced and narrated by the author.

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The topic of formal program evaluation is a focus of social science theorists, practitioners, researchers, and oversight groups. In particular, this area of study has gained attention since the 1960s, driven in part by the ambitious social programs related to President Johnson's Great Society. During roughly the same period, the international social intervention programs of the US government have expanded dramatically as have the efforts of a myriad of international Non-profit Organizations (NPOs). Most recently, the conflict zones in the Middle East (e.g. the Republic of Iraq) and South Central Asia (e.g. the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) have received heavy funding for programs with social change as their underpinnings. This paper attempts to add to the conversation and to suggest evaluation methodology. Within the evaluation process, I recommend the use of Rossi's definition "a social science activity directed at collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and communicating information about the working and effectiveness of social programs" (2). What I am unable to do in the scope of this paper is provide a detailed discussion of program needs assessment, design, implementation or cost and efficiency other than what one can deduce from the public domain materials on our two examples: a large publically-funded effort known as Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative (ASI) East and the much smaller privately-funded efforts of Canadian Women-for-Women Afghanistan. I will attempt to shed some light on the interplay among program logic, outcome and impact in all their complexity.

Program evaluation is a complex endeavor. However, different evaluators with different evaluation criteria might come to different conclusions when evaluating the same program. The more one focuses on the details of programming and social change, the more perplexing things may seem. For example, an intervention to improve the plight of women in society may lead to precisely the opposite results, depending on the timing of the evaluation. To those who are working hard and spending assets to improve women's rights in very conservative traditional societies this may be disheartening indeed. But depending on the timing, an evaluation may show negative impact right before improvement begins. A leading social scientist with the World Bank, Michael Woolcock sheds light on the impact trajectories of interventions. Speaking to women's empowerment programs as an example "would suggest that in fact the most likely shape of such projects' functional form is a J-curve (i.e., things get worse before they— hopefully, maybe—get better)" (5). In other words, the trajectory of a developmental project impact varies widely with the type of project and may be hard to know ahead of time. In the case of women's empowerment programs, evaluations conducted by Woolcock have shown that metrics for women's empowerment, when measured over time, typically decline first and then show improvement at a later time if the intervention continues. Without going into a great deal of detail, this is likely because of cultural opposition to the change that the intervention seeks to alter. At the same time, writing in glowing terms about the projected impact of a large publically-funded program may be also an unwise thing to do. Too many unknowns exist. Given these limitations, I will attempt to focus on a single aspect of evaluation: socio-cultural legitimacy.

Two major conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have focused many billions of humanitarian and development dollars into relatively small and hitherto largely ignored countries. From the United States' side, this outlay has been channeled largely through publically-funded means such

as the development activities of the Department of Defense and the Department of State including its US Agency for International Development (USAID). Much has been written about the economic distortion and contributions to endemic corruption of US publically-funded campaigns in Afghanistan. What is not as well publicized is the intent to alter Afghan culture in fundamental ways. There has been little discussion as to how these dramatically expensive efforts are linked with or accommodate basic tenets of social change theory, conflict theory, and collective behavior theory. The very legitimacy of western-directed social change is questioned. Against this background, smaller privately-funded NPO activities in these regions are achieving results that are proportionally greater. Why? Simply put, private NPOs are hard-pressed to conform to social norms and work within the Afghan cultures that they interact with-their resources do not allow them to do otherwise. The effectiveness of some of their programs (versus the immense government programs) indicates that there are lessons to be learned.

Section I

Analysis: Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative East

US publically-funded development interventions have struggled to achieve their stated goals in Afghanistan. Possibly, core elements of Afghan society, social norms and viewpoints and key elements of sociological theory were not taken into proper consideration when developing the goals of the interventions, some of which cost hundreds of millions of dollars. As a corollary, little effort has been made to legitimize social change in the context of the whole range of US publically funded interventions. For the purpose of example, I provide a specific publically-funded intervention called ASI East. I reference official evidence on the relative success of the intervention: reports by the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), USAID, and its partner Development Alternatives International (DAI).

The ASI East intervention is the selected program for this section. ASI East occurred in ten districts sprinkled widely throughout six mountainous provinces of the eastern sector of Afghanistan. Several of the districts are close to the volatile Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The USAID implementing partner, DAI, is a US for-profit international development company that performs projects in countries around the world, largely on behalf of USAID. The framework of ASI is to use a “community-based consultative approach that identifies and implements small community improvement projects” (“Afghanistan”). There is also a communications requirement – i.e. communicating to the populace those services that the government (Afghan) is delivering. Ostensibly, the program intends to “build confidence and trust between (the national government) and local Afghan communities” (“Afghanistan”). Therefore, the underlying premise is that an improvement in economic conditions and a growing recognition that their own government is working to provide help and services will enhance stability in the areas where the intervention occurs.

But, what is stability in the context of this intervention? Stability has been defined in a number of ways, but, according to USAID, in the Afghan context it means “a reduction in the means and motivations for violent conflict, increased capacity to resist sudden change or deterioration, and socioeconomic predictability” (*District Stability 5*). The terms of reference for reduction, tendency, and support are not provided by the US government. As only eight districts are selected from among fifty, I cannot decipher for sure what process was used to determine them. In some cases it is a given that some US government processes in a war zone will be opaque (classified). Some core questions need to be asked: Do the citizens of targeted unstable districts consider themselves as needing US government attention? Is it possible that some of the selected districts actually considered themselves stable before the arrival of the US government?

As Americans, can we legitimize placing a centrally run government in charge of the affairs of Afghan tribal structures?

Consider this worst-case hypothetical example: Insurgents are swarming a small village cluster high in the mountains of Eastern Afghanistan, in a small valley right on the border with Pakistan. The insurgents are members of local families and clans. Some tribal Afghans are not happy that their territory is being used as a pass-through for other insurgents. On their way, they rest, plan, recruit and launch attacks in urban areas closer to the capital. It has been this way for centuries. The villages have run their own affairs locally through a committee of elders called a jirga. It is their culture and it has worked for a millennia. Fearful that the US Army will come, the elders insist that the insurgents leave. One hothead among them murders a respected elder. The villages in the district are then declared, by definition, unstable by the US Army. The US Army comes in and dispatches or chases away insurgents. Of course, the insurgents strike back. Only a single village is heavily damaged, and the Army pays to have it rebuilt. However, pitched battles take place on other tribal lands, and the roads out of the valley become hostile territory. The district is added to the list of unstable areas and is targeted for intervention in the ASI program. An entire US Army battalion makes its base camp near the district capital and a continuous low level battle drags on over years. Villagers are often caught in the middle. At a cost of over \$151 million over three years 2010-2012, one might expect some significant results from both the hypothetical intervention described above and the real one (ASI) that was established under the same auspices. This was not the case.

First, one should understand that the ASI development efforts began linked to a military strategy of clear-hold-build, a key element of General David Petraeus' counter-insurgency program in Iraq (not Afghanistan). This strategy (clear-hold-build) was a contract of sorts

between the military and civilian authorities in Iraq. The idea was that the military would clear an area of insurgents and hold it. Meanwhile, USAID would build the local economy and relations with the official local government removing the net causes of insurgency in the first place. A lack of jobs is often held up as a root cause of insurgency and USAID, through implementing partners, provides jobs programs. These programs are almost exclusively for manual day labor such as road building, canal cleaning, wall building, etc.

