Afghanistan NGO and CSO Capacity Support Project July 2022 – October 2024

FINAL EVALUATION

Final Report

October 2024

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Submitted to: UNDP Afghanistan

PROJECT INFORMATION	
Project title	Afghanistan NGO & CSO Capacity Support Project (NCCSP)
Quantum ID	00132321/00132322/00132323/00132324
Country Programme Results - Outcome and Output	**UNDP Transitional Country Programme Results Framework (CPRF 2022-2023** <u>OUTCOME 2:</u> Community Livelihoods and Local Economic Activities OUTPUT 2.2. Local livelihoods and economies sustained through Cash for Work and Cash for Market CPRF 221. Number of CSOs and communities who received conditional grants for community service management in areas with limited presence of development actors (disaggregated by sector) CPRF 222. Number of people whose employment is secured as a result of technical and financial support to CSOs <u>OUTCOME 4:</u> Community Resilience and Social Cohesion OUTPUT 4.1: Communities for peace and social cohesion reinforced. CPRF 414. No. of grievances received through UNDP established community grievance/feedback handling platforms (disaggregated by sex) **UNDP Transitional Country Programme Strategy (TCPS) 2024-2025** <u>OUTPUT 3.2</u> Community-driven solutions strengthened to enable social cohesion. 3.2.1 Number of CSOs and community-based structures (Community Development Councils and other Local Associations) that contribute to social cohesion and reconciliation with UNDP support. <u>OUTPUT 3.3</u> Community and community-based organizations participation and engagement for effective and inclusive planning and decision making enhanced. 3.3.1 Number of organizations who received (i) financial and/or (ii) technical assistance from UNDP on institutional governance and management to advance human rights, gender equality, non-discrimination of women, and media resilience, with UNDP support. <u>OUTPUT 3.4</u> Gender Equality and Women's Rights promoted. 3.4.2 Number of partnerships with women-led civil society organizations and other bodies and networks to advance women's leadership and participation and gender equality.
Country	Afghanistan
Region	Asia-Pacific
Date project signed	28 July 2022
Project dates	Start date: 1 July 2022 Planned end date: 31 October 2024
Project budget	US$ 20,000,000
Project expenditure	US $ 15,000,000, as of March 2024
Funding source	World Bank
Implementing party	UNDP

EVALUATION INFORMATION		
Evaluation type	Project Evaluation	
Final/midterm/ other	Final	
Period under evaluation	Start date: 1 July 2022	Planned end date: 31 October 2024
Evaluators	Nahla Hassan and Sabahuddin Sabah	
Evaluation dates	Start date: 1 August 2024	Completion: 15 October 2024

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The Evaluation Team wishes to thank UNDP for the opportunity to successfully undertake the Final Evaluation of the Afghanistan NGO and CSO Capacity Support Project (NCCSP). We are particularly grateful to the UNDP Afghanistan Country Office (CO) in Kabul and teams in provinces who, despite other pressing commitments, were responsive and informative, giving us all the support that we needed to accomplish our work in Afghanistan, one of the most challenging restrictive contexts globally. We appreciate the CO's leadership, led by Stephen Rodriques for their support and contribution to the successful implementation of the evaluation.

We particularly recognize the invaluable support of **Yoshiaki Noguchi** Project Manager – NGO/CSO Capacity Support Project (NCCSP) and the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team: **Mr. Sayed Nayel** and his team in the different provinces for the successful coordination of the evaluation exercise and for the enablement of our in-person and online interviews, field visits, meetings and sessions across the different provinces. We appreciate the participation of members of the Evaluation Reference Group, especially those who took time to provide comments towards improving the quality of the evaluation design and reports. We would also like to acknowledge the contributions made by the all the UNDP staff, World Bank and partner-NGOs, without whom the evaluation would not have been successful. Special thanks are due to CO staff members who shared their insightful inputs openly and freely to share key successes, challenges and lessons learned.

The Evaluation Team extends its gratitude to the external partners who contributed to this evaluation. We especially thank the World Bank, UN agencies, the NGOs, ABADEI and all NGOs for their collaboration, insights, and dedication. Their efforts were essential to shaping this evaluation.

The Evaluation Team hopes that the findings, lessons learned, and recommendations presented in this report will positively contribute to building a sound and evidence-based foundation for the development of the next programme in Afghanistan.

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Acronyms

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
ABADEI	Area-Based Approach to Development Emergency Initiative
ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development
ANCB	Afghan NGO Coordination Bureau
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
AWCCI	Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry
COs	Country Offices
CPRF	Country Programme Results Framework
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations

DFA	De Facto Authority
ESCOP	Environmental and Social Code of Practice
ESS	Environmental and Social Safeguards
EQs	Evaluation Questions
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GRCs	Grievance Redress Committees
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LNOB	Leaving No One Behind
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOUs	Memoranda of Understanding
NCCSP	Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society Organizations Support Project
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OECD/DAC	the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
PSS	Psychosocial Support
PwDs	People with Disabilities
RBA	Rights-Based Approach
IRMU	Integrated Risk Management Unit
SC	Steering Committee
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
STFA	Special Trust fund for Afghanistan
TCPRF	Transitional Country Programme Result Framework
TCPS	Transitional Country Programme Strategy
TEF	Transitional Engagement Framework
TOC	Theory of Change
ToRs	Terms of Reference
UNCT	the United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNSFA	United Nations Strategic Framework in Afghanistan
UNV	UN Volunteers
WFP	World Food Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Afghanistan has commissioned a Final Evaluation for the project 'Afghanistan Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) Support Project (NCCSP). The project aimed to enhance the capacities of selected registered national and local NGOs/CSOs to contribute to sustaining the provision of basic services and life-saving support to the most vulnerable populations. It was implemented between June 2022 and October 2024 with finance by the World Bank with the total budget of US$ 20 million.

Evaluation Purpose, Scope and Methodology

The overall purpose of the evaluation was to inform UNDP Afghanistan, the donor (World Bank) and partners of the lessons learned, results, value for money and provide recommendations for similar programming in future. The specific objectives according to the evaluation TORs by UNDP were to:

- Assess project performance and progress against the expected outputs, targets including indicators presented in the results framework and contribution to expected UNDP Transitional Country Programme Results Framework 2022-2023 and UN framework in Afghanistan.
- Review and document the success and lessons learned and good practices. Identify challenges and the effectiveness of adopted strategic approaches for addressing them.
- Outline recommendations in line with the project's outcome and provide forward-looking recommendations that contribute to enhancing the quality of future programming.

The scope of the final evaluation, which was conducted between August and October 2024, was the overall performance against all project's planned outcomes and outputs across all 34 provinces from July 2022 to the evaluation date, integrating UNDP's cross-cutting themes, and highlighting challenges and best practices in design and implementation. Primary users include UNDP Afghanistan, senior management, the Development Effectiveness Unit, the World Bank, Project Steering Committee members and NGO/CSO teams.

The Final Evaluation systematically used the standard criteria of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee. It assessed the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, potential impact, and sustainability of the NCCSP Project performance vis-a-vis planned results through 21 Evaluation Questions (EQs), guided by the TORs and the inception report. A participatory mixed-methods approach was employed, engaging with UNDP staff, stakeholders, international partners, NGOs/CSOs across Afghanistan, adhering to UNDP guidelines and cross-cutting themes like Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Leaving No One Behind and Accountability. Data collection included qualitative and quantitative methods, involving Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 74 NGOs, while an online survey received a 68-response rate from 134 NGOs benefiting from low-value grants. Ethical considerations were prioritized, ensuring independence, confidentiality, and security of information throughout the evaluation process.

Evaluation Findings and Conclusions

Coherence
The NCCSP was designed and implemented in consistence with international norms and standards to the degree possible within Afghanistan's challenging context. The project followed a rights-based approach, adherence to which was challenging due to systemic gender discrimination and restrictive De Facto Authority (DFA) policies. Nevertheless, it focused on empowering civil society, promoting the right to freedom of association and supporting livelihoods and resilience of those most left behind,

with focus on women and girls. The NCCSP ensured accountability through the application of Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) and the established Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM), yet under constraints imposed by the DFA. The NCCSP's integration within the Area-Based Approach to Development Emergency Initiatives (ABADEI) has enhanced UNDP's capacity to build resilience in Afghanistan by decentralizing operations, empowering local NGOs, and women's economic empowerment. Synergies with UN agencies were largely untapped, aside from UN-Women who was represented in the NCCSP SC and was engaged in the grant selection process of the NGOs/CSOs, limiting the potential for more coordinated and impactful efforts in addressing the country's complex challenges. .

Relevance

The interlinked outputs of the NCCSP project were designed in full alignment with the UN TEF for Afghanistan 2022, the Transitional Country Programme Result Framework (TCPRF) 2022-2023 and the United Nations Strategic Framework in Afghanistan (UNSFA) 2023-2025. In addition, it contributed to the objectives of the UNDP Strategic Plan and the ABADEI by contributing to resilience building and women's empowerment, making it a critical intervention in Afghanistan. The project's strategy to strengthen the civil society sector was relevant to the country needs and stood true, there is significant gap within NGOs/CSOs' capacities, resources and operational freedom, particularly for organizations focused on women's rights, hindering their ability to perform a vital role in community development The NCCSP The project helped to bridge these gaps by providing essential technical support, financial resources and establishing what has become the largest NGO platform in the country, which was unanimously agreed by all stakeholders in this evaluation. The NCCSP's work in this area paved the way for a wider scope of support to the civil society sector in future programming.

Although during design, stakeholders' input was partially integrated, yet during implementation, UNDP adopted a culturally informed strategy and close communication with NGOs/CSOs, community leaders and local authorities, which fostered trust and a greater ownership. It employed mitigation measures such in the NGOs' selection criteria, registration of male *mehrems* on behalf of women in activities, gender-separated training venues. This strategic manoeuvring enabled the project to navigate the complex political and human rights restrictions imposed by DFA, ensuring successful small projects' implementation.

Effectiveness

Overall, the NCCSP had successfully achieved all its outputs amidst challenging operational conditions. Under Output 1 *'NGO/CSO personnel capacity enhanced on core management functions and service-delivery focused areas'*, a mapping exercise of active NGOs/CSOs was conducted and capacities of 4,760 employees (2,683 men, 2,077 women) of 400 NGOs/CSOs was enhanced through thematic and on-the-job trainings. This resulted in reported capacity improvements of 60 percent among participants, which was corroborated by survey participants, 86 percent of whom found the programme's overall quality good or excellent. Although based on needs assessments and relatively effective, there is room for improvement to ensure a differentiated approach better tailored to varying NGO capacities. Under Output 2 *'NGOs/CSOs benefitting from project grant awards have enhanced their programmes'*, the project provided USD 10.5 million in low-value grants to selected 210 NGOs/CSOs, with which, small projects were implemented that respond to diverse community needs in livelihoods, education, agriculture, and health sectors. In addition, the grants were used by the NGOs to strengthen their systems, including 43 percent women-led organizations. The selection process followed an eligibility and prioritization criteria to ensure transparency and effectiveness, yet there were varied perceptions during the evaluation, with concerns on clarity of its processes and due diligence among NGOs. The grants have been effective to a large extent with evidence of job creation, essential healthcare provision, PSS, and empowerment for women., Further, the establishment of the UNDP NGO network platform successfully fostered collaboration among nearly 751 NGOs/CSOs.

However, limited NGO capacities, short implementation timeframe and low value compared to needs limited their relevance to specificities of community needs. The project fully achieved its commitment under Output 3 'NGOs/CSOs benefiting from improved coordination and access to better information and networking' by establishing what has become the largest NGO Platform in Afghanistan. The platform hosts 751 member NGOs/CSOs. Yet, sustainability beyond the UNDP's support is concerning for all stakeholders, NGOs/CSOs and the UNDP and World Bank staff.

The evaluation acknowledges the highly challenging operational realities and risks in Afghanistan in the face of the NCCSP's implementation, including the growing human rights violations on women and girls, stringent DFA oversight, corruption, complex MoUs approval processes, exclusion of women from leadership roles, NGOs' capacity constraints, inconsistent DFA policies, and the restrictions by international organizations on development activities. The NCCSP effectively navigated these risks with support by UNDP CO Integrated Risk Management Unit, like carefully designed NGO eligibility and selection criteria, beneficiary data cleaning and validation, tracking patterns indicating risks of collusion or extortion and extended the project timeline. Additionally, efforts were made to engage stakeholders and promote ownership, and vigorously advocate for women's participation in activities.

Efficiency

The NCCSP demonstrated a generally efficient allocation of resources within its USD 20 million budget. Of the USD 20 million NCCSP project budget, 52.5 percent was allocated to low-value grants for NGOs/CSOs. The complex and lengthy MOU process between NGOs and the DFA slowed expenditure during the first year of the project and necessitated a four-months extension to address initial delays. Some allocations seemed lower than actual needs, for example the insufficient budget for PSEA training activities necessitated a shift to less effective online training modality and the small grant size of USD 50,000 restricted the scope of NGOs' projects, but this was considered appropriate given the overall project budget and their often-limited capacities.

The project was recognized by the donor and stakeholders for its efficient performance and effective outcomes, facilitated by adequate human resources in Kabul and across regional offices and NGOs/CSOs who implemented the low-value grant projects. M&E teams implemented efficient monitoring activities, one of the project's observed strengths. However, some workload for regional staff were created during disbursement of low-value grants to 210 NGOs, which was addressed by dividing the implementation into two rounds; the first batch of agreements was signed in October 2023 and the second signed in February 2024. Female UNDP staff played equal roles as male despite restrictions by the DFA, while their counterparts at NGOs faced limitations, particularly on their leadership. Delays in MoU approvals by the DFA slowed implementation. The NCCSP established GRM is one of the strongest elements of the NCCSP project, it handled over 1,421 grievances with enhanced capacities of NGOs/CSOs. Other ESS measures included OSH and PSEA being integrated into their operations, leading to improved project planning, safer training environments and better community awareness. The delayed disbursement of the low-value grants did not allow for post-grant monitoring.

