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Territorial Economic Development in conflict zones (Badghis, Afghanistan)

Is there a role for market-focused approaches to territorial economic development (TED) in highly insecure, conflict-ridden situations? If there is, what changes are needed to these approaches in such contexts?

This article reflects on the experience of promoting TED in Badghis province in north-western Afghanistan in December 2014, where a Market Assessment and Local Value Chain Analysis (MA-LVCA) was undertaken.⁴ This article's focus is on method, not on results.⁵

⁴ The MA-LVCA method combined elements of PACA with WV's Local Value Chain Development Approach.

⁵ A longer paper, spelling out the results, will soon be available on the Mesopartner website.



World Vision (WV) has been operating in Badghis since 2002, supporting farmer groups to improve their production and marketing capabilities. Building on this experience, WV designed a three-year Australia Afghanistan Community Resilience Scheme (AACRS) in 2014. The MA-LVCA exercise in Badghis was designed to launch the AACRS.

With the toppling of the Taliban government in 2001 and the establishment of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, the new government faced immense challenges. Supported by NATO and Western aid, it sought to rebuild an economy

and society shattered by decades of conflict, social and economic breakdown and physical destruction.

Parts of Badghis are currently more stable than other provinces. WV operates in four districts surrounding Qala-i-Naw, the provincial capital. The MA-LVCA exercise would not have been possible without WV's security system. This is an elaborate, carefully managed and constantly updated information system based on a network of local contacts including local shura (traditional authorities) and mullahs (religious authorities), government departments, the military and police. It is in effect a local information/support network.



A number of lessons can be learned from the experience in Badghis:

An embedded security/support network: A well-worked-out and managed security/ support network, deeply embedded within the local community and based on mutual understanding and trust between the project and key local power brokers is essential.

TED approaches can play an effective role: Rapid, bottom-up, participatory approaches hold the key because they bring conflicting parties together in clearly structured ways that can heal trauma, build trust, encourage practical cooperation and achieve positive results quite quickly.

The methodology: In conflict zones emerging from long periods of violence, social and economic breakdown, a “light touch”, purely market-focused approach is not enough. Programme design should combine continued support for improved food security over a transition period as farmers and their families adapt to increasingly market-oriented production. Rapid, participatory appraisal methods are excellent for kick-starting this process, but these methods need to be fully understood, taken over and driven by the local team and actors. It is only by learning from working with local complexity that these approaches begin to take effect.

Market Assessment and Local Value Chain

Development: the market assessment using the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) matrix was well understood and highly relevant to the team’s and the stakeholder’s interests, but it needs to be supplemented with statistical data to ensure that stakeholder perception is backed up by statistical evidence, where this is possible. The participatory local value chain mapping also worked well, but here too, findings on the value chains and their environment need to be verified by sources other than the team in order to bring greater rigour to the process.

Embedding the local team: two distinct kinds of team are needed: a programme unit and a local stakeholder team, including not only representatives of farmer groups, but also input suppliers, buyers, traders and transporters, and private and government service providers, all carefully chosen for their knowledge, connections, dynamism and commitment.

The programme unit is best staffed by nationals, supported by expatriates on short-term contracts and specialists brought in on short missions for focused training. To ensure that local power elites do not capture a programme and use it to pursue narrow interests, an inclusive approach is needed. There are



no sure ways of guaranteeing this. A key factor is to have a programme unit driven by committed staff who understand and support an inclusive approach.

The programme should include an exit strategy that provides for the programme unit's capacity to be fully institutionally embedded within the territory as an independent public or private entity providing TED facilitation services.

The involvement of women: in cultural settings that prevent women and men from working freely together, there should, ideally, be two international consultants facilitating the process, one woman and one man. The programme unit itself should have at least one national woman who has specialised in TED. To increase women's involvement while respecting cultural norms,



close attention must be paid to team selection prior to a mission and to ways of increasing women's involvement during the mission. Where possible training, stakeholder and results workshops should be held separately or there should be breakaways to enable women to voice their views freely.

Length of mission and allocation of time between activities: ideally, more time is needed to complete a TED exercise in this kind of setting than in territories that are stable. Three, or preferably four, days are needed for both the hypothesis and results workshops. At least a week, and preferably two, should be allocated to fieldwork.



Iterative learning in conflict situations: from the experience in Badghis, it appears that it is less the content of the proposals than the way the process is set up that makes the difference. The content of the proposals was similar to that in more stable areas, namely to orient production activities towards market demand and build the capacities of farmers and other actors along and alongside the value chains to perform more effectively. In terms of process, one of the keys is to make sure that support for market development does not override continuing humanitarian and food security needs; that it draws in rather than excludes the vulnerable.

Another key is to prioritise small-scale actions that promote rapid learning and adjustment. This enables the team and local stakeholders to monitor closely how the actors respond, to identify trends and to adapt accordingly. Small, rapidly implemented actions are less likely to precipitate power struggles over control of donor resources. They make it possible for the local team to head off negative responses that threaten to renew conflict and to build upon the momentum created by positive responses that fulfil the project's goals.

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