The Special Inspector General Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) did an extensive report on the ASI East program entitled *Progress Made Toward Increased Stability under USAID's Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative-East Program but Transition to Long Term Development Efforts Not Yet Achieved*. Essentially, the US Dept. of Defense report states that no lasting progress has been made: “Despite nearly 3 years of program efforts, none of ASI-East’s target districts have transitioned to the build phase of the COIN strategy, which is designed to solidify the gains during the hold phase of COIN operations” (2). COIN is military jargon for Counterinsurgency. This statement correlates with the clear-hold-build strategy noted previously, itself an approach that might be open to question both on sociological grounds as well as practical ones.

The SIGAR report on ASI highlights some issues with the ratio of money spent on operations versus the money spent on the programs themselves. I mention this as it will contrast later in this document with the efforts of smaller privately funded efforts. The ASI ratio of program support (foreign employees, security and life support) was to be around 55% with the balance of 45% going to programs. This is not atypical of overseas development programs where statutory requirements exist for monitoring the local implementing partners where monies are expended as grants. Ostensibly this is to prevent fraud. The US government requires that a high

level of USAID funds be disseminated by approved internationals, preferably American citizens, in order to assure fiduciary supervision. This is not to say that Americans are necessarily more trustworthy. The reason is mundane: Americans can be prosecuted and punished for embezzling federal funds while foreign nationals are virtually immune. In any case, SIGAR has found that the ASI program actually used a whopping 75% for overhead and only 25% was spent on programs.

The irony is that early in the program roll-out, the government made a change in the size of the grants (smaller is smarter), and even more international oversight was required. This required more people and more supervision. In regard to all of these international programs, the locals have a sense that a great amount of money is being skimmed off by US companies. They may be correct. But, the high administrative costs can be linked to statutory requirements. Every time there is a scandal in the media, Congress requires more oversight, which leaves less program money. It is a paradox. Private charitable development organizations, by contrast, see ratios more on the order of 20-80 with the vast bulk of funds going to interventions. I will examine a typical small development organization in Section II.

As ASI money is largely spent on small grants, it may be illustrative to examine a few of them:

- The USAID article entitled *Taking the Message to Remote Areas* claims that “ASI-East has found that outreach training enables district government to address issues of local concern more effectively, which reduces people’s feelings of alienation.”
- The USAID article entitled *School Provides Government Legitimacy* states that “[b]y enabling the district government to address a community concern, USAID reinforced the Afghan government’s legitimacy.”

- The USAID article entitled *Using Soccer to Kick Out Extremism* states that “[t]he tournament allowed the Afghan government to conduct a dialogue with local community leaders.”

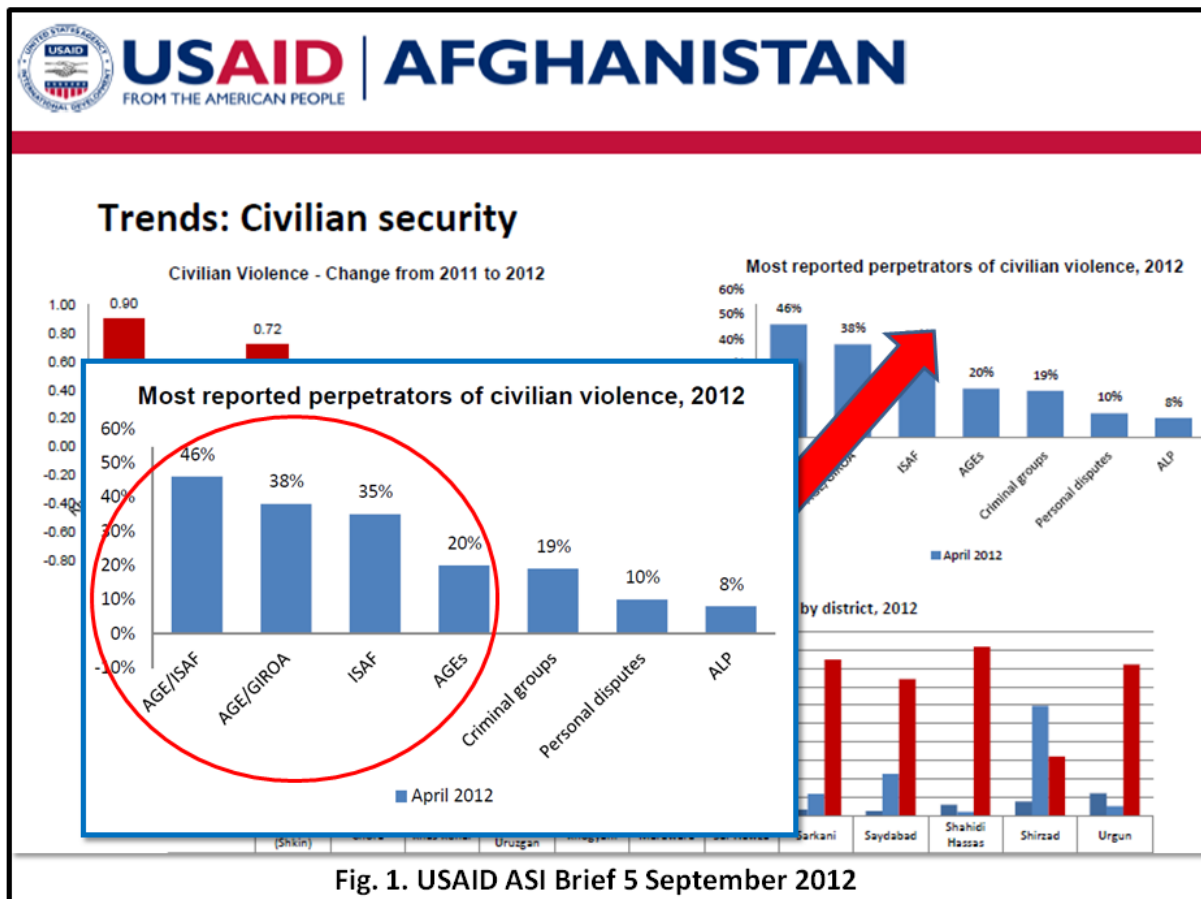
The final damning aspect of the US Dept. of Defense’s SIGAR report is the claim that “[p]reliminary results show significant and positive results at the project level while instability remains a problem across ASI-East’s ten program districts...” (12). In other words, the implementing partner, DAI, did all the things that the ASI East program required, and the projects were successful, but the program goal of stability was not achieved.

One might conclude that this shortfall points to problems with the program’s base assumptions (i.e., that small grants providing services and wages increase stability). But this is not the conclusion that the US government came to. Instead, USAID announced an additional \$161.5 million follow-on task order to a different implementing partner to continue working on ASI to bring stability to selected districts in Afghanistan with no changes in program goals. Though this in no way rebuts the legitimacy of social change, it certainly indicates that the US government writ large does not understand the obstacles to social change within the confines of a traditional culture.

Before looking into the ASI intervention in more detail, I would state that in all likelihood, the dedicated men and women field officers of the implementing partner (DAI) worked hard to achieve the program goals, indicated in the significant and positive results comment above. To learn more, I examined what DAI admitted about their program. A primary source for this evidence can be found in the ASI brief to USAID, published on September 4, 2012, after the program was completed. I will reference two slides in the pages that follow. This brief, *Overall Stability Results and Program Learning*, was produced in an attempt to both

justify what had actually been done to affect the program and to clarify what lessons might be learned from the three years in the ten districts where the program had been operating.