Impact

Overall, the NCCSP project played a pivotal role in empowering Afghanistan's NGO sector, which had been the backbone of service delivery, gaining opportunities for growth, secure funding and legal stability and create a sense of collaboration with each other. Such improved capacity is also attributed to partnerships established with on-going development initiatives, mainly with UN-Women. The adopted integrated approach empowered target NGOs/CSOs through thematic and on-the-job training on 10 modules, combined with hands-on implementation of the low-value grants, significantly built the capacity of NGOs, and provided them practical techniques to function at higher standards and address operational challenges. Most importantly, the UNDP improved perceptions and acceptance by DFA of NGOs/CSOs work, including with focus on women and girls. The project's capacity-building

efforts, especially around PSEA and ESS standards, strengthened NGOs' resilience and visibility, enabling them to better serve their communities and approach donors for financing. However, the short project duration raises concerns about the sustainability of these gains without continued UNDP support to the NGOs that hinges on providing them with financial support, capacity-building and strategies to ensure the sustainability of these essential services that they provide to the wider communities.

The evaluation attests to the positive change on the supported beneficiaries by the NGOs' small projects implemented with the low-value grants, indirectly impacting more than 254,000 people, benefiting more women. The NCCSP has laid a strong foundation for community transformation and hope for women and girls through the NGOs serving them. Through KIIs and FGDs with over 74 NGOs, it was visible that the small projects have driven substantial positive changes across multiple sectors, particularly in improving economic resilience, education opportunities, healthcare, and social empowerment. Vocational training equipped beneficiaries, especially women, with income-generating skills, transforming them into active contributors to their households and communities. Education projects increased school enrolment and enhanced classroom conditions and improving learning of languages and computer for young people. They addressed critical health needs like maternal care and hygiene, fostering long-term well-being, while agriculture initiatives promoted climate resilience and crop productivity. However, the short project duration limits impact as both the NGOs still do not have the concrete capacity to better align activities with local needs and realities. sustain progress and many beneficiaries still require ongoing support to maintain these gains.

ESS and GRM were pivotal to ensuring accountability within the NCCSP project, aligned with UNDP standards. The GRM stood out as an effective tool for managing grievances at the NCCP and NGOs levels, fostering increased capacities, trust, and accountability. Shifts in grievance types were observed from NGO issues to service delivery complaints highlight its evolving role in maintaining project integrity. Training and communication channels enhanced local-level accountability. Monitoring and reporting were also central to ensuring compliance and accountability and comprehensive risk management, though the late disbursement of grants did not allow for sufficient post-grant assessments.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the NCCSP project is mixed; Outputs 1 and 2, which focused on capacity-building for NGOs/CSOs and low-value grant projects for target communities, show higher sustainability potential. The strengthened NGOs institutional systems, improved employee capacities and enhanced skills and resources among beneficiaries are likely to remain within the civil society sector in the country, with a likelihood that these can potentially expand to other NGOs/CSOs on the longer-term if financing is secured and activities are sustained including through donors and UN partnership portals. Contrarily, the sustainability of the NGO platform under Output 3 is not guaranteed due to the absence of a robust financial and governance framework or registration with the DFA., for which UNDP has developed a sustainability plan for the platform's continued operation, yet contingent on several risk-prone factors.

The delayed integration of exit strategies into the NCCSP project weakens the sustainability prospects in general, and of the NGO Platform in particular. Efforts have been on-going during the last few months of the project's timeframe; had these strategies been integrated from the inception, they might have yielded more impactful and viable outcomes. Overall, several factors must be carefully considered, most prominently the issue of limited financing, fluidity of the labour market in Afghanistan's NGO sector, uncertainty around the continuation of the established NGO Platform and the complexity facing CSOs transitioning to NGOs.

RBA, LNOB and GEWE

The NCCSP has made commendable efforts to integrate cross-cutting themes such as human rights, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) and accountability in its design and implementation. Although the project has benefited the communities directly and indirectly through the strengthened civil society, more consideration could have been given to the inclusion of PwDs in the various project activities, which remained under-addressed, with limited engagement in low-value grants. In terms of GEWE, the project went beyond what was initially planned and what might typically be credited given the challenging context in Afghanistan. To the extent possible, it supported women to continue playing a role in the civil society sector, specifically focusing on women-led organizations. It ensured women remained heard and have access to livelihoods opportunities through services that respond to their needs. Enhanced training modalities and consistent awareness-raising in PSEA and ESS have begun to shift perceptions among communities and NGOs employees to be extended to wider target communities The project's impact on GEWE could have been broader if not for the increasing restrictions on women and girls in the country.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Continue the support from UNDP and the World Bank to empower Afghanistan's civil society sector and NGOs; DFA dissolved all the CSOs and they are unable to implement interventions at the community level. Given the deteriorating human rights situation for women and girls and the narrowing space for NGOs and CSOs, the achieved gains by the NCCSP are at risk due to lack of financing and support.

Recommendation 2:

In future programming, extend the project timeframe to accommodate the inherently slow capacity strengthening progression and ensure adaptation to Afghanistan's challenging context and higher prospects of sustainable outcomes for local NGOs/CSOs and the target communities. A longer timeframe would also allow for post-grant monitoring to inform the programme for potential continuous support to the small projects.

Recommendation 3:

Building on the experience gained from the NCCSP, revise the management processes of the low-value grants model to introduce a wider scope of interventions with a higher likelihood of impactful results for the target vulnerable communities.

Recommendation 4:

Integrate sustainability considerations from the outset of the project design phase and throughout all stages of implementation. Given the unique context in Afghanistan, a heightened focus on gradual phase out and sustainability is inevitable, including in operational work plans, M&E frameworks, capacity building activities and strategic and local partnerships.

Recommendation 5:

Adopt a differentiated longer-term approach to NGOs' capacity building programming tailored to their specific capacity needs, thematic areas of operations, target beneficiaries and geographic areas, with a possible clustering approach and diverse interactive learning models.

Recommendation 6:

Provide support to NGOs during the formulation of the community projects that they plan to implement, including since the identification, design, implementation and monitoring phases to

ensure various needs of the different community groups are addressed, including targeted action to respond to the unique needs of PwDs and their integration in their communities and establishing partnerships with organizations for PwDs.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Afghanistan has commissioned a Final Evaluation for the project '**Afghanistan Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) Support Project (NCCSP)**. The purpose of the evaluation, which was conducted between 01 August and 11 October 2024 is to inform UNDP Afghanistan, the donor (World Bank) and partners of the lessons learned, outcomes achieved, value for money ensured and recommendations for similar programming in future. Financed by the World Bank, the project aimed to enhance the capacities of selected registered national and local NGOs/CSOs to contribute to sustaining the provision of basic services and life-saving support to the most vulnerable populations. It was implemented by UNDP Afghanistan over 28 months ending in October 2024 with the total budget of US$ 20 million. This Final Evaluation draws out progress and achievements toward project deliverables, identify gaps in programming, efficient use of resources, impacts, and key takeaways for future programming. It offers lessons and experiences, providing useful findings to other relevant projects by UNDP Afghanistan and other Country Offices (COs). The inception report was submitted by the consultant and approved by UNDP in August 2024.

This Draft Final Report is submitted in accordance with the evaluation's Terms of Reference (ToR) provided by UNDP Afghanistan (Annex 1) and adhering to the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines.[1] The report is comprised of seven sections; (i) Executive summary, (ii) Introduction, (iii) Evaluation scope and objectives (iv) Evaluation approach and methodology (v) Evaluation findings and best practice, (vi) Conclusion, recommendations and lessons learned, and (vii) Annexes.

1.2 Overview of Afghanistan's Context

Prolonged conflict and power shift in Afghanistan have caused the economy to severely recess with deflation and GDP contraction reaching 26 percent.[2] Coupled with climate disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, global recession, reduction in international aid and significant inequalities and restriction on women and girls, the Afghan people are left struggling with entrenched poverty. The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that more than a quarter of the Afghan population are going hungry, including 2.4 million people facing emergency levels of food insecurity. About half of the households has experienced a significant reduction in income and are adopting emergency coping strategies, such as selling assets and reducing food consumption. Households with People with Disabilities (PwDs) are more likely to resort to emergency coping strategies, with 29 percent relying on emergency coping compared to 20 percent of households without PwDs.[3] Further, 69 percent of Afghan people are subsistence insecure; lacking access to healthcare, essential items, suitable living conditions and employment opportunities necessary for basic subsistence-level living.[4]

The economic outlook for Afghanistan remains uncertain, despite seen some improvement in stability and peace since the cease of conflicts in 2021, and despite recent early signs of slight upturn in few economic indicators.[5] Nevertheless, access to basic services, including healthcare and education, continues to be a major concern in the country, particularly for vulnerable populations of displaced

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[1] UNDP https://erc.undp.org/methods-center/guidelines/undp-evaluation-guidelines
[2] World Bank. 2024. Afghanistan Development Update April 2024.
https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/18a1ccff0457effb0a456c0d4af7cce2-0310012024/original/Afghanistan-Development-Update-April-2024.pdf
[3] WFP. 2024. Afghanistan Food Security Update 2024, 1st Quarter. https://www.wfp.org/publications/afghanistan-mvam-household-food-security-survey
[4] UNDP. 2023. Two Years in Review. Changes in Afghan Economy, Households and Cross-Cutting Sectors. https://www.undp.org/afghanistan/publications/two-years-review
[5] UNDP. 2023. Two Years in Review. Changes in Afghan Economy, Households and Cross-Cutting Sectors. https://www.undp.org/afghanistan/publications/two-years-review

people, women, girls and PwDs. The capacity of the health-care system and services is weak, most health facilities have poor infrastructure with fewer qualified health-care professionals and workers. Likewise, the country's education system is fragile with damaged infrastructure and limited coverage, leaving around 40 percent of children out of school.[6]

Afghan women and girls have been impacted by restrictions imposed by the De Facto Authorities (DFA) in 2021 and restrictions against them continue to expand. Since 2021, the DFA has issued more than 50 edicts targeting women and girls, alongside several inconsistently enforced provincial-level decrees and practices, restricting the basic rights and fundamental freedoms of women.[7] they are banned from most areas of public life, higher education, and employment. Before the restrictions, 13 percent of households had female members who were employed, which decreased to only 3 percent in 2024.[8] This, combined with social norms has exposed many girls to extreme forms of violence and abusive behaviour, such as honour killings, child marriage and domestic abuse.[9]

In Afghanistan, UNDP supports people's aspiration for peace, prosperity and sustainability, advancing integrated development solutions driven by its Strategic Plan 2022-2025[10] and the UNDP Transitional Country Programme Strategy (TCPS) 2024-2025.[11] In previous years of the project lifetime, it has been working through the United Nations Strategic Framework in Afghanistan 2023, Transitional Country Programme Result Framework (CPRF) 2022-2023[12] and the United Nations Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF) for Afghanistan in 2022.[13]

1.3 Project Description

Financed by the World Bank's Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF)[14] with a total budget of US$ 20 million, the NCCSP project aimed to enhance the capacities of selected registered national and local NGOs/CSOs to improve their performance and effectiveness. The overall project outcome was to build their capacities to ultimately contribute to sustaining the provision of basic services and to providing life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable populations, in the short to medium term. The project started on 1 July 2022 and received a no-cost extension in June 2023 extending the duration from 24 to 28 months to end on 31 October 2024.

With four interlinked outputs, the project design was predicated on a clearly defined Theory of Change (TOC) assuming that: **If** there is a tailored and updated understanding of the current operational and programmatic capacities of National NGOs and CSOs, including their challenges and aspirations, geographic presence, and outreach. **If** NGOs/CSOs capacities can be maintained and/or strengthened, including the coordination and collaboration, operational space, and advocacy. **Then**, NGOs/CSOs will be able to continue delivering critically needed basic services to the most vulnerable in the communities. The project outputs are illustrated in Figure 1 and its Results Framework in Annex 2.