As I examined some of the societal elements that may have obstructed the DAI intervention, it is illustrative to look at a single slide from their ASI brief in Fig. 1.



Several acronyms are used in the slide including AGE (Anti-Government Elements); ISAF (International Security Force Afghanistan) and GIROA (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan). This particular slide shows a major challenge for development personnel (i.e., operating in a district where major security operations are on-going). The take-away is that local people perceive that some violence against civilians comes from the Taliban. But, in their opinion, more of it comes from US forces or government forces.

This problem appears to drive the failure of the intervention, although I have no way to quantify the effect. DAI does not detail what the instances of violence were or whether there was any basis in truth for the generally negative perception. The reality is that it does not make any difference whether or not US or government forces were behind violence against civilians. The salient point is the high significance that local perception places on violence as related to US or government forces. It is notable that the US government enabling partner, DAI, would have necessarily been closely associated with those forces.

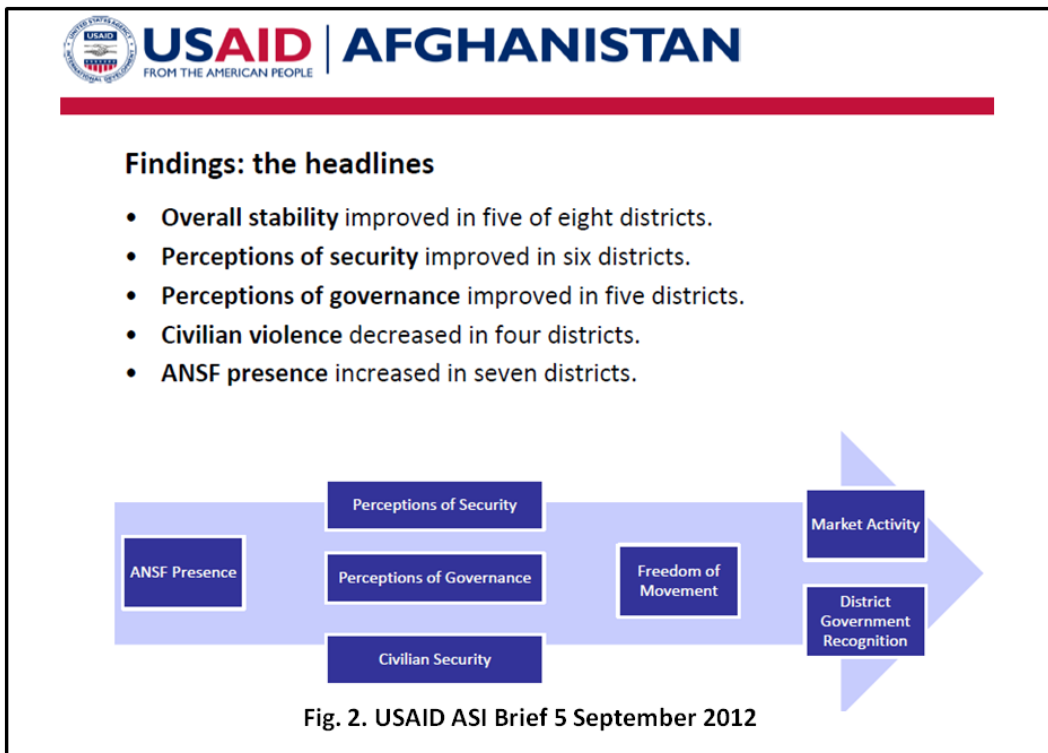
This links directly to the on-going challenges regarding Pashtun (tribal Afghan) resistance to change. When dealing with a very traditional and rigid society, any exposure to foreign elements may, or is even likely to, lead to friction. This can be true even when those elements bring funding for local improvements. The category of distrusted foreign elements can even include representatives of other regions of Afghanistan as well as representatives of the central government. When the underlying goal of the program is to facilitate societal change (i.e., increase trust of outsiders including those represented by the central government) that program may fail. This is especially true when an examination of programmatic goals and on-going monitoring and evaluation materials does not clearly acknowledge that resistance to change (i.e., alteration in the mistrust felt for outsiders) is a social norm, and a primary challenge, not a peripheral or secondary one.

In the case of ASI goals there is an implicit if-then statement:

- If ASI uses a “community-based consultative approach that identifies and implements small community improvement projects” (“Afghanistan”)
- Then the ASI program will “build confidence and trust between (the national government) and local Afghan communities” (“Afghanistan”).

Referencing the SIGAR report on ASI, the implementer in all likelihood satisfactorily performed the intervention, but the results were not achieved.

In the same brief, USAID and their implementing partner (DAI) seem to admit to more failures than a simple acknowledgement that security perceptions have not improved. Recalling that the core charge of the ASI program is to increase confidence and trust, one must ask how did these metrics fare on DAI's own report.



In the DAI Presentation on ASI to USAID (Fig. 2) it appears that DAI relies more on superlatives than actual data. The presentation states that overall stability improved in 60% of the districts a little more than half. However, nowhere in the presentation is there reference to improvement in the original stated program goal of building confidence and trust in the central government. Thus, over a fairly short period of time (24-36 months), and without a project re-bid, it appears that major changes were made to the goals of a large publically-funded effort. In

the end, it is difficult to determine if any of the original project goals were actually retained to the end of the program. Likely they were not. From a structural viewpoint, this brings into question the intervention's legitimacy.

The environment in Afghanistan during the course of this conflict (2001-present) has required that organizations continually adapt as security fluctuates. Ultimately, the goals and operation of the ASI program may be more about synchronizing with the military concept of clear-hold-build than it is about securing some type of longer-term change that will increase stability in the targeted districts. Legitimacy of social change aside, USAID could have considered several well-developed social theories to either help foster ASI-type goals of behavioral change or at least to determine their feasibility in the first place. As a federally supported agency of the US Department of State, USAID can claim the necessity to protect officers and programs by not revealing too much to the general public without a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Therefore, determining if overt cultural change motivations were behind the original confidence-building goals stated for ASI is not easy.

The Pashtun tribes have been in the rugged mountains of Eastern Afghanistan, where ASI was underway, since before recorded history. Functionalist theory helps to provide an explanation of why Afghan Pashtun society, in spite of turmoil, has remained, at its core, stable and somewhat unchanged. Before I examine aspects of functionalist theory that may apply and attempt a comparison to the theories that may have driven the development of ASI, it is important to take a look at what it means to be Afghan, albeit in a simplistic manner. It does not appear that strong consideration was given to fundamental social differences (i.e., American culture differs from Afghan culture), and by extension, how we might approach a development intervention.

The social narrative of Afghan is highly dissimilar from America. As a Pashtun, one is first a member of a family. However dysfunctional or combative internally that family might be, a Pashtun man is expected to defend his family's honor with his life. The social rules that govern behavior and expectations are an ancient set of social rules known as Pashtun Wali, or code of life. The Pashtun are patriarchal, which may have meshed well with the introduction of Islam over one-thousand years ago. They are known for being fierce and determined fighters. A part of their social narrative is that they have never been conquered. Next, one is a member of a clan and/or tribe. There are around 400 clans and tribes among the Pashtun alone (comprising around 60% of the Afghan population overall). Next, one is a member of a geographic area such as a village or village cluster. One is also a member of an ethnic group. Only under limited circumstances one might consider himself or herself Afghan. Families are very tight-knit. When seeking to arrange a marriage for their sons, mothers often seek out a prosperous relative with an eligible daughter. Marriage among first cousins is a common occurrence and is seen as a way to keep family bonds strong. Incidentally, it also carries the personal advantage that a mother may continue to have contact with her daughter.