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[6] OCHA. 2023. Humanitarian Needs Overview in Afghanistan. https://reliefweb.int/attachments/2f525ec0-622e-47ee-bb0b-d411323dc054/AFG-HNO-2023-v06.pdf

[7] UN Afghanistan. 2024. Annual Report 2023. https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsdg_afghanistan_report_2023_final.pdf

[8] WFP. 2024. Afghanistan Food Security Update 2024, 1st Quarter. https://www.wfp.org/publications/afghanistan-mvam-household-food-security-survey

[9] UN. 2024. Children and Armed Conflict. https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2023/12/afghanistan-a-dire-situation-for-children-due-to-a-lack-of-access-to-basic-services-and-increased-vulnerabilities/

[10] UNDP. 2022. UNDP Strategic plan 2022-2025. https://www.undp.org/publications/undp-strategic-plan-2022-2025

[11] UNDP. 2024. Transitional Country Programme Strategy (TCPS) 2024-2025 https://erc.undp.org/api/download?filePath=%2Fdocuments%2F15688%2Fmgmtresponse%2Fkeyaction%2Fdoc_16877297827648055798Prodoc_10312_clean_10June2024_final.pdf

[12] Transitional Country Programme Result Framework (CPRF) 2022-2023. https://afghanistan.un.org/en/247134-united-nations-transitional-engagement-framework-tef-final-report-dashboard

[13] UNDP. 2024. Legal Framework in Afghanistan. https://www.undp.org/afghanistan/legal-framework

[14] World Bank. Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fud. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/06/03/afghanistan-reconstruction-trust-fund-approves-three-emergency-projects-for-afghanistan

Figure 1: NCCSP Project Outputs
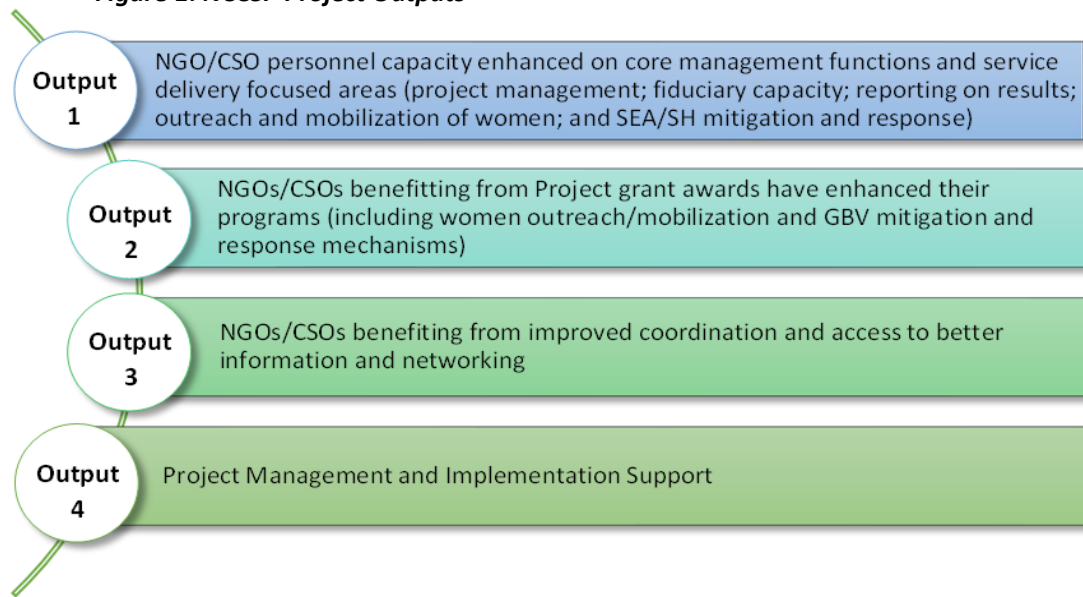
Output 1 — NGO/CSO personnel capacity enhanced on core management functions and service delivery focused areas (project management; fiduciary capacity; reporting on results; outreach and mobilization of women; and SEA/SH mitigation and response)

Output 2 — NGOs/CSOs benefitting from Project grant awards have enhanced their programs (including women outreach/mobilization and GBV mitigation and response mechanisms)

Output 3 — NGOs/CSOs benefiting from improved coordination and access to better information and networking

Output 4 — Project Management and Implementation Support

The NCCSP's design was anchored around the central role that NGOs/CSOs play in the basic service delivery, gender equality and life-saving support to the most vulnerable populations. Identification and classification of existing CSOs/NGOs and the analysis of their challenges and constraints was essential for positive economic and social impacts on communities and contribute to the objectives of UNDP's ABADEI. Activities under Output 1 of the project planned to map and assess 400 NGOs and CSOs across Afghanistan and to provide standardized capacity building efforts in project management, fundraising, and financial management. Capacity building in the other thematic areas, such as social cohesion, conflict management, and gender-sensitive programming in sectors like health, education, and livelihoods. Output 2 aimed to support 200 NGOs/CSOs with low-value grants to help organizations reactivate operations, retain staff, and implement innovative small community projects. Priority was given to women-led and marginalized groups-focused organizations involved in socio-economic empowerment and community developments. Output 3 aimed to improve coordination by strengthening existing NGO platforms or establishing new ones. The project planned to assess current structures, collaborate with stakeholders, and leverage ACBAR to enhance communication and networking to create a sustainable, inclusive platform for national and local NGOs.

The direct project beneficiaries were the selected national and local NGOs/CSOs in all 34 provinces across the eight administrative regions in Afghanistan, covering their management and board members, staff and volunteers. They are targeted based on set eligibility and priority criteria, such as operational presence, track record in financial management and focus areas. Special emphasis is given to NGOs/CSOs led by women or those focusing on vulnerable groups. Indirect beneficiaries were the vulnerable community groups that are ultimately served by the NGOs/CSOs, who as a result, may benefit from positive economic and social impacts, including improved and equal access to services in health, agriculture, livelihoods and education. The project stakeholders were diverse, engaging, the local NGOs/ CSOs, including women-led organizations, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR),[15] UN-Women, community leaders, diverse benefiting community groups (women, men, youth and children),

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[15] ACBAR, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development, is an Afghan independent body bringing together 202 national and international NGOs working in Afghanistan and abiding by the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality and humanity.

1.4 Project Evaluability Assessment

The Project Document presented a strong context analysis, according to which, the project was anchored around the role that NGOs/ CSOs play in the basic service delivery, gender equality and life-saving support to the most vulnerable populations. With that, the project's Causal links between the project's development objective, medium and long-term outcomes and outputs are logic and well-articulated, as observed by the evaluators. Both categories of beneficiaries, direct and indirect, were clearly specified during the project's design phase, as well as stakeholders, which facilitated assessing the potential impact on each.

Because the project management and financing approaches were explicitly described in the Project Document, including with allocated resources (budgets, human capacity and time), the evaluation had enough data for in-depth analysis for some criteria. However, analysis was challenging for some other areas given the likelihood that data might not be available, accurate or accessible. The project has been implemented by the UNDP team in Kabul and eight regional offices and through the firms and network of NGOs. Guided by a Project Operations Manual (POM) agreed between UNDP and World Bank, implementation is done through a Project Implementation Unit (PIU) composed of international and national officers and support staff, in addition to filed monitors.

Reviewing the indicators of the project's framework, they are well-defined and clear, incorporating a balanced mix of both quantitative and qualitative measures, reflected in Table 1. As such, enabled this evaluation to effectively measure progress and change happening as a result of the activities and cross-cutting aspects. However, some indicators were not specific nor time bound. For example, outcome indicator '*NGO/CSO personnel capacity enhanced in core management and service delivery focused areas*' does not specify which capacity is being measured and over how much time. Likewise, indicator '*Operational support sub-grants benefitted women-led NGOs/ CSOs or delivered activities benefitting primarily women and girls*' does not specify what type of benefit will be measured and the activities over how long. Output 3 indicator '*The NGO platform(s) was established and/or an existing platform was enhanced for national and local NGOs*' does not allow measuring the quality of the platform or the level of accessibility and usefullness for the NGOs.

The project design at its outset was set to ensure adherence the Do No Harm, Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) and Human Rights-Based Approach (RBA). This was revealed during the review of document that showed a meaningful consideration of the most vulnerable groups, using political economy insights, solid monitoring indicators, civil society dialogue and flexible design. The activities had planned to use community approaches and locally led interventions to deliver services effectively, even in remote areas and engaging marginalized populations.

The NCCSP project contributes to the UNDP's focus areas of governance, poverty and equality, resilience building and gender equality. It started on 1 July 2022 and received a no-cost extension in June 2023 extending the duration from 24 to 28 months to end on 31 October 2024.

2. EVALUATION SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Purpose and Objectives

The overall purpose of the Final Evaluation of the NCCSP Project is to inform UNDP Afghanistan, the donor (World Bank) and partners of the lessons learned, outcomes achieved, value for money ensured

and recommendations for similar programming in future.[16] The evaluation was carried-out between 01 August and 11 October 2024.

The objectives of the Final Evaluation are to:

- Assess project performance and progress against the expected outputs, targets including indicators presented in the results framework and contribution to expected UNDP Transitional Country Programme outcome and UN framework in Afghanistan.
- Review and document the success and lessons learned, good practices and transferable examples. Identify challenges and the effectiveness of the strategic approaches that project adopted for addressing those challenges.
- Outline recommendations, including potential realignments in scope and approach in line with the project's outcome and provide forward-looking recommendations that contribute to enhancing the quality of future programming.

2.2 Scope

Thematic Scope: The Final Evaluation assesses the NCCSP project's overall performance in line with its planned outcomes and outputs as presented in the Project Document and any changes or revisions made to it during the period under review. It covers all aspects of the project highlighting the main challenges and good practices throughout its design and implementation, the evaluation methodology and all deliverables integrate UNDP's cross-cutting themes.

Geographic Scope: The evaluation captures all regions and 34 provinces where the programme has operated.

Temporal scope: The project duration from its start on 1 July 2022 until the time of the evaluation (the project's end date is 31 October 2024).

The primary clients of the evaluation include the UNDP Afghanistan and other COs, UNDP senior management, UNDP Development Effectiveness Unit, UNDP Programme Quality Assurance, the World Bank, the Project Steering Committee (SC) members, including UN-Women and ACBAR and management team and staff of NGOs/CSOs.

3. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

3.1 Evaluation Criteria and Questions

The Final Evaluation systematically used the standard criteria of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC).[17] It assessed the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, potential impact, and sustainability of the NCCSP Project performance vis-a-vis planned results and will draw out lessons learned. The Evaluation Question Matrix (EQM) was the centre piece used throughout the evaluation process (Annex 3) covering 21 Evaluation Questions (EQs) guided by the TORs and the inception report, where it was proposed to re-organize or merge few of them for appropriateness to the objectives and scope of the evaluation, as presented in Table 1. The EQM guided what will be assessed (EQs for all evaluation criteria and key assumptions to be examined), and how it will be reviewed (data collection methods, sources of information and analysis methods for each question and associated assumptions).

Table 1: Evaluation Questions

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[16] The inception report does not propose any changes to the objective, purpose, scope and users of the evaluation which were indicated in the ToR by UNDP.

[17] OECD.2021. *Evaluation Criteria*.
https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm

Criteria		Questions
Coherence	1	Do synergies exist with other interventions carried out by UNDP as well as intervention partners and stakeholders including the donor? To what extent is NCCSP complementary to other actors' interventions in the same context? To what extent does NCCSP add value and avoid duplication?
	2	To what extent is NCCSP consistent with international norms and standards to be applied to the existing context?
Relevance	3	To what extent was the project in line with the UN TEF, TCPRF and UNDP Strategic Plan) and to the needs of local NGOs and CSOs specifically for women-led?
	4	To what extent has the project adapted to the changing external conditions following the changed happened at the national level after the DFA takeover in August 2021 and the recent ban on women education and work by the DFA?
Effectiveness	5	To what extent did the project achieve its overall outputs? Are the project's contributions to outcomes clear, especially contribution to GEWE? How effective were the strategies used in the implementation of the project completing the activities effectively in terms of quality, quantity, and timing?
	6	Did the capacity support services deliver by NCCSP address the needs of beneficiaries and local communities and were the target beneficiaries reached as expected? (Are there significant differences between male and female beneficiaries?)
	7	What are the key internal and external factors that contributed, affected, or impeded the achievements, and how UNDP and the partners have managed these factors?
	8	To what extent have UNDP partners, NGOs and local stakeholders been involved in project implementation following a participatory approach? To what extent stakeholders and beneficiaries are satisfied with the benefits they received.
Efficiency	9	How cost-effective was the project? Were the financial resources used appropriately to achieve the intended results?
	10	What systems and tools were developed and implemented for the Social and Environmental Safeguarding? What challenges were experienced during the implementation of the tools? How has it contributed to the quality of the project implementation?
	11	To what extent, the inputs and strategies identified were realistic, appropriate, and adequate to achieve the results?
Impact	12	To what extent is the project likely to contribute to improved capacity at the individual (employees of NGOs/CSOs) and institutional level (management and operations)? How significant are the changes to the NGOs/CSOs, their employees and communities that will be created because of the NCCSP?
	13	What positive and/or negative changes are the beneficiaries experiencing because of their participation in NCCSP activities?
	14	To what extent the local communities benefited from the quick impact projects implemented through the low value grants?
Sustainability	15	Did the NCCSP activities take specific measures to guarantee sustainability? Are activities supported by the local stakeholders and communities well-integrated into local social and economic structures? To what extent did the NCCSP bring momentum in the country for implementation of NGO/CSOs support activities?
	16	How do beneficiaries at the individual and institutional levels perceive sustainability of NCCSP, for capacity building support? Do they plan to continue making use of the services/products produced?
	17	Describe key factors that will require attention to improve the prospects of sustainability of Project outcomes and the potential for replication of the approach? What social or

		political risks may jeopardize sustainability of project outputs and the project's contributions to UNDP Country Programme outputs and outcomes?
	18	What exit strategies are in place and how effective are they in ensuring the sustainability beyond the project life cycle? Are structures, resources, and processes in place to ensure the benefits generated by NCCSP are continued after its completion?
RBA, LNOB and Gender Equality	19	How adequately were cross-cutting themes such as human rights, gender equality, age and social and environmental standards considered in the NCCSP?
	20	To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in GEWE? Were there any unintended effects? How can the project further broaden in a future phase its contribution to enhancing diversity and inclusion?
	21	To what extent have local communities, women, youth, PwDs and other disadvantaged groups benefited from the project either direct or indirectly?

3.2 Evaluation Approaches

The Evaluation followed a participatory mixed-method approaches, engaging with national partners, the CSOs and NGOs in Kabul and some other provinces in Afghanistan. A gender balance between women and men consulted was challenging, however the evaluators sought the participation of women where possible by ensuring a minimum number of women participate in each FGD. Gender-responsive data collection was ensured using interview guides included questions and sub-questions to draw out gender differentiation and specifically at the unique barriers facing women's access services and livelihoods in Afghanistan, as well as barriers in the face of women-led organizations. Questions also intended to assess the impact on women and girls. The evaluation also adhered to the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines[18] and considers the UNDP cross-cutting themes of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE), LNOB and RBA approaches, environmental sensitivity and sustainability and ensures Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP). The evaluation during data analysis and reporting avoided any form of bias, assessing results that consider the different groups, including women and girls and taking measures that are appropriate to the local context, including scheduling times and places, seeking privacy, using appropriate language and managing group dynamics. The analysis ensured to assess any change relating to GBV, social behaviours, power relations, participation and social aand economic empowerment of women.

The Final Evaluation relied on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data using primary and secondary sources, entailing an in-depth desk review as indicated in the Bibliography (Annex 6), remote and in-person Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), field visits and an online survey with a wide range of beneficiaries and stakeholders at national and decentralized/local levels of the different activities in Afghanistan. Semi-structured interview guides and stakeholders list are presented in Annexes 3 and 4. The evaluation used an iterative, multi-phased approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data for robust analysis. AI tools were leveraged, adhering to UNDP regulations. Stakeholder validation ensured accuracy, and findings were presented in a clear format. Quality assurance is guided by UNDP standards, ensuring credibility and independence of results.

3.3 Field Data Collection and Analysis

During the course of the evaluation a total of 74 NGOs were met in person and 17 were interviewed online, including the UNDP senior management such as the DRRP, Evaluation manager, risk management team and other Project staff, UN agencies, NGOs/CSOs staff and ACBAR. To the extent possible, the evaluators ensured inclusion and diversity of respondent groups, however almost no

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[18] UNDP https://erc.undp.org/methods-center/guidelines/undp-evaluation-guidelines

PWDs participated. The evaluation team conducted one FGD with NGOs in each region, in addition to visiting two to three NGOs (except for South East and North East which were interviewed online). FGDs included both men and women, each FGD conducted (except in Jalalabad and Kandahar) included at least 3 women participants. Participation in FGDs was voluntary and selection criteria of respondents considered gender, different age groups, including children, youth, adults and elderly, where applicable, geographic location, sector of the NGOs/CSOs work (Education, Livelihoods, Health and Agriculture), staff of different seniority levels and functions and type of support provided by the project, including low-value grant projects' beneficiaries.Likewise the evaluation visited a varied range of proejcts and speak with as many end beneficiaries as possible. Proejcts visited also covered the four sectors supported by the project. The majority of field visits included discussions and FGDs with female beneficiaries involved in education or livelihood activities. Table 2 presents the total numbers of stakeholders consulted and Annex 5 presents the comprehensive list of stakeholders.

Table 2: Numbers of stakeholders consulted

Region	No. of People in FGDs			No. of People in KIIs				No. of People in Visits		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total persons	Total visits
Kabul	15	5	20	7	7	14	5	5	10	4
Mazar-e-Sharif	5	2	7	1	1	2	2	4	6	2
Herat	6	2	8		1	1	4	3	7	3
Jalalabad	4	2	6	1		1	6	2	8	3
Bamyian	3	2	5	0	0	0	6	2	8	3
Kandahar	10	0	10	0	0	0	8	0	8	3
South East[19]	4	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East	9	2	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	**56**	**17**	**73**	**9**	**9**	**18**	**31**	**16**	**47**	**18**
Grand Total of Persons met										**138**

In addition to the FGDs and KIIs, an online survey was additionally rolled-out targeting the 210 NGOs who have received low-value grants through Outpiut 2 of the NCCSP. The repsonse rate to the survey was 68 percent (n.143). The vast majority of responses were received from NGOs, 24 percent women (109 male and 26 females) and the majority between 25 and 45 years of age, shown in Figures 2 and 3

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[19] Data Collection for South East and North East were conducted online. No physical visits took place.

Figure 2: Representative Organization

Figure 3: Respondents' Age Groups
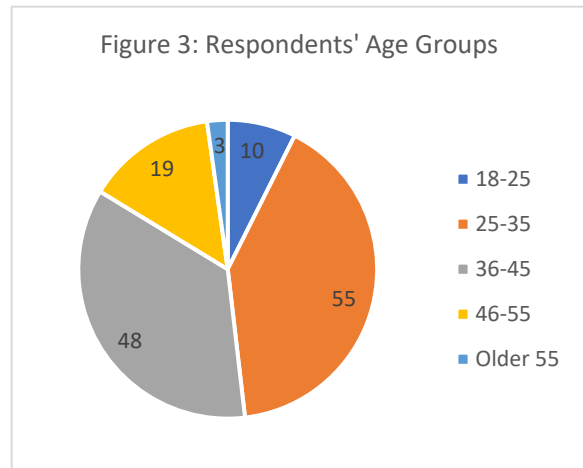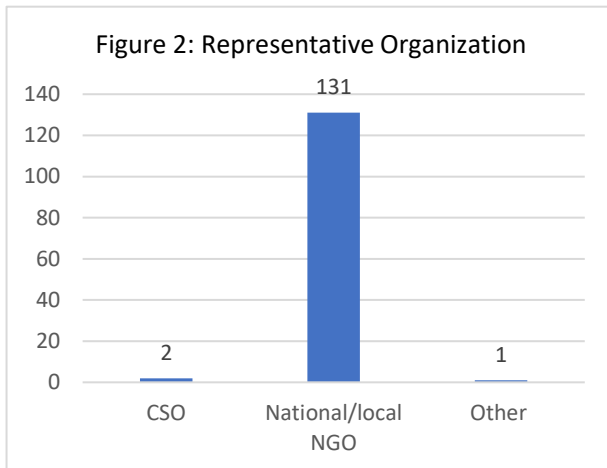
Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

Almost all responses were from national NGOs with a very limited number received from CSOs operating in all regions of Afghanistan,[20] but the number of responses varied between regions as shown in Figure 4. The highest number of responses came from the center (Kabul) followed by the East. This could be explained based on the number of NGOs operating in these two regions. It is worth noting that following data cleaning only 134 answers were complete and used for subsequent analysis.

Figutre 4: Location of Operations of NGOs
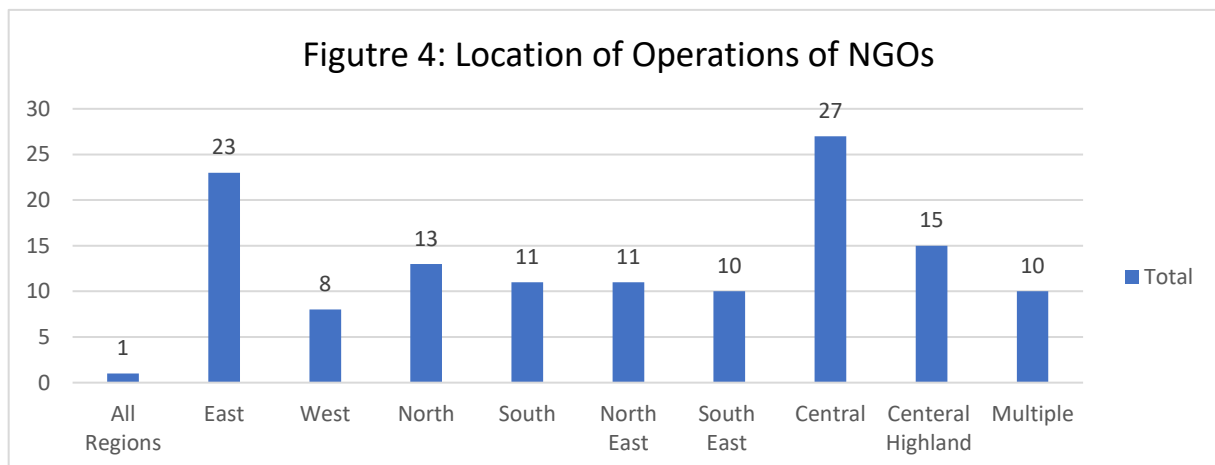
Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

The data analysis for the evaluation was both; qualitative and quantitative in nature from primary and secondary data sources, organized around the 21 EQs and the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria. It examined the criteria and sub-questions generated in the EQM, its indicators and assumptions, and addressed by data sources, mapping the facts, perceptions and opinions of the interviewed and surveys participants. Data was organized according to the criteria, reviewing objectives, EQs and the different outputs. Some quotes and human stories were also cited anonymously across the findings to support the analysis. Notes of KIIs and FGDs were coded with due consideration of data protection principles.

Data analysis approach involved triangulation methods, as a way to cross-check information collected from the different sources, and validating them. Responses for the online survey was analysed,

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[20] The NCCSP worked only with two types of organizations; CSOs and NGOs. If another type was selected by one respondent, it may have been an error.

presented in diagrams/ charts and triangulated to support the assessment of the primary collected data and enrich the evidence base and content of the findings. Further, the data analysis was conducted by the evaluators during the in-depth review of documents to provide contextual information and data that, combined with primary data from, KIIs, FGDs and survey permitted the provision of detailed and credible answers to all the EQs. Finally, technical support, guidance and coordination meetings with the UNDP Evaluation Manager ascertained data analysis and triangulation, independence of information, credibility of sources and quality of deliverables.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The proposed evaluation approaches, data collection methods and EQM abided by the UNDP Evaluation Policy guiding principles and the Final Evaluation TOR. The evaluators do not have any links to project management or any other conflict of interest to interfere with the independence of the Evaluation. The evaluation will adhere to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards[21] and the Ethical Guidelines and Codes of Conduct for Evaluation.[22] As indicated in the Evaluation TOR, the evaluators ensured the security of collected information before and after the Evaluation to respect anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. The evaluators confirm that the information, knowledge, and data gathered in the Evaluation process were and will be solely used for the that purpose and not for any other uses, with the expressed authorization of UNDP and partners. Ethics Form signed by the consultant included in Annex 8.

3.4 Limitations

As with any evaluation or field work, certain limitations might be faced, including:

- The complexity of the context in Afghanistan following the 2021 shift in power and the restrictions imposed by the DFA imposed limitations on many aspects of the evaluation, including obtaining the delays in visa for the international consultant to enter the country, restriction on movement, access to different geographic areas, availability of data, restriction on the conduct of field visits and difficulties to arrange meetings. This was overcome to a certain extent by having a national consultant on the team who was able to go to some hard-to-reach locations and conduct necessary data collection activities.
- With logistical, political, social and freedom of association constraints, diversity of insights might be impacted, and participants may also be reluctant to engage in the KIIs and FGDs conducted under this Evaluation. All efforts were exerted during meetings to put the participants at ease and provide a safe and confidential venues for the discussions prompting them to share their views honestly and openly. Ethical standards were repeated to them including the confidentiality and anonymity of the information provided during the meetings.
- Mostly a consultative Evaluation, NGOs/ CSOs benefiting from the project whose staff were engaged as a key stakeholder can enrich the inputs received and contribute to impartiality but might have a risk of funding and/or social desirability bias, by the nature of the funding relationship between the project as a donor and NGOS as beneficiaries. Participants were repeatedly reminded during the meetings that there is no positive or negative statements that can affect their potential for engaging with UN or World Bank in the future. Annonmity of statements was constantly mentioned to encourage honest response to the questions.

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[21] http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914
[22] http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2866 and http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/100

4. EVALUATION FINDINGS

4.1 Coherence

EQ-1: Do synergies exist with other interventions carried out by UNDP, as well as intervention partners and stakeholders including the donor? To what extent is NCCSP complementary to other actors' interventions in the same context? To what extent does NCCSP add value and avoid duplication?

Finding 1: Synergies between the NCCSP and other UN agencies remain largely untapped, collaboration was primarily limited to UN-Women. The NCCSP's design under the ABADEI framework has enhanced UNDP's capacity to build resilience in Afghanistan by decentralizing operations, empowering local NGOs, and women's economic empowerment.

UNDP's programmatic priorities and operational framework in Afghanistan has shifted since August 2021 when Taliban had become the DFA. The Area-Based Approach to Development Emergency Initiative (ABADEI)[23] was establishment responding to the crisis caused by the government collapse, economic decline, job loss, and the exclusion of women. The ABADEI programme is the largest integrated area-based initiative combining short-term humanitarian aid with long-term resilience-building efforts. It addresses poverty, food security and livelihoods, with a focus on women's empowerment and vulnerable communities. ABADEI strengthened UNDP's capacity to build resilience, opened offices in eight regions of Afghanistan and supported decentralized operations, paving the way for subsequent projects like the NCCSP. Under the ABADE programme, the NCCSP has been contributing to the Livelihoods and Women's Economic Empowerment priority area by empowering national NGOs, enhancing risk management, and reporting, and increasing livelihood opportunities for vulnerable communities, particularly in remote areas.

Synergies between the NCCSP and other UN agencies was limited to UN-Women who was represented in the NCCSP SC and was engaged in the grant selection process of the NGOs/CSOs. Both organizations had similar objectives on empowering women by supporting women-led organizations, focusing on capacity building and financial assistance, helping women secure jobs, and become more active in their communities. UN-Women leveraged UNDP's NGOs/CSOs' database and mapping exercise. There were, however, some differences in the financial and capacity-building strategies between the two organizations; UNDP provided shorter-term grants and larger-scale training sessions aimed to quickly equip women-led CSOs.

With no specific ties to the NCCSP, UNDP plays a well-recognized facilitating role in Afghanistan across the humanitarian and development partners, notably through its engagement within the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), where high-level coordination takes place between all UN agencies. UNDP shares information on projects and resources with the Special Trust fund for Afghanistan (STFA) that includes 17 UN agencies.