To further complicate identities in Afghanistan, political divisions like districts, provinces or regions are arbitrary designations by a distant central government that is not well-liked or understood. A family residing in the national capital will often refer to their tribal roots as a point of pride in conversation. Talking about a national identity is largely confined to the political class.

How might the localized social narratives of individual Afghan families be impacted in the ASI targeted districts? For one thing, the stated premise of the program is “build confidence and trust between (the national government) and local Afghan communities.” (“Afghanistan”).

We can see how this may have been problematic from several levels. The social narrative or perspective of tribal Afghans does not include the national government. This leads to the question as to whether local Afghans feel any need to have confidence in or trust the national government. It seems to be more likely that they would rather have no involvement from the national government. The concept of trust does not generally apply outside one's immediate circle; a tribal Afghan might respect or pay homage to an important public official, but never trust him. Likewise one might respect a member of the national government (President Karzai, the chief executive of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a Pashtun), but never trust him personally or trust the national government. One might build a case that a tribal Afghan could have some confidence, at some level, in things that the central government does, although the subtleties of trust and confidence are almost identical in Pashto, the Pashtun language. Given that tribal Afghans have little understanding of what it means to have a national government and certainly would never trust the national government, the underlying premises of the ASI program may have doomed it to failure from a practical standpoint.

How does the ASI program objective theoretically conform to one of the basic theories of social science – functionalism? Although Afghans at every level fulfill their own roles and functions within the social system, functionalist theory does not mandate that individual members of the society understand how their role is a fit within the larger system. There is no requirement for confidence or trust to exist, other than relative to those members of the society in which we come into daily contact. Unfortunately, were the ASI program to depend on functionalist theory for its success, there seems to be little that speaks to the potential for success. In fact, with its dependence more on a certain rigidity of the social system, functionalist theory would seem to argue that fundamentally changing the views of the Pashtun or tribal Afghan

community is unlikely. That is to say, if lack of confidence and trust in outsiders is integral to their social norm, changing those norms is difficult.

The functionalist sociologist Talcott Parsons established a very complex system of human interaction that reflected a voluntaristic approach. Whereas, radical positivists insisted that one should reduce individual action and cause-and-effect decisions right down to the cellular level. From Parsons' perspective, individuals in a social system are actors:

- Actors are individual persons.
- Actors see goals.
- Actors are constrained by values, ideas and norms that define goals.
- Actors have various alternatives to achieve their goals.
- Actors are influenced by their biological makeup as well as external constraints.
- Actors make subjective decisions about the means to achieve goals.

It is beyond the scope of this paper (a discussion of legitimacy of social change) to detail how each point of the Parsons system could be analyzed in detail as they might apply to the ASI intervention. However, two of them are especially cogent: Actors in a society see goals and actors are constrained by values. From what I understand of the Pashtun perspective, they seem to have an intrinsic predilection to avoid any association with the national government. I conclude the people's goals were simply not in synchronization with the ASI intervention. The intervention sought to build trust and confidence. The local perspective may have been to dismiss this completely, even as they accepted millions in development dollars. The second half of this equation is the cultural norm aspect. Afghan (Pashtun) cultural norms evolved over many centuries. They were not thought up and written down as a national declaration of some kind, as with the founding documents of the United States. This implies that the Pashtun norms are likely

to be highly resistant to change. One can postulate that a more realistic intervention would have been to work towards a local planning process of how to develop a vision for one's district based on local realities and then use the intervention funding to make that happen. This would completely exclude the central government. But it would build local unity and confidence - something that would build on local strength rather than try to abruptly change it. As the intervention area in this alternate scenario became more prosperous and stable, with local men employed and supporting their families, there might be an appropriate time for pushing for bigger social changes.

In all projects that encounter difficulty, hindsight is clearer than foresight. That said, returning to the justification for the program and how it was scoped, it should have been clear that only minimal results were probable. Only the most altruistic and idealistic development officer would have anticipated otherwise. Why is this? Imagine the areas where the intervention took place. They were the very districts in which the US military had a very tough fight, lives were lost and a good deal of treasure expended (far more than a paltry \$151 million spent on the intervention). As to dividing the intervention by districts, the targeted geographic areas were more likely closely correlated with the military, which has a penchant for dividing up terrain in a way that matches their units. In Afghanistan, the US Army assigns areas of operation to different units that may not conform to anything that relates to tribal areas or other culturally sensitive demarcations. One might ask oneself why a district, itself a completely arbitrary definition imposed by the central government, would be designated a problem area to receive an intervention? Clearly insurgents traveled freely among the districts and there was little to no correlation to tribal or clan boundaries in the district definition. Again the rationale does not seek a foundation in sociological principles of change, but to the scheme that grew out of apparent

success in the Iraq conflict, clear-hold-build – a dramatically different scenario. Some skeptics of both war efforts have labeled operations in the two theaters into “clear-hold-build and repeat” frameworks. In fact, the differences between Iraq and Afghanistan is dramatically different. Iraq is a highly developed country with significant educational institutions, a long history of economic integration with both its neighbors and the world, and excellent transportation and distribution systems (albeit damaged by conflict). Afghanistan has none of those characteristics. Thus an attempt to draw equivalencies between them is invalid.

Logic might indicate that the development assets for the ASI program would have been better served in population centers where international development workers could move more freely and a populace more accommodating to change could be found. That was not to be. There is an applicable counterinsurgency theory that has some lingering ties back to the Vietnam era. Called the ink blot theory, it holds that to bring some stability to an area, people have to start by feeling safe in their own homes (i.e., free from attacks or control of insurgents and from getting caught in the crossfire with foreign combatants including the foreign forces). According to this theory, development must begin in relatively peaceful areas where interventions have the most chance for success and then expand, like an ink blot, to less secure areas. In Afghanistan there has been a tendency to work in the opposite fashion; i.e. concentrate interventions in the areas with the highest risk of conflict. Although not specifically identified such, some USAID programs attempt to work according to the ink blot theory, in the medium sized urban centers for example. However, in many cases, even fairly stable urban centers continue as conflict zones. This may be because large US military bases are located nearby and natural transportation hubs are magnets for insurgent attacks. Nevertheless, in the case of ASI, USAID chose to respond to

pressure from the military, ignore ink blot theory and attempt to affect change in very unstable districts. Thus ASI may have been fraught from the beginning.