Overall, it was shown from KIIs that the DFA -although with no relations with UNDP- and the civil society see UNDP as a trusted and transparent organization contributing to development in the country, which had a positive impact on the ability of NGOs/CSOs to successfully implement low-value grant projects with focus on women and girls, despite restrictions and sensitivity of the context. During FGD, one NGO employee explained saying: *"When the DFA visits our project sites and sees our projects on girls, they do not initially feel good to have this project and when they learn its connected to UNDP, they accept and see it positively"*.

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[23] ABADEI https://www.undp.org/afghanistan/projects/area-based-approach-development-emergency-initiatives-abadei-20

EQ-2: To what extent is NCCSP consistent with international norms and standards to be applied to the existing context?

Finding 2: The NCCSP was consistent with international norms and standards to the degree possible within Afghanistan's challenging context. The project followed a rights-based approach, empowering civil society, promoting the right to freedom of association and supporting livelihoods and resilience of those most left behind, with focus on women and girls. However, systemic gender discrimination and restrictive DFA policies limit full adherence to human rights standards, especially regarding women's rights. The NCCSP ensured accountability through the application of Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) and the established Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM), yet under constraints imposed by the DFA.

The NCCSP design followed a rights-based approach with outputs aiming to safeguard livelihoods and strengthen community resilience, in alignment with the ABADEI and UN TEF frameworks. The design considered UNDP's commitment to supporting the 'universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.' As an overarching programming principle to the international development agenda, leaving no one behind was at the core of the NCCSP project, which focused on empowering marginalized and excluded groups and individuals. In the NCCSP, UNDP upheld and promoted the principles of accountability within its supported NGOs/CSOs, it ensured that they have the means to formulate, implement and monitor the projects as needed by their communities in their views. Additionally, accountability to affected communities is ensured by the NCCSP and the partner NGOs through the established GRM system, considered one of the strongest achievements of the project.

The NCCSP contributed to the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, notably SDG 5: Gender Equality by emphasizing support for women-led CSOs and advocating for women's rights. It also aligned with SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions by strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations helping them to become more active, effective, accountable, and inclusive. Alignment with SDG 5 and SDG 16 was reflected in the Project Document, however the evaluation also accounts for its broader alignment, perhaps indirectly through the small projects, with the SDG 1: No Poverty by enhancing the capacity of NGOs and CSOs to deliver quality basic services, the project helps reduce poverty and improve the livelihoods of vulnerable communities, SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being and SDG 4, where it helped NGOs deliver basic services on education and health. The NCCSP could also be said to contribute to SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities by targeting marginalized and vulnerable groups, the project aims to reduce inequalities within Afghan society.

Consistent with the GEWE principles, the project design prioritizes gender equality placing emphasis on women's socio-economic empowerment, gender-sensitive capacity building and integrating Gender-Based Violence (GBV) risk mitigation in monitoring (*Outcome indicator 'Share of NGOs/CSOs trained in GBV prevention and response and demonstrating proper protocols in-place to support survivors of GBV.'* Further, the project design had a gender marker of GEN 2, meaning that gender equality was a significant objective. Both women and men were able to participate equally in the project activities, by NGOs/CSOs prioritised projects that respond to women and girls' specific needs. Women-led organizations were targeted with the NCCSP capacity building trainings. The training themes included those related to gender mainstreaming and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). The project was informed by gender analysis elements in their design and integrated in assessments, NGOS mapping and periodic monitoring surveys. **More details are included under section 4.5 and 4.7 of the report.**

4.2 Relevance

EQ-3: To what extent was the project in line with the UN TEF, TCPRF and UNDP Strategic Plan and to the needs of local NGOs and CSOs specifically for women-led?

Finding 3: The NCCSP project's interlinked outputs were designed in full alignment with the UN TEF for Afghanistan 2022, the Transitional Country Programme Result Framework (TCPRF) 2022-2023, the United Nations Strategic Framework in Afghanistan (UNSFA) 2023-2025. It contributes to the objectives of the UNDP Strategic Plan and the ABADEI. The project's strategy to strengthen NGOs/CSOs capacities and sustain their activities in the short to medium term was relevant and stood true because, after the collapse of the government, there was a significant gap within national NGOs/CSOs' capacities and resources. There was room for the project to expand its scope of support to the civil society sector, which could be considered for future programming.

Alignment with TEF, TCPRF and UNDP Strategic Plan

In Afghanistan, UNDP supports people's aspiration for peace, prosperity, and sustainability, advancing integrated development solutions driven by its Strategic Plan 2022-2025[24] and the UNDP TCPS 2024-2025.[25] The NCCSP worked within the context of the UNDP 3x6x3 framework, supporting Afghanistan towards structural transformation, LNOB and resilience building. It has been contributing to its prioritized signature solutions, specifically; poverty and inequality and resilience by improving economic recovery, governance by strengthening social cohesion and safeguarding rights, climate adaptation and disaster risk management by promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency, as well as striving to enhance women's protection, participation, and empowerment.

Since its outset in 2022, the NCCSP project's interlinked outputs were designed in full alignment with the TEF for Afghanistan 2022,[26] the TCPRF 2022-2023[27] and the United Nations Strategic Framework in Afghanistan UNSFA 2023-2025.[28] The project's Outputs 1 and 3 are more relevant to the TEF and UNSFA's Outcome 2: 'By the end of 2022, essential services are sustained that address basic human needs for the people in Afghanistan' and Outcome 3: 'By the end of 2022, Afghanistan will preserve social investments and community-level systems essential to meeting basic human needs, protect gains to the SDGs, and develop scenarios for future engagement'. The project's Output 2 is more relevant to the TEF and UNSFA's Outcome 1: 'By the end of 2022, more people in Afghanistan will have benefitted from life-saving humanitarian assistance that enable them to live in safety and dignity'.

Relevance to Afghanistan's civil society sector

For decades, NGOs/CSOs have been playing a vital role to complement government efforts and managed large-scale projects that fill gaps in essential basic service provision and in delivering humanitarian and development activities in hard-to-reach areas. They had a well-established operational track record in Afghanistan and have proven to be effective to provide services, with high degrees of agility and cost-effectiveness.[29] Today, after the 2021 political transition, they face dire political, legal, financial, and operational barriers, including barred freedom of association, assembly, and expression. They lost financial and material support from donors and international organizations, including the World Bank which shifted its priorities to sectors like health, education, agriculture, and

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[24] UNDP. 2022. UNDP Strategic plan 2022-2025. https://www.undp.org/publications/undp-strategic-plan-2022-2025

[25] UNDP. 2024. Transitional Country Programme Strategy (TCPS) 2024-2025 https://erc.undp.org/api/download?filePath=%2Fdocuments%2F15688%2Fmgmtresponse%2Fkeyaction%2Fdoc_16877297827648055798Prodoc_10312_clean_10June2024_final.pdf

[26] UNDP. 2024. Legal Framework in Afghanistan. https://www.undp.org/afghanistan/legal-framework

[27] Transitional Country Programme Result Framework (CPRF) 2022-2023. https://afghanistan.un.org/en/247134-united-nations-transitional-engagement-framework-tef-final-report-dashboard

[28] Transitional Country Programme Result Framework (CPRF) 2022-2023. https://afghanistan.un.org/en/247134-united-nations-transitional-engagement-framework-tef-final-report-dashboard

[29] UNDP. 2024. Afghanistan NGO/CSO Capacity Support. Afghanistan NGO/CSO Capacity Support | United Nations Development Programme (undp.org)

livelihoods, leading to a sharp decline in development and humanitarian aid. The were forced to abandon activities supporting human rights and exclude women from their operations. Many had to discontinue activities and stop service delivery.[30]

According to UNDP, the NGO sector faces significant challenges in terms of effectiveness and accountability, most notably: (i) limited capacity for collaboration and reduced ability to negotiate with authorities; (ii) lack of financial sustainability; (iii) limited human resources capacity and lack of qualified staff; (iv) limited capacity on overall project management, fiduciary, monitoring and reporting; (v) ineffective dispute settlement mechanisms and systems to engage stakeholders in local development planning; and (vi) challenges to recruit and retain female staff, as well as to mobilize and engage with women in communities.[31]

During FGDs under this evaluation, there was unanimous agreement by all NGOs' employees on the importance and highly relevance of the capacity-building to the NGOs/CSOs sector. Which have had to adapt to drastically changed circumstances by registering as businesses to continue their activities. This shift has placed them in a challenging position, where professionals like teachers and lawyers are encouraged to become entrepreneurs. Despite these difficulties, NGOs have demonstrated resilience, leveraging collective intelligence within networks, while private sector funding and DFA support for women entrepreneurs and the health sector offer potential opportunities for sustained impact. The need is technical in areas such as project management, financial management, proposal writing and gender mainstreaming, as well as organizational, enabling NGOs to refine their internal workflows, policies, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Several NGOs which had been inactive were revived and operationalized due to these interventions. This rejuvenation was particularly important in maintaining linkages with communities and stakeholders.

The NCCSP's design was anchored around the central role that NGOs/CSOs play in the basic service delivery, gender equality and life-saving support to the most vulnerable populations. Identification and classification of existing CSOs/NGOs and the analysis of their challenges and constraints was essential for positive economic and social impacts on communities and contribute to the objectives of UNDP's ABADEI. With that, the evaluation finds that the project's strategy to strengthen NGOs/CSOs capacities and sustaining their activities in the short to medium term was relevant and stood true. This project was essential in addressing both the funding shortfall and the capacity deficits caused by this brain drain. The project's focus on rebuilding capacity and providing critical funding enabled NGOs to continue operating and meet urgent community needs. NGO staff interviewed during this evaluation confirmed that UNDP filled this gap, at least partially, in project management, governance and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) by providing training, grants and building a network of 400 NGOs across thematic areas. One interviewed NGO director mentioned that *"The lack of trained human resources has been a significant challenge, and this initiative has effectively built capacity among our staff and beneficiaries"*. To help address these needs, it was critical to develop meaningful and impactful engagements sustained over time, hence, the project created avenues for dialogue and coordination that aimed to strengthen the voice of NGOs/CSOs with focus on the socio-economic empowerment of women and girls.

According to the online survey rolled-out under this evaluation among UNDP-supported NGOs, there is almost unanimous agreement that the NCCSP came relevant to their needs and expectations, as shown in Figure 5.

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[30] Afghanistan Policy Lab, Princeton University 2023. The Collapse of the Civic Space in Afghanistan and Supporting the Fight to Reclaim it, Policy Brief, School of Public and International Affairs. https://spia.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/2023-05/Civic%20Space%20Policy%20Brief_FINAL.pdf
[31] UNDP. 2023. NCCSP Project Document Extension 23Nov2023.

Figure 5: Relevance of the capacity building programme to NGOs needs and expectations
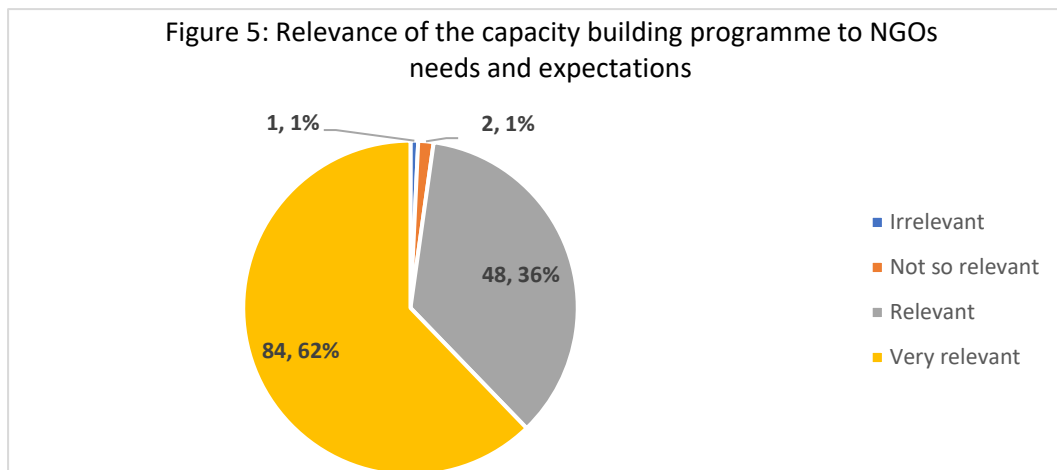
Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

EQ-4: To what extent has the project adapted to the changing external conditions following the change happened at the national level after the Taliban takeover in August 2021 becoming the DFA, and the recent ban on women education and work by the DFA?

Finding 4: The project navigated Afghanistan's challenging political and gender restrictions under the DFA regime through cultural understanding and close communication with NGOs/CSOs. With adopted mitigation measures, like carefully designed NGO eligibility and selection criteria, gender-separated training venues and registration by male *mehram*'s name instead of women's, the project was able to achieve all its results.

The project throughout its duration had to navigate sensitive political context and gender restrictions, since the takeover by the DFA in Afghanistan, which led to a drastic deterioration in the operating environment. The ability to navigate such challenges is attributed to UNDP's understanding of the political specificities and the flexibility shown by the DFA with UN agencies authority, which minimized interference in the project.