We have reviewed the possibly flawed reasoning behind ASI, the potentially flawed justification for ASI (clear-hold-build), and taken a look at both the internally directed SIGAR report and the implementing partner's own report of project problems. What we have not touched on is the real cost for some of these programs. What we find is that the cost-benefit ratio becomes hard to justify. It is generally accepted that the baseline cost to keep a single US soldier in a war zone for a year is between \$1 million and \$2 million. Thus, total figure for keeping a US brigade of 4,000 personnel in Afghanistan for a year is in the range of \$10 billion and higher if costs of air forces, support activities, etc. are factored in. The ASI intervention occurred in an area where there were actually two US brigades assigned, but I will use the cost for just a single brigade for comparison. The \$10 billion does not include the follow-on medical costs, social costs and all the benefit and pension programs payable in later years to soldiers and former soldiers. If I take just the cost of the three years of the ASI program in which a Brigade Combat Team (BCT) cleared, held and waited for the ASI program to build, providing overhead security for them and providing a military presence in the eight targeted districts the cost is around \$3,000 million (\$10 billion by three). It can be seen that the security costs to enable the ASI program, itself an expensive proposition, is on a ratio of roughly 20:1. This does not include the massive direct assistance to the Afghan security forces, the Afghan government or overall national military efforts such as the US Air Force. Thus it is easy to see that the scale of US counterinsurgency and US intervention efforts have been a very expensive proposition indeed. The fact that they have been largely unsuccessful makes the justification problematic.

Section II

Analysis: Women's Programs, Canadian Women-for-Women

Canadian Women-for-Women Afghanistan is a privately funded international NPO. The goal of the organization is to advance educational opportunities for Afghan women and their families, with the longer range intent of advancing their human rights. They have invested a total of \$4.5 million (as of 2012) over sixteen years with the average yearly budget for all in-country projects running around \$5 hundred thousand.

Their projects are primarily in two program areas: Community Libraries and Literacy, and Public Education. The latter focus area features in-service teacher training. The Fanoos Teacher Training program takes place in four provinces of central and eastern Afghanistan. The intervention emphasizes training for rural female teachers. Most have had no formal teacher training at all. A graduate from the program will always have those new skills and positively impact thousands of girls and boys throughout her/his teaching career. A key element is sustainability by keeping the program almost entirely Afghan-led and operated. The original foreign program managers discovered fundamental weaknesses in the Afghan teacher training program. Even Afghan educators with advanced degrees had little knowledge of the application of pedagogy and the sequential learning mental processes such as recognize, recall, analyze, reflect, apply, create, understand, etc. This may be understandable considering the education gaps and turmoil in the country over the last thirty years. Happily, with no cultural resistance whatsoever, Afghan teachers were found to be anxious to learn new techniques. The manner in which the training is adapted to Afghan cultural norms has been working. It is delivered in a collegial adult-to-adult manner. Even government officials welcome programs where teachers receive new training. This is evidenced by the fact that the conservative Islamic government

allows Canadian Women-for-Women (CW4WA) to continue working with minimal interference. Western scientific methods are respected by the educated elite, and are seen as entirely legitimate according to Dr. Lauren Oates, the educational director of Women-for-Women. Care is taken to never criticize the Afghan university standards, merely augment them. Since 2008, several thousand teachers have received the training. Some have been recruited to pass their new skills to others that the program is not funded to reach.

The Community Libraries and Literacy program is a more grass roots effort. In this case the text books used are those approved by Islamic authorities. The NPO discovered that they were available, but there was neither the funding nor the process to get them to smaller communities outside of Kabul, the capital. The NPO essentially takes the existing books, packages them into durable purpose-built containers and has them delivered to village schools. Many of the rural schools are completely without any formal texts. One may extrapolate multiple worthy purposes from their book placement efforts. For example, the public schools are in competition with religious madrassahs. In some of those religious schools a very conservative outlook is espoused along with cultural norms that the NPO may wish to help change over time. However, instead of openly campaigning against the madrassahs, the NPO merely helps the public school offer an alternative. What they have found is that many parents, even in the outlying areas, would actually prefer a broader education for their children if it can be made available, even if some boys also attend the religious schools.

According to Dr. Oates, the NPO carefully considers ways that they can gently introduce progressive thinking to the local populace. Again, cultural norms are a primary consideration. In the case of Canadian Women-for-Women Afghanistan, one goal is to improve the plight of women by helping them get more basic education even if it only is to be able to read, write and

do simple mathematics. The organization realizes that they have no power to coerce anyone and that overt challenges to the current cultural norms will be met with resistance and possible closing down of their NPO. Therefore, their literary programs in the villages are designed with this in mind. The program aims to bring basic educational skills to married women that may have had their formal education curtailed under the Taliban regime, during current the conflict or for other reasons. It could have been due to a local school closing or the school could have been very distant and there was no male member to accompany her. Or it could have been family needs: for example, the family may have needed a daughter to work hard at home to keep the household running due to parental illness or death. There are many different circumstances according to Dr. Oates.

Early on, the program administrators realized they needed to involve the male leader of the family in order to more effectively deliver their women's education program. This would avoid operating on the margins of the local society. For example, they took advantage of the fact that a husband needed to escort his wife to the training. Trainers observed that often the husbands waited for their wives outside the classes. The next step was to invite them to witness what their wives were learning and then getting them to participate. Some of them did. This was a new experience for the couples, working on something together outside the home. The results have been a program adaptation when training is launched at new sites. Husbands or the escorting male relative is now specifically invited to attend at the outset. Trainers have observed that this has not only met the overt training goals, but it has also brought husbands and wives together in a new forum with other couples that are not related to each other. This breaks down cultural barriers in an unobtrusive manner and leverages cultural norms (men having to escort their wives). Trainers are also careful, when possible, to involve the local clergy (mullahs).

When religious leaders also take ownership in a new idea, things go much more smoothly. They can discuss positive aspects of the intervention informally and rebut potential objections from ultra-conservative elements with less fear of reprisal than other members of the society. Working within the culture also builds legitimacy for the intervention. In rural Afghanistan it is a powerful thing to have local clergy preach on the importance of helping your wives and daughters receive a basic education and thus building strength in your family.

Section III

Other Actors - United Nations and US Army Commanders Emergency Response Program

The United Nations (UN) has been working in Afghanistan under various forms for many years. These include the World Food Program (WFP) and the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP). The WFP focuses on areas where a serious food and shelter shortage exists and people are in imminent danger due to malnutrition or exposure. The UNDP is closer to a traditional development agency like USAID, disseminating funds on projects that meet their criterion and development objectives. Like USAID, all projects are managed by foreign nationals and little real authority is given to native Afghans. Expatriate Afghans that have EU, British, Canadian or US citizenship may be placed in high positions as they can be pressured or even prosecuted in their adoptive country if improprieties are suspected.

The UN has a large physical footprint in Kabul and other major cities in Afghanistan. The UN budget is opaque, but is probably around \$500 million a year for Afghanistan. It is not known what percentage goes to overhead (management) and what is spent on actual programming. Determining the legitimacy of UNDP projects is tricky. The UNDP answers to no government or financial authority save their own UN headquarters and even that connection is vague. Legitimacy for their programs comes primarily from the UN brand. It is likely that the

various UN actors will continue in Afghanistan for some time to come unless security conditions deteriorate in a significant way. The UN is largely an internally-focused, self-perpetuating organization with only mild inclination towards social or cultural change. The UN's expressed goals in Afghanistan will continue to be largely humanitarian, educational, and the arts. UN interventions (through the UNDP) also have some limited involvement in promoting democratic institutions and human rights. There is no strong indication that the UN programming seeks cultural change as primary goals. Therefore, it would be difficult to use the legitimacy tests proposed later in this paper.

The US Army Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) is a tactical program. The idea is that an area military commander can use funds to launch projects that are needed and appreciated by the locals and generate positive feelings that will lessen tensions. The program dispensed over \$2,000 million in Afghanistan. There is even a *Commanders Guide to Money as a Weapons System Handbook* produced by the US Army Center for Lessons Learned. Very little consideration is given to sustainability. The military commanders are on one-year rotations and are concerned with other kinds of metrics. They look at terrain cleared; terrain held; enemy captured or killed; number of projects launched; etc. Military commanders must show progress of some kind during their unit's tour to be promoted. CERP projects generally must be completed during the one-year tour of the deployed unit. The complexities of social change are not part of the military calculus. The National Defense University creates an ongoing series of documents under the banner of the PRISM quarterly. The March 2012 edition includes a graphic illustrating the scale of foreign assistance in Afghanistan. Fig. 3 provides a snapshot of categories and scale of CERP expenditures. The bulk of the costs seem to be in transportation and reconstruction. The education category is largely schools rebuilt or opened.

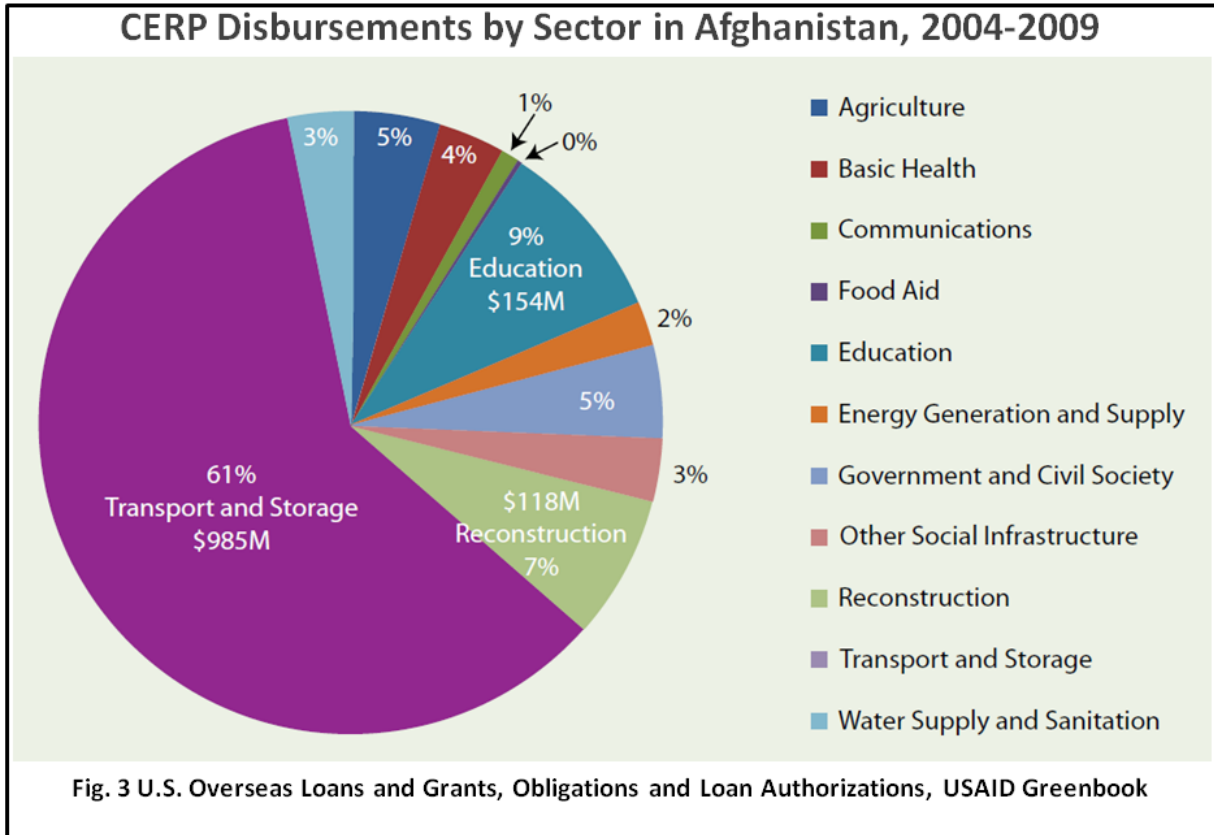
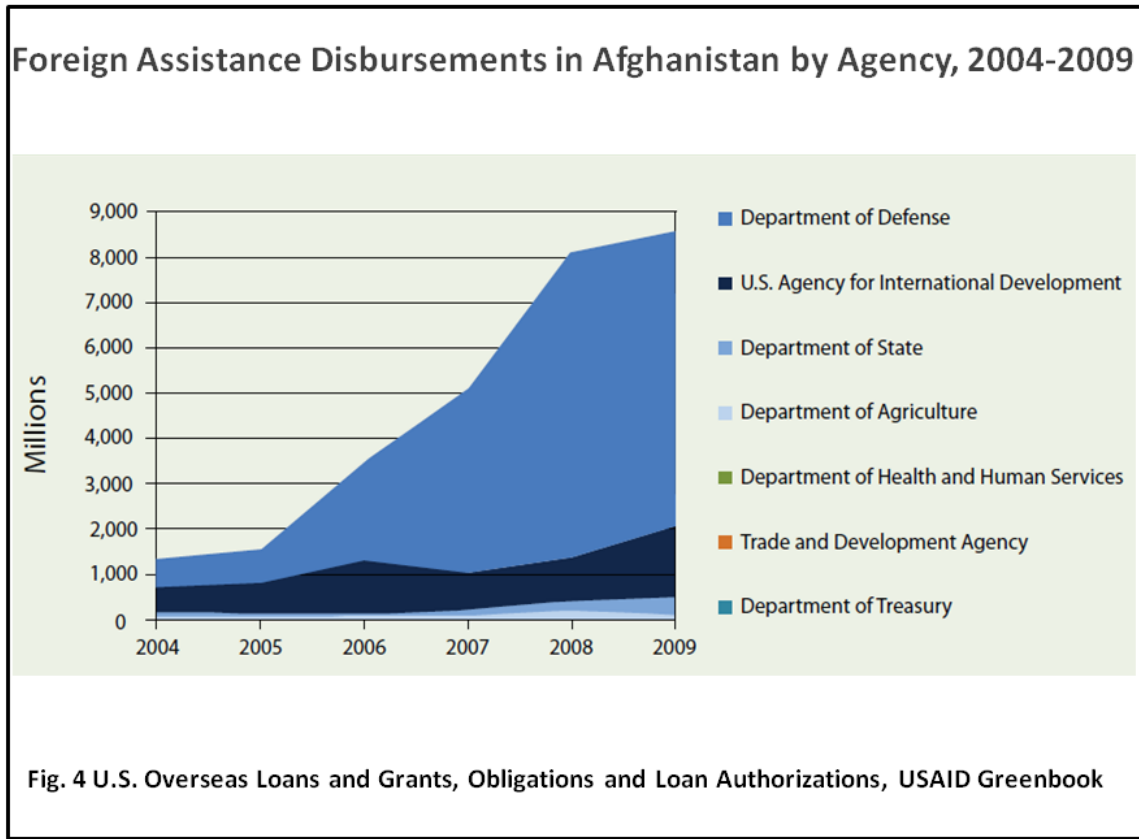


Fig. 4 illustrates the scale of funding for U.S. foreign assistance to Afghanistan overall. Both graphics are accurate up till 2009 and do not include funding expended in 2010, 2011, 2012 or to date in 2013. In Fig. 4 note that over \$8 billion was expended by the Department of Defense in 2009 alone. It is interesting to note that the CERP program accounted for around 18% overall in 2009 (\$1.5 billion/\$8.2 billion).