The project faced significant challenges in operating under the restrictive policies of the DFA, particularly regarding women's rights and participation in NGOs. The evaluation asserts that UNDP team's understanding of local culture and close communications with NGOs/CSOs helped them navigate challenges, reach compromises, and make careful adjustments to avoid conflict with the DFA. For example, the ban on women working in NGOs, enforced through a decree issued in December 2022, complicated the project's target of supporting 30-50 percent women-led NGOs and to include women in NGO activities and training programmes. Despite that, the project advocated to provide vocational training programmes for women and a solution was introduced to allow male registration of NGOs/CSOs while maintaining women in leadership roles. The project implemented gender-segregated training sessions and relocated some activities to less restrictive regions, while also providing transportation and support for *mehrams* (male guardians). This sensitive approach enabled the project to continue supporting women-led NGOs without provoking direct opposition from the DFA. As a result, the project was able to support 43 percent women-led organizations out of the total supported NGOs/CSOs and to provide trainings to women in five regions, with notable difficulties faced in Kandahar (South) and Jalalabad (East).

The donor community, consisting of 16 donors in Afghanistan, had worries that new NGOs established in the country might be influenced by the DFA, because of that, the selection of NGOs was limited to only those that were registered and operational for at least one year before August 2021. This was an attempt to ensure they were not "puppet" organizations influenced by the DFA, drawing from similar experiences in India and Egypt. On the other side, DFA's concerns about NGOs being tied to the previous regime created mistrust, there was no guarantee the DFA would not ban NGOs or women's employment within them (This risk proved to be real, as restrictions on women in NGOs were enforced). A rigorous NGOs eligibility and prioritization selection criteria was applied by the project requiring them to have a proven track record of performance and accountability, including financial and management records. This mitigation measure helped to manage these risks in a cautious and sensitive approach to avoid legitimizing the DFA, while maintaining the integrity of the project's objectives. The project focused on four key sectors for the low-value grant projects; health, education, agriculture, and livelihoods, in alignment with the World Bank's priorities for Afghanistan, while public infrastructure was almost excluded due to the DFA control. The donor-imposed restrictions, including a ban on publicizing projects or associating them with donor names, constrained the project's ability to promote its work.

4.3 Effectiveness

EQ-5: To what extent did the project achieve its overall outputs? Are the project's contributions to outcomes clear, especially contribution to GEWE? How effective were the strategies used in the implementation of the project completing the activities effectively in terms of quality, quantity, and timing?

Finding 5: The project fully-achieved commitments under Output 1 *'NGO/CSO personnel capacity enhanced on core management functions and service-delivery focused areas'*, despite the challenging operational context. It conducted a mapping exercise of active NGOs/CSOs It enhanced capacities of 4,760 employees of 400 NGOs/CSOs through thematic and on-the-job trainings. Although based on needs assessments and relatively effective, there is room for improvement of content to ensure a differentiated approach tailored to varying NGO capacities.

Output 1

Under Output 1: *'NGO/CSO personnel capacity enhanced on core management functions and service-delivery focused areas',* the project conducted a mapping exercise of active NGOs and CSOs, which was lacking in Afghanistan; existing records from ACBAR [32] and the Ministry of Economy were outdated or incomplete. The mapping exercise identified and verified the activity status of 1,600 organizations out of 3,000 since 2018. The project enhanced capacities of 336 NGOs and 64 CSOs through the provision of specialized training to 4,760 of their employees (2,683 men and 2,077 women, without double counting)[33] on advocacy, community mobilization, conflict resolution, financial management and budgeting, fundraising, grant proposal writing, human resource management, M&E and learning, project design and implementation, strategic planning and organizational development, as well as gender mainstreaming and PSEA. Moreover, the NCCSP provided on-the-job trainings to 210 NGOs/CSOs through thematic experts to ensure NGOs met international standards management

> *Lesson Learned: It is crucial to adopt a diversified and targeted approach to NGOs/CSOs' capacity building through training content and practices that are based on and tailored to their technical and capacity levels; one size does not fit all.*

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[32] ACBAR, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development, is an Afghan independent body bringing together 202 national and international NGOs working in Afghanistan and abiding by the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality and humanity.
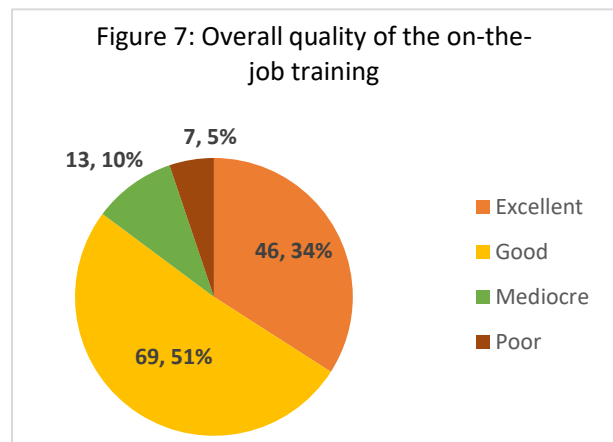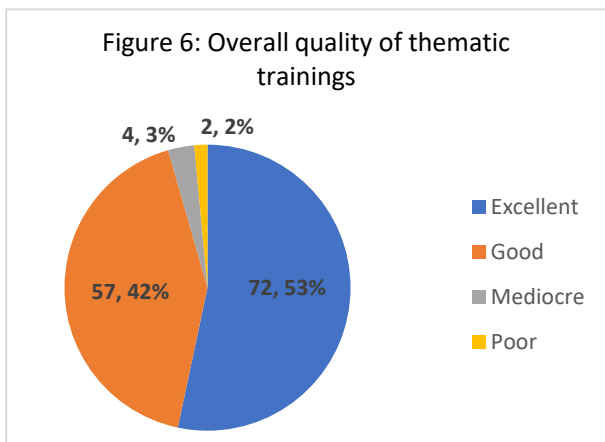[33] NCCSP Progress Report Q2 2024

strategies and policies, the quality of which was reported as satisfactory by 96 percent of them and a 60 percent capacity improvement, according to project monitoring.
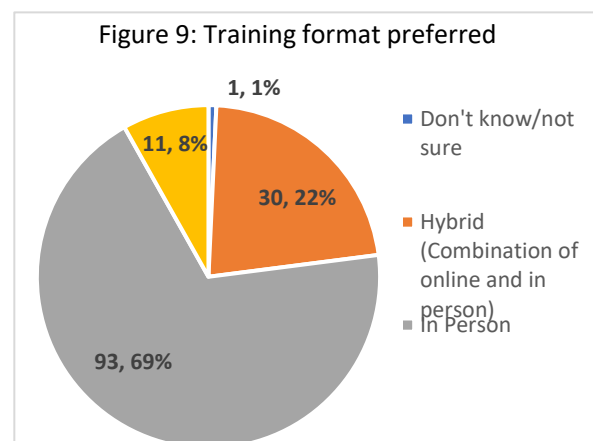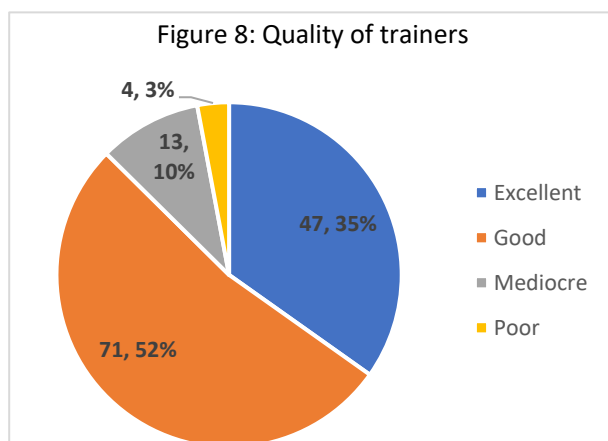
Assessing feedback provided by NGOs' employees during FGDs reflects that the capacity-building activities were relevant and useful, particularly for addressing gaps in financial management, M&E, proposal writing and project management. The NCCSP built NGOs capacities on documentation practices, leading to better-prepared financial documents and reports, and facilitated resource provision, including furniture, which contributed to a more effective operational structure. On-the-job training were valued, especially for their practical application in real-world scenarios. However, they noted significant issues with the training's short duration, limited depth, and some trainers' lack of expertise. More details about the impact of the capacity building are provided under section 4.5.

Although capacity building efforts under Output 1 were preceded by needs assessments that identified organizational capabilities and community needs, customization for each of the supported NGOs was not feasible, the design and content of the trainings seem not to have always considered the specific capacity levels of the target NGOs/CSOs. Analysis of feedback received from most of the NGOs/CSOs' employees, UNDP field staff and few international partners during KIIs and FGDs suggests that a more tailored approach, including gap assessments prior to training, could have made the interventions more relevant to specific organizational needs. Training content was overly theoretical with limited on-the-job practical trainings, coaching and mentoring. For instance, organizations that had previously lost key staff, particularly in finance and IT, found the training beneficial, but others noted certain areas of training were unnecessary for their particular operations. More could be done to ensure adequacy of the capacity building efforts and avoid being theoretical and rushed. For example, applying a differentiated approach by offering two or three customized training levels, from basic to advanced, to match the varying managerial and technical capacities of NGOs. Establishing partnerships between stronger INGOs/NGOs with grassroots ones for the exchange of good practices and knowledge, which could have provided a more meaningful learning experience than relying solely on consultants.

According to the online survey rolled-out under this evaluation, the majority of NGOs' employees benefiting from the capacity building activities found that the overall quality of the thematic trainings and on the job trainings excellent or very good, whereas few found them poor or mediocre, as shown in Figures 6 and 7. 52 percent of the respondents found that the trainers were of good quality, 35 percent found they were of excellent quality, while 17 percent found their quality mediocre or poor, as shown in Figure 8 and 9.

Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

Figure 8: Quality of trainers

- Excellent: 47, 35%
- Good: 71, 52%
- Mediocre: 13, 10%
- Poor: 4, 3%

Figure 9: Training format preferred

- Don't know/not sure: 1, 1%
- Hybrid (Combination of online and in person): 30, 22%
- In Person: 93, 69%
- 11, 8%

Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

Table 3: Indicator results under project Output 1

Indicator	Consultants' assessment of indicator	Baseline	Target	Results
Select NGOs/CSOs received a minimum of six training packages offered under the Project.	The indicator is quantitaively meaurable, achieveable, relevant, however not specific to which 6 trainings would be provided and not time-bound to specific timeframe within the project's duration.	0	400	400
NGOs/CSOs that underwent the Project trainings report improved staff performance in training areas.	Measured through a training outcome survey with 172 NGOs. The indicator would have been more informative if disaggregated by training type to indicate the progress, specific areas for improvement and identify where further support is needed. Gender disaggregation was necessary to assess the extent to which women staff had specifically benefited.	0	60%	99%[34]

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[34] According to Progress Report 2024 Q2

NGO/CSO personnel trained under the Project reporting satisfaction with the capacity building activities.	The indicator would have been more informative if disaggregated by activity type to indicate the progress, specific areas for improvement and identify where further support is needed.	0	70%	92%[35] 85%[36] (thematic training) 95% (on the job training
NGO/CSO personnel trained under the Project reporting satisfaction with the capacity building activities, of which female.	The indicator would have been more informative if disaggregated by activity type to indicate the progress, specific areas for improvement and identify where further support is needed.	0	70%	93%[37]

Finding 6: The project fully-achieved commitments under Output 2 *'NGOs/CSOs benefitting from project grant awards have enhanced their programmes'*, it provided low-value grants to selected 210 NGOs/CSOs used to implement small community projects and strengthen its systems, including 43 percent women-led organizations. The selection process, while following an eligibility and prioritization criteria to ensure transparency and effectiveness, was criticized by some CSOs for a lack of clarity. The grants have been effective to a large extent with evidence of job creation, essential healthcare provision, PSS, and empowerment for women. There is room to improve relevance their relevance to the specific community needs.

Output 2

Under Output 2: *'NGOs/CSOs benefitting from Project grant awards have enhanced their programmes (including women outreach/mobilization and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) mitigation and response mechanisms)'*, the NCCP project provided low-value grants to 195 NGOs and 15 ex-CSOs (210 in total and 91 of them are women-led) from Central North Afghanistan, Northeast, South, Southeast, West, East and Central Highlands. The total value of grants disbursed to all NGOs/CSOs by the project was around USD 10.5 million. The low-value grants were managed according to a Grant Operational Note developed by UNDP as an annex to the NCCSP Project Document in 2022, which described the grants eligibility, priority and selection criteria, negative menu for grant usage, solicitation, agreement, and disbursement, as well as monitoring and reporting. The value of each grant was USD 50,000; USD 20,000 allocated for operations and USD 30,000 for implementation of activities, allowing the NGOs/CSOs to hire personnel and acquire necessary equipment and implement small projects that respond to community needs.

There have been mixed perceptions around the actual application of the set selection criteria for NGOs to receive the low-value grants. Most interviewed UNDP staff confirmed that the selection followed the eligibility and prioritization criteria and that support to newly established NGOs/CSOs that may have potential ties to the DFA was avoided. Priority was given to proposals that clearly outlined activities with higher probability to benefit community members, demonstrated cost-effectiveness, had valid input pricing, included a strong M&E plan and a strategy to sustain operations. Cross-checking

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[35] According to Progress Report 2024 Q2
[36] According to the evaluation survey
[37] According to Progress Report 2024 Q2

with UNDP's field staff, it could be said that, while DFA occasionally intervened in beneficiary selection, NGOs safeguarded the project by adhering to clear selection criteria. When presented with these criteria, DFA accepted the process, and safeguards like verification visits and a GRM ensured an acceptable level of transparency in beneficiary selection and issue resolution. However, the perspective by NGOs/ CSOs was different; the adopted selection and due diligence processes were perceived as unclear, with questions raised about whether UNDP ensured that selected NGOs had proper staffing, organizational structures, and banking systems in place. Many complaints were raised by NGOs/CSOs, it remains unclear if/how UNDP had addressed or communicated about them.