The CERP program has been widely criticized in the media, both as it was used in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Some articles claim they spent massive amounts of taxpayer dollars with little demonstration of long-term benefit. But then long-term benefit was never a base-line intention of the program. It is, according to the handbook mentioned above, based on the idea that if you give people stuff they will be less likely to cause trouble and unrest. To that extent CERP does not push for cultural change or advancement along the lines of a USAID-funded intervention. Therefore, I cannot argue that CERP is legitimate in actuating cultural change. Programmatically, it cannot meet the tests suggested later in this paper.

There are other development players in Afghanistan such as the World Bank and the French, English, German and Italian Embassies that may attempt to affect social change. The

countries of India, Pakistan, Iran and China also have economic or humanitarian projects that they fund. It is noteworthy that the total actual revenue of the Afghanistan government is around \$1,500 million annually, less than what is spent by foreign publically-funded organizations. Various donors such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and direct payments by donor nations such as the United States make up the shortfalls in their national budget.

Section IV

Resiliency – Social/Cultural Values and Resistance to Change

Traditions in Afghanistan run very deep. Even Islam is a relatively new religion in comparison to the age of the culture. One ethnic area in the eastern section of Afghanistan (Nuristan Province) converted to Islam in 1896, perhaps a thousand years after the rest of Afghanistan. The Pashtun Wali (code of life) also predates Islam itself by thousands of years. The people can have a very European appearance. Blonde or red hair and blue eyes occasionally appear among the population. Sprinkled throughout the Pashtun areas are peoples that speak a derivation of the early Aryan language, the precursor to Indo-European languages. It seems the mountainous Pashtun region has been a battleground since the 2nd millennium B.C. when peoples of Aryan culture began arriving from Central Asia. The Afghan calendar is Solar. New Years is the first day of spring. The language spoken by half of the country comes from Iran/Persia (Dari) and the other from the mountain tribes (Pashto). The young educated elite speak English and the older elites, a little Russian or French.

The Afghan people view themselves as part of a family first, part of a clan next, part of a tribe after that and a member of an ethnic group after that. Being a resident of a particular village could be inserted in there somewhere. Among the illiterate or semi-literate tribal people there is little recognition of having Afghan nationality unless it is to espouse a dislike for foreigners.

These are not a people who are comfortable with change. The Afghan traditions of family, clan and tribe have served them well through centuries of conflict.

Afghans see safety in maintaining their traditions. Even extreme punishments for individuality and transgression have to be seen in their eyes. Everyone knows the rules and the punishments. Social change in the context of foreign views is treated with suspicion. This is not incomprehensible. By definition, traditional societies have achieved a stable state. There is a religious component as well. Islam can be translated as submit in Arabic. A society that submits and accepts things as they are is not going to be a society that changes easily. In defense of that rigidity, losing stability may be giving up the resiliency or social glue that holds their society intact. Resiliency, as derived from their long-held social values, protects them from conflict and disaster. Any development intervention that is seen as disrupting this social consensus, without extensive investment in preparing the targeted population for change, will have no legitimacy and be handicapped from the start.

Section V

Legitimizing Socio-Cultural Change

Increasingly, the world has become closer and more integrated, irrespective of where one places emphasis: economic aspects, political aspects, social aspects or cultural aspects. There is no question that some cultures seem to be benefiting more from the changes that have come about than others, at least in terms of comfort and longevity. Whether or not one is a cultural relativist, there is little question that for the last few centuries western culture (western European) has been partially dominant in the world. Arguing whether this is a good or bad thing is irrelevant to this discussion.

Similarly, getting into a discussion of whether or not Afghan society is changing is of little consequence. Certainly, it is experiencing a period of strong cultural adaptation as it comes into direct contact with people from the west as well as the influences of the mass media. Therefore, some cultural change is likely occurring in Afghanistan, albeit slower than some would wish and faster than others would wish. There is no question that Afghans can assimilate into western society should they wish to and have the opportunity. In fact, the United States Department of State Humphrey and Fulbright higher educational programs as well as State Department International Visitors Leadership Programs (IVLP) have cultural change as an overt motive: bring bright, promising foreign-born leaders and scholars to the US and they will understand and think and become more like us. Then they will take those skills home and use them to advance their culture to become more like us.

There is nothing inherently insidious about all this. A culture with the economic and social punch of western societies arguably want to reach out to other cultures that they view as needing help of some kind. Both publically-funded and privately-funded organizations as well as elements of western national governments can take this perspective. Perhaps they view Afghanistan as lagging behind.

In 1922, William Fielding Ogburn proposed cultural lag as an explanation of how cultures could adapt to new technology quicker than they changed their underlying norms. In other words, technical adaptation often precedes any fundamental cultural change. In Afghanistan this seems to apply. Young Afghans quickly adopt mobile phone text messaging, computers, and MP3 devices and even listen readily to western music when the opportunity arises. For much of the software that they want to learn, some level of English ability is very helpful as well. However, fundamental change in cultural norms is much more subtle.

Whether or not one accepts the implications of cultural lag, when an intervention proposes to directly impact (alter) specific closely-held cultural views, both the challenges and the ethics of that effort should be thoroughly examined. As much as one might hope otherwise, whenever cultural change occurs, it may be obvious not everyone is a winner. Differentiating winners from losers as cultural norms shift can be an important point when an intervention is being designed. Some members/segments of society may be happy with the changes and others fundamentally unhappy. A failure to recognize this issue may be a formula for failure. To be successful, intervention designers should think through the ramifications, the responses and potential workarounds in order to affect change in any culture. A deeper examination of the evolution of cultural norms and recalcitrance towards change in Afghanistan is beyond the scope of this paper. But I extrapolate that it is likely that members of this ancient culture may view their system of cultural norms as a survival mechanism. Bringing this thought process home to the US, the outcry (on both sides) over same-sex marriage might be understood as an underlying societal queasiness about what cultural norm might fall next?

Similarly one must think through how attempting cultural change can be a legitimate enterprise. This should be considered not only from a Western European perspective, but from the perspective of the host culture of Afghanistan. There may be many arguments for and against legitimization of cultural change. For example, if increased women's rights and opportunity in the society is the proposed cultural change, what arguments might be made? Do the positives seem to outweigh the negatives? How is the intervening organization prejudiced by cultural values held by its leadership? How should the organization go about actuating this change? What winners and losers might there be? What second and third order effects might result?

One example might examine the economic side of empowering women. Afghanistan is lagging behind both regionally and in the world from an economic perspective. Part of this is geographic. Countries (like Afghanistan) that lack access to the sea are handicapped. Robert Kaplan makes this case, “check the list of the world’s most feeble economies and note the high proportion that are landlocked” (Kaplan 32). Basic western views on human rights aside, some think that empowering women, especially in the work place and as entrepreneurs, would go a long way to make Afghanistan more competitive as a culture as globalization continues. As the commonly held saying goes, when only half of your society is working (men) then you are achieving only half of your society’s potential. Obviously that may be a bit overstated, especially in societies where there is rampant male unemployment like Afghanistan. Nevertheless, evidence indicates some underlying truth. One example often referenced is the adjacent societies of Israel and the Palestinian territories. The former is an economic powerhouse and the latter is impoverished. The overall point is that going into a traditional society with a desire to change things may have more success if more consideration is given to the legitimacy of the proposed intervention.