The grant operational procedures allowed each NGO/CSO the freedom to select its focus area of work in the submitted grant proposal, with the idea that this may contribute to building their capacity and increase relevance. This flexibility enabled a broad range of activities to be covered, benefiting many families, particularly women, which was commended by almost all NGOs/CSOs' employees who participated in KIIs or FGDs during the evaluation. However, the evaluation finds that the wide-open nature of the grant scope reduced the ability to create contextually-specific proposals with longer-term economic and social impacts. As such, several projects had only partial alignment with local priorities due to insufficient NGO coordination with relevant ministries and their limited capacity to identify precise local needs in some cases. For instance, some health sector grant proposals were adjusted after the Ministry of Public Health indicated they did not reflect societal needs. In agriculture, a project proposing tablet distribution to farmers was deemed irrelevant and, subsequently, had to be readjusted.

> *Lesson Learned: The complex nature of coordination with the DFA have adversely impacted the implementation of the grant selection and management strategies on ground. For instance, UNDP had applied strict eligibility and prioritization criteria, yet concerns about transparency emerged. Additionally, the flexibility intended for project proposals led to duplication and misalignment with local needs, which may have been avoided had there been possible coordination with legitimate authorities, lacking in Afghanistan.*

Many NGOs/CSOs submitted low-value grants proposals that were almost similar to each other, which seems to have led to issues of duplication. Additionally, many projects were concentrated in the same geographic areas/communities. UNDP acknowledged the time constraints for NGOs/CSOs to work on development of their proposals, which may have limited the opportunity for more innovative and community-specific ideas. These gaps highlight the need for better coordination during the proposal phase, ensuring that projects align with the context in each region. At the same time, it reflects the challenge of balancing the restrictions on engaging with the DFA and the necessity of collaborating with ministries to develop grant proposals and project designs for more efficient and impactful implementation.

The NCCSP worked with NGOs/CSOS of varying expertise levels, ranging from experienced organizations with over 20 years of operations to weaker ones with limited capacity in service delivery. While the project aimed to build the capacity of all participant NGOs, some highly experienced NGOs may not have required inclusion in the low-value grants, which would have better been directed weaker organizations. Some CSOs lacked project implementation experience but were selected to participate due to the DFA ban on CSOs, requiring them to convert to NGOs. These newly formed NGOs faced challenges in adapting to their new roles. Many struggled with reporting and operational capacity, the project helped improve their abilities through direct interventions, including hands-on guidance in project implementation and improving the quality of services delivered to communities. For example, suggesting improvements to the quality of distributed materials and providing training on proper livestock care, directly contributed to enhancing service delivery.

The NCCSP applied the Environmental and Social Code of Practice (ESCOP) framework in its activities, and it was functioning as a management plan for environmental and social risks across the 210 NGOs/CSOs. Risks were identified and mitigated through awareness-raising and proper community engagement, ensuring transparency and inclusivity, which helped them manage moderate risks, protect beneficiary data, especially for women, and emphasized safety measures during activities. There were no reported Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) or security incidents throughout the NCCSP's life cycle, which may likely reflect the effectiveness of these risk management strategies. The project has successfully established and operationalized a GRM, expanding from 9 initial Grievance Redress Committees (GRCs); 8 at the regional level and 1 at the central level. to 210. The project also developed an ESS Management Plan, approved by the World Bank, and provided comprehensive training to NGOs on institutional responsibilities, risks, and mitigation measures. More discussion in relation to the GRM and ESS under section 4.4.

During interviews, almost all stakeholders expressed high satisfaction with the results of the small projects, including NGOs/CSOs, end beneficiaries and UNDP and World Bank staff, which in their views, exceeded expectations given the modest funding. The small projects implemented by the NGOs included vocational trainings for women in several fields, such as livestock, agriculture, tailoring and weaving. They succeeded to cover gaps in service delivery within the community and address systemic behavioural issues. Additionally, the continued monitoring of agricultural projects by local authorities, including technical teams from the Directorate of Agriculture, helped ensure the sustainability of these initiatives. The projects extended activities to include Psychosocial Support (PSS) for women, their participation in these programmes created social bonds, improved mental well-being, and provided economic opportunities, despite the restrictive environment imposed by the DFA. This also included working within community spaces where women could gather and work without societal or DFA interference. One UNDP staff talked about the effectiveness of projects saying that: *"It had a good impact, they are happy with the assistance and especially for girls and women, this was a bad time with a ban on education and work for females. The project gave them hope for their future. and they had been sad and depressed"*.

Table 4: Indicator results under project Output 2

Output 2 : Provision of operational support sub-grants to select NGOs and CSOs				
Indicator	Consultants' assessment of indicator	Baseline	Target	Result
Select NGOs/CSOs provided with operational support sub-grants under this Project.	The indicator is SMART, yet may have been better if time-bound to specific timeframe within the project's duration.	0	200	210
Operational support sub-grants benefitted women-led NGOs/CSOs or delivered activities benefitting primarily women and girls.	The indicator is not specific, it intended to measure two different deliverables; (i) the provision of sub-grants to women-led orgs, or (ii) the delivery of women-targeted acitvities, which leads to lack of clarity during monitoring and reporting. If 43% of supported NGOs are women-led, then it is not clear whether NGOs -in general- that delivered activities targeting	0	30%	43%

	women were included in this percent or not.			
NGOs/CSOs that received sub-grants have continued to be functional in areas of public outreach/community mobilization and/or service delivery for the full duration of the project.	The indicator is SMART	0	100	100%

Finding 7: The project fully achieved its commitment under Output 3 *'NGOs/CSOs benefiting from improved coordination and access to better information and networking'* by establishing what has become the largest NGO Platform in Afghanistan. The platform hosts 751 member NGOs/CSOs. Yet, sustainability beyond the UNDP's support is concerning for all stakeholders, NGOs/CSOs and the UNDP and World Bank staff.

Output 3

Under Output 3: *'NGOs/CSOs benefiting from improved coordination and access to better information and networking'*, the UNDP NGOs network platform newly established by the NCCSP in October 2023 has become the largest NGO platform in Afghanistan, successful in attracting wide membership of NGOs and CSOs, with nearly 751 members. Because smaller organizations in Afghanistan used to face challenges in accessing existing fee-based networks like ACBAR or the Afghan Women Networks that has relocated outside the country, the NCCSP Platform now provides an important alternative that creates an accessible, non-political space for dialogue and collaboration. It is helping to bridge the gap for local organizations through coordination events were held in Kabul with the participation of UN agencies, donors,

> *Lesson Learned A communication plan and exit strategy for Output 3 at the onset could have empowered the platform further and ensured wider visibility and impact and supported long-term sustainability. However, communication efforts may have exposed participants to risk under the DFA's scrutiny, particularly regarding women's access and mobility.*

international and local NGOs, civil society, and networks. Synergies were fostered among NGOs with similar activities, encouraging them to leverage each other's experiences and institutional knowledge to enhance service delivery. However, the Platform's free subscription has put its sustainability beyond the UNDP's support at risk, UNDP has developed a sustainability plan, discussed under EQ-17 and EQ-18.

In an online survey rolled out to NGOs employees, 93 percent strongly agree and agree that the meetings carried out as part of the Platform coordination mechanism has enabled them to improve their networking and knowledge of other opportunities, as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Platform meetings result in improved NGOs' networking and knowledge
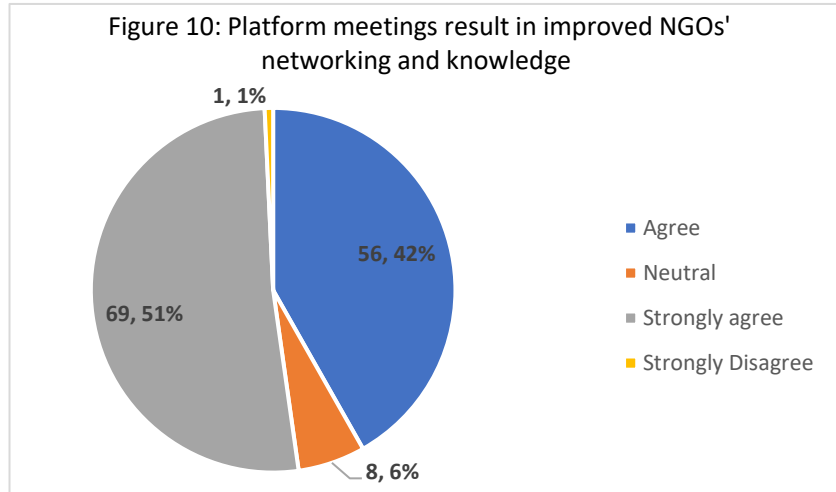
Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

Table 5: Indicator results under project Output 3

Output 3 : Development and Coordination of NGO platform(s)				
Indicator	Consultants' assessment of indicator	Baseline	Target	Result
The NGO platform(s) was established and/or an existing platform was enhanced for national and local NGOs in Afghanistan to represent members of all stakeholders.	The indicator is not specific, it does not allow for measuring the quality of the established platform, it may have included, for example, an indication of a minimum number of member NGOs, or a mention of secific activities to reflect representation/ coordination of members. It is also unclear what enhanced entails.	No	Yes	Yes

EQ-6: Did the capacity support services deliver by NCCSP address the needs of beneficiaries and local communities and were the target beneficiaries reached as expected? (Are there significant differences between male and female beneficiaries?)

Finding 8: The project benefited over 4,760 NGOs/CSOs employees (2,683 men, 2,077 women) and indirectly impacted more than 254,000 people, benefiting more women through the low-value grants. Low-value grants empowered women through small business creation and livelihood projects. However, NGO engagement in decision-making needs improvement to better align activities with local needs and realities.

The project reached a broad spectrum of beneficiaries; NGOs, their employees, and the wider communities in target areas. With approximately 400 NGOs involved, the direct impact extended to over 4,760 of their staff (2,683 men and 2,077 women, without double counting). 210 NGOs received low-value grants, indirectly benefiting more than 254,000 people.[38] The creation of small businesses, especially by women, and capacity-building across various skillsets were noted as key results of the

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[38] NCCSP Progress Report Q2 2024

NCCSP. The projects implemented by NGOs through the NCCSP low-value grants benefited more women than men, particularly through livelihoods projects, focusing on economically empowering women, as they have much fewer livelihoods' opportunities within their communities due to imposed restrictions.

NGOs/CSOs were represented at the SC meetings that were held regularly by the project, however there is room to improve their engagement through national and regional level consultations or events, especially at the beginning of the project. FGDs with NGOs/CSOs reflect that some felt overlooked in broader discussions and do not have any say in decision-making processes, which reflects on the level of relevance of detailed description of activities to the context needs and realities.

EQ-7: What are the key internal and external factors that contributed, affected, or impeded the achievements, and how UNDP and the partners have managed these factors?

Finding 9: The evaluation acknowledges the highly challenging operational realities and risks in Afghanistan in the face of the NCCSP's implementation, including the growing human rights violations on women and girls, the lengthy approval processes by line ministries of NGOs MOUs, their capacity constraints, corruption, and the restrictions by international organizations on development activities. NCCSP, with support by UNDP HQ, effectively navigated these challenges and delt with them with an eye on achieving the project's objectives to the fullest extent possible.

Managing Risks

The NGOs' selection criteria were complex; the NCCSP, including a global compliance check and an enhanced screening in Afghanistan. This involved collecting national IDs from nearly 5,000 beneficiaries and NGOs/CSOs' senior management to ensure accuracy, but submissions received by NCCSP, who in turn had received it from MgtWell, were of poor quality, including duplicate names, mismatches of IDs, outdated photos, low-quality data and language barriers, which significantly increased the time and effort required for data verification.

The Integrated Risk Management Unit (IRMU),[39] established in Afghanistan since the Taliban took over, has been supporting the selection process, however, during the evaluation, they also reported the challenge with the poor quality of data received from NCCSP side with inconsistent or incomplete beneficiary information, leading to significant delays, back-and-forth communication, and additional workload. The second level of due diligence involved verifying partner NGOs, which included confirming their registration and conducting additional checks using other data sources, which ran smoothly once the data was cleaner. Further, due to the large number of partners involved (400 partners), NCCSP faced heightened risks of collusion between NGOs and extortion schemes, where

> *Lesson Learned The integration of UNDP's Integrated Risk Management Unit (IRMU) in Afghanistan was central to support the NCCSP staff in managing risks such as counterterrorism and sanction compliance. Setting clear data quality standards for NGOs during the information submission process is important to identify and manage risks.*

individuals posed as NCCSP staff to solicit portions of grants. The verification process included tracking such risks through a database that analysed NGO participation over time, identifying patterns like family-run organizations or duplicated content in submissions. Plagiarism between NGOs and the use of AI in submissions were also detected during this process.

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[39] The Integrated Risk Management Unit (IRMU) was established in Afghanistan since the DFA took over, modelled after similar units in Yemen, Myanmar and Somalia, to help all UN organizations manage risks proactively and strengthen effective governance through a structured approach to identifying, assessing and mitigating risks associated with their operations. The RRMU supports the UN's efforts in Afghanistan by enhancing data collection, monitoring and evaluation processes, which are crucial for informed decision-making and coordination, especially in challenging environments.

Another risk was caused by the exclusion of CSOs by the DFA and the requirement for licensing led to a decrease in female leadership in NGOs, as many female-led organizations were re-registered under male leadership. This shift also raised concerns about shadow ownership by influential individuals or families seeking to monopolize aid and grants, making it difficult to ascertain the true leadership of organizations on the ground.