As to the question of legitimacy, should there be some system of grading or rating an intervention as to its intrinsic legitimacy, especially after the intervention is underway or complete? Ideally, there should be some model to fully anticipate and grade an intervention prior to launch, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. In any case, grading an intervention for legitimacy after completion is valuable. The primary reason is that interventions that are perceived to be successful may achieve additional funding and are likely to be duplicated in other areas. In some cases a smaller intervention is greatly expanded, almost as though going

from a pilot plant to full production. In development vernacular it is said to be scoped up (the scope of the project is expanded).

If legitimacy is not graded, unintended outcomes or poor results may occur as in our ASI example assessed earlier in this paper. ASI East failed to achieve its objectives and the project was funded for three more years at a cost of \$161 million. SIGAR had reviewed the initial intervention but never looked at whether the whole concept was legitimate. SIGAR metrics for success are tied to proper handling of government funds. They have no charter to directly challenge the legitimacy of an intervention from a cultural change viewpoint. I propose two different broad standards or tests in which an intervention might achieve legitimacy. The importance of proposing a standard is that it provides a topic about which opposing views can take issue, concur or recommend adaptations.

The first test can be extrapolated from the manner and verbiage used to present the intervention/program. Does the program make it very clear in the terms of reference, solicitation or other public document that a cultural change is required and/or desired? This could be relative to the intervening culture's perspective. The program should clearly cite what the rationale is, even to the point of explaining why the status quo of host country cultural norms should be changed. For clarity I will call this the Pre Test of Legitimacy.

Some might say that an intervention meeting the Pre Test of Legitimacy would be proselytizing their own cultural view/perspective to the target culture. But one could argue that stating what the intervention is intended to do, and why, is legitimate as it inherently allows for opposing views and dialogue before the intervention begins. The host culture may not want or accept change easily, but if the program states its intent, then it could be argued that it is legitimate under the proposed standard for Pre Test of Legitimacy. A program being viewed

using this standard might even be unsuccessful in its program goals, and still be legitimate.

Under the Pre Test model, the intervention demonstrated that it took a position, showed understanding of the challenge, and was ready to engage in honest debate. Under the Pre Test model it is deemed legitimate whether successful in reaching its goals or not.

I will name the second model the Post Test of Legitimacy. Under this test, the program does not have to overtly state with clarity as to the intention for social change. For example, the program would describe the intended intervention and the goals of the program. It would not necessarily elaborate as to the underlying impact on cultural norms. Especially, it would not be required to detail an intention to change those norms. This approach is taken in an honest and frank admission that being less than open about program intent may be required in some cases. For example, it might be felt that telegraphing the intention for changing a cultural norm directly would be too controversial and doom the intervention before it had a chance to make an impact. The Post Test gains legitimacy by being successful in reaching its program goals. The program description does not have to offer up a deep understanding of the challenge or engage in debate before launch. If the program is successful, that success is prima facie evidence that the intervention was likely designed with intrinsic cultural understanding built in. If the program is unsuccessful, then the likelihood of cultural understanding drops precipitously and legitimacy is not achieved. Under the Post Test Legitimacy scheme, success/no-success rating is achieved for publically-funded interventions by both independent evaluations and watch-dog organizations and is almost always after the project has closed. Privately-funded interventions would succeed under this scheme by their ability to validate and telegraph their success (i.e., if they are able to attract funding to continue their intervention or launch similar ones) - then they are legitimate under this test.

To synopsise, programs evaluated under the Pre Test scheme achieve legitimacy through transparency; and programs following the Post Test model achieve legitimacy through reaching stated and demonstrable programmatic goals. I would argue that the large publically-funded ASI program seems to conform to the Pre Test model: an intervention is suggested (small community improvement projects) and program goals are set (i.e., to build confidence and trust). It could be argued that confidence and trust of outsiders is a shift in cultural norms, but the program did not clearly present them in that manner. If the program administrators had honestly and openly tried to broker social change as the program goal, then the ASI program might have passed the legitimacy test. They did not, so it failed the Pre Test model. On the other hand, if the ASI intervention had been rated as successful by SIGAR and the independent evaluation contractor, then the ASI intervention would have been legitimate under the Post Test for Legitimacy. Post Test intervention can be legitimate even if they have not stated their underlying intent to drive cultural change (Pre Test). If the unstated social change was successful, then it is self-evident that the intervention successfully accounted for resistance and understood the host culture they were trying to impact. In the case of the small privately-funded educational interventions efforts by Canadian Women-for-Women Afghanistan described earlier, they meet the standard proposed for Post Test Legitimacy and they have been gaining funding regularly for many years.

The system of models proposed above is by no means a panacea for poorly executed programs or an over-arching definitive solution for decision makers to determine whether or not programs should be launched or continued. Pre Test Legitimacy and Post Test Legitimacy are merely offered as one tool in which development programs that impact foreign cultures might be evaluated for their legitimacy.

Section VI

The Future in Afghanistan

Interpreting history in retrospect has its own set of challenges, but looking into the future is exponentially more challenging. That said, the likely outcome for Afghanistan will be to continue to limp along with foreign help; have questionable elections; crash economically for awhile; see an exodus of educated and wealthy elite; witness worsening corruption at the center; suffer bank failures, currency devaluation, rocketing prices and runaway inflation; face disbanding of large segments of the security forces; and experience new eruption of ethnic and tribal strife. Meanwhile, in thousands of villages in the provinces, the biggest news will be the wedding that just happened, or the wedding that is to take place next.

Afghanistan has never, in its very long history, been stable for very long, if at all, from our American perspective. There is a warrior tradition that underlies the culture. Afghans are not a peaceful people as a westerner might interpret it. Pakistan has long been criticized for meddling in Afghanistan, but then they may have reason for paranoia. There have been over a dozen instances over the last millennia where mountain warriors have come from the passes in the western part of what is now Pakistan and run rampant over the plains.

Even now, as the NATO powers begin to construct their exit, the various northern warlords and eastern Pashtun tribes are rattling their metaphorical sabers. The Taliban, Al Qaeda and other insurgents are itching to get back in the fray full time. As a corollary, Afghans have never really had a viable central government as Americans understand that concept either. Locally, the central government is viewed as an irritation at best and something to be feared at worst. Flying over the country, one gets the sense that it has barely been touched by the hand of man. The view is of hundreds of miles of desolate rocky mountains and little sign of civilization.

Since the beginning of the most recent conflict in 2001, the US and European partners have tried to promote the idea of a strong central government. The official US government mission statement for Afghanistan policy includes the line, “extend the reach of the central government” (US Mission Afghanistan). Afghans outside of Kabul do not like this idea. The famous US politician Tip O’Neil famously quoted his father as saying that all politics is local. What is true here in the US may be exponentially true in a traditional culture like Afghanistan. Small NPO’s like Canadian Women-for-Women seem to understand this and continue forging ahead in their nearly invisible way, in the background, accounting for local perspectives and doing their good work. Our take-away should be that there are immensely resilient socio-cultural forces at work in a place like Afghanistan. Giving proper attention to legitimacy can play an important part in ensuring the success or failure of an intervention. Whether development groups intend to help people within their cultural context or attempt small incremental changes for the benefit of specific segments such as young women, those groups will need to proceed with caution.

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