Limiting Factors

The restrictions on women and girls in Afghanistan

Legal restrictions and societal norms have had a profound impact on the work of the UNDP in general and the NCCSP in specific. Female-led NGOs faced registration challenges and restrictions on women's work and vocational training delayed grant activities by blocking MOUs and limiting operations in provinces. Since 2020, there has been a significant limitation on women's organizations obtaining licenses, which has severely restricted their ability to operate. Additionally, NGOs are required to have male leadership and are restricted from handling finances, which has made it difficult for them to fully participate in project implementation and operational management, particularly in the rural areas. This compromises the autonomy of women-led organizations and creates distrust when men control their finances. UNDP supported NGOs by adjusting activities and coordinating with DFA, the project team had to advocate vigorously to provide vocational training programmes for women. Despite these challenges, women were trained in five regions, with notable difficulties faced in Kandahar (South) and Jalalabad (East).

Lengthy approval processes and alignment of line ministries

Another challenge stemmed from the requirement for NGOs to secure approval from the DFA's line ministries before signing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with them. This approval process caused significant delays, with some NGOs waiting up to four months, reducing the effective implementation time of their projects, putting NGOs face to face with DFA in rigid lengthy communications. Additionally, inconsistent personnel within the DFA complicated coordination efforts and resulted in a lack of clear policies, exacerbating communication barriers. Likewise, the conversion process of CSOs to NGOs had been challenging as well due to its complexity to CSOs and time requirements

> *Lesson Learned 3: The process of signing MOUs with sectoral ministries under the DFA in Afghanistan often took over two months, which should be factored into project's workplans from the onset and an inception phase is therefore necessary to focus on securing these agreements as needed for UNDP's partners and NGOs.*

In field visits during this evaluation, it was observed that this issue was experienced by almost all the visited NGOs' projects. As a result, NGOs had to modify activities to avoid leaving grant funds unspent. This led to challenges in the proposed small projects' design and implementation, with many defaulting to tailoring due to time constraints. Additionally, ministries often demanded changes to proposed activities, particularly those focused on women's health or education, necessitating further adjustments to comply with ministry requirements. Even after MoU approval, discrepancies between the ministries and local authorities caused further disruptions, including the halting of activities and additional revisions, reflecting a lack of alignment between various levels of the DFA. This was raised during FGDs where NGOs' employees recognized the high magnitude of challenges posed by the DFA, calling at the same time for a more flexible approach by UNDP to communicate with sectoral ministries, which is not possible.

Constraining regulations by Health Authorities to NGOs' scope of work

Another limiting factor was the new regulations implemented by health authorities, which prohibited NGOs from conducting awareness-raising and psychosocial activities unless these were facilitated through Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) centres. Consequently, NGOs engaged in such

activities were required to either adjust their programming or shift their target communities to ensure that services could be provided through local clinics and basic health centres. This change has posed significant challenges in maintaining the effectiveness and reach of essential support services within the target communities.

Capacity constraints and administrative delays

Capacity limitations among CSOs and NGOs posed a persistent challenge in the project. The political transition caused by the Taliban's rise to power led to a significant loss of qualified personnel across many organizations, including NGOs and CSOs. Many skilled staff fled the country or applied for relocation to other countries, and the remaining teams were often inexperienced, exacerbating the capacity gap. This 'brain drain' left many institutions with insufficient staffing unable to efficiently manage projects, further delaying progress and quality of project's results. The recruitment of new staff, many of them through UN Volunteers (UNV), was essential but time-consuming. Furthermore, many of the newly recruited personnel required additional capacity-building efforts. Many organizations struggled to meet reporting requirements, with delays in submitting monthly reports and difficulties in adhering to the reporting format. This necessitated frequent revisions and close follow-up from the UNDP team. Furthermore, delays in disbursing the second tranche of low-value grants were caused by the need to ensure that MOUs were signed, and sufficient progress was reported. Lastly, the absence of clear guidelines on NGO licensing under the current regime complicated the grant distribution process, as CSOs were not certified and lacked the legal and financial infrastructure (such as bank accounts) necessary to receive grants. As a result, many CSOs had to re-register as NGOs, further delaying implementation.

Restrictions on longer-term development activities by international organizations

There are rooms for improvement in coordination between the DFA and donors including the World Bank.While the World Bank suggested avoiding collaboration with the DFA, coordination was necessary for successful implementation. A major challenge that faced the project -and UNDP in general- was trying to hit a balance between the actual needs, including humanitarian needs and the long-term development goals. Donors were highly cautious about supporting activities that could be perceived as legitimizing the DFA, limiting funding to life-saving projects and small community infrastructure improvements. However, the absence of development projects threatened the long-term recovery and stability of Afghanistan's civil society, as humanitarian projects alone could not sustain or rebuild the civilian infrastructure. UNDP faced the difficult task of maintaining a focus on long-term recovery and economic empowerment, particularly for women, while adhering to donor restrictions. A cautious, low-profile communication strategy was adopted by the project to avoid endangering beneficiaries and provoking the DFA. This approach, while necessary, limited the project's visibility and hindered advocacy efforts.

Contributing factors
UNDP's close support and strong field presence

UNDP's consistent support was a key factor in the project's success, evident through impactful training sessions and regular field visits that facilitated effective implementation. The team's assistance to NGOs to navigate challenges posed by the DFA at the regional level, including guidance during negotiations, contributed to overcoming obstacles. One NGO employee said during FGD: *"UNDP team were very cooperative and supportive and not to be discouraged and they were very supportive. When we faced any problem, they were there and had the courage to move us forward. They were very professional. We developed our skills also and we did not have any issues with them"*. Additionally, promoting community ownership by involving local leaders in project phases fostered trust and responsiveness, ensuring that activities aligned with cultural sensitivities and community needs. This collaborative approach enhanced project effectiveness and sustainability.

UNDP's adaptability

UNDP's adaptability was a crucial success factor for the project, enabling it to effectively navigate the DFA's political and gender restrictions. By demonstrating cultural understanding and flexible strategies, such as gender-segregated training and male registration for NGOs, UNDP ensured continued support for women-led organizations and NGOs/CSOs while they avoid conflict with the DFA. The project was extended for four months to compensate for the delayed start caused by lengthy MoUs signatures between NGOs/CSOs and DFA.

Interest and ownership by stakeholders

The NCCSP aligned well with the needs of the civil society sector and relatively to the needs of community groups, particularly women under societal pressures. Strong interest and motivation from NGOs/CSOs, beneficiaries and stakeholders fostered resilience and contributed to NCCSP's success.

EQ-8: To what extent have UNDP partners, NGOs and local stakeholders been involved in project implementation following a participatory approach? To what extent stakeholders and beneficiaries are satisfied with the benefits they received.

Finding 10: The NCCSP design incorporated lessons from previous civil society initiatives, such as I-PACS and *Tawanmandi*, to enhance NGO capacities in Afghanistan. The evaluation found that stakeholder input was partially integrated, and community leaders, involving elders, fostered trust and greater ownership, ensuring successful small projects' implementation.

The design of the NCCSP was informed by lessons learned from past initiatives to build capacities of the civil society sector in Afghanistan, including the Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS Phase I and II) and *Tawanmandi*.[40] Analysis of feedback received through field data collection, the evaluation finds that the design process was collaborative to some extent, it included input from stakeholders and was implemented across various provinces. NGOs/CSOs involved community leaders, such as elders, mullahs, imams and shura councils and local authorities, who found the small projects successful although was short, this fostered trust and ownership among beneficiaries and respect for cultural norms and encouraging community support.

4.4 Efficiency

EQ-9: How cost-effective was the project? Were the financial resources used appropriately to achieve the intended results?

Finding 11: Of the USD 20 million NCCSP project budget, 52.5 percent was allocated to low-value grants for NGOs/CSOs. Delays in finalizing MoUs between NGOs and the DFA initially slowed expenditure. NGOs found the USD 50,000 grant size limiting for project scope, but this was considered appropriate given their often-limited capacities.

Out of the total project budget of US$ 20 million, as shown in Table 6 the highest portion is allocated to Output 2 'Operational Support Grants to Select NGOs/CSOs' at 5 57.6 percent (US$ 11,530,569.73), followed by Output 1 'Mapping and Capacity Strengthening of NGOs/CSOs' at 24.6 percent (US$ 4,932,206.50)), then Output 4 'Development and Coordination of NGO Platform' at 14.4percent (US$ 2,884,655.49) and Output 3 'Management and Operations' at 0.7percent (US$ 142,547.46).

Table 6: Project Budget and Expenditures

	Output Area	Budgeted	Expenditures as of 31 Aug 2024	Execution Rate
1	Output 1	$4,938,059	$4,932,206.50	100%

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[40] NCCSP Project Document 2022

2	Output 2	$11,495,423	$11,530,569.73	100%
3	Output 3	$315,800	$142,547.46	45%
4	Output 4	$3,250,719	$2,884,655.49	99%
5	**Total**	**$20,000,000**	**$19,489,979.18**	**97%**

Source: Project Financial Records

The budget allocations across the different components were efficient, the expenditure rate was slow at the beginning of the project lifetime due to delayed start and lengthy MoU process for the low-value grants to NGOs/CSOs. The value of the grants was USD 50,000 to all NGOs and projects, which only allowed implementation of limited size community projects. The evaluation was unable to determine the methodology used to calculate the grant value from a community-needs perspective, the value was decided considering the amount of budget available for the grant and the target number of the NGOs/CSOs to be supported with grant, which is 200 in the original plan.

However, it appears that the grant was selected based on its suitability for addressing the risks associated with the limited capacities of many NGOs and CSOs. Feedback from many interviewed employees and UNDP staff showed that higher value grants could have allowed for wider reach and continuation, one NGO employee mentioned during one FGD: *"There are some negative elements, the fund was very small, and we could not move on and is not sustainable for a long time. An INGO would implement this with USD 1 million but we did it with a small grant and we could not save our personnel and when this is done everything is done".* Nevertheless, the value is. Budget for PSEA activities was limited, which constrained the ability of the project to conduct face-to-face training sessions to target NGOs employees and had to shift to online trainings with less effectiveness, as shared by interviewed UNDP staff.

EQ-10. What systems and tools were developed and implemented for the Social and Environmental Safeguarding? What challenges were experienced during the implementation of the tools? How has it contributed to the quality of the project implementation?

Finding 12: The established GRM is one of the strongest elements of the NCCSP project, it handled over 1,420 grievances, enhanced capacities of and compliance by NGOs/CSOs and ensured voices of beneficiaries are heard. Other ESS measures included OSH and PSEA being integrated into their operations, leading to improved project planning, safer training environments and better community awareness. M&E activities were adequate with quality reporting, however with focus on process monitoring, also, the delayed disbursement of the low-value grants did not allow for post-grant monitoring.

Environmental and Social Code of Practice
Initially, communities and NGOs/CSOs lacked understanding of ESS, they often relied on security personnel for safeguards, as a result of capacity building by the project on ESCOP to NGOs/CSOs employees and ESS focal points. According to this survey Figure 12 that was rolled out under this evaluation, more than half (54 percent) of them found the overall quality of the training excellent 36 percent found it good. They reported becoming familiar with principles such as ESS standards, grievance case management, PSEA, conflict resolution and the 'do no harm' approach. There is evidence of application of ESS measures within their work, for example, they established GRCs, beneficiary feedback mechanisms, selection of safe gender-convenient venues for training, integrating OSH, as well as planning and budgeting for these measures. The project's awareness sessions provided to wider communities through NGOs increased understanding of critical environmental health and safety matters related to projects in agriculture, such as proper chemical storage and safe disposal of deceased livestock.

The implementation of GRM, ESS and PSEA mechanisms has empowered female aid workers, making them feel more comfortable and aware of appropriate behaviour in their roles and empowered women on how to recognize and report harassment. It also helped NGOs/CSOs and the community members to more clearly understand the operational boundaries and environment in the contexts where they work. The UNDP GRM team, composed of one woman and two men, oversaw the implementation of ESS across the NGOs, ensuring compliance with the ESCOP, they conducted regular visits and meetings in person or online to supported NGO projects.
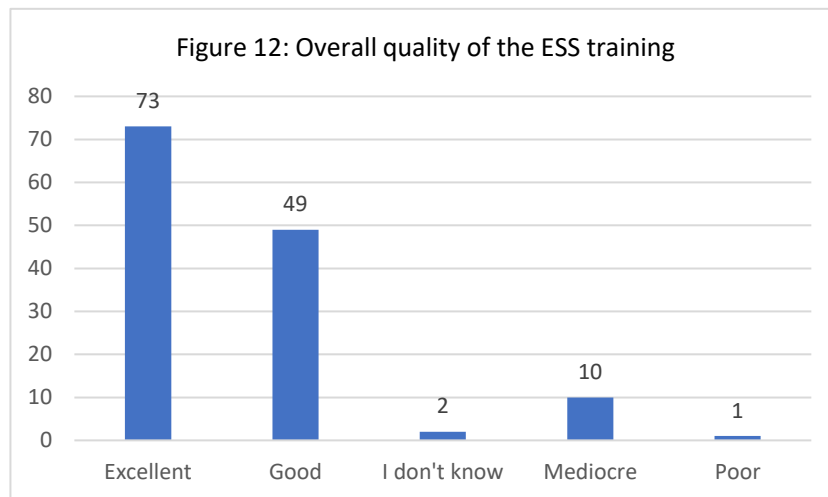
Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

Grievance Redress Mechanism

The GRM was the primary ESS system established by the NCCSP project in alignment with the World Bank and UNDP ESS standards,[41] and is an important achievement by the project, it was highlighted as a success during the CO audit and is considered a best practice for other projects. It was also described during this evaluation by UNDP HQ staff as and effective and most engaging GRM compared to other UNDP projects. Additionally, almost all NGOs participating in the evaluation survey found it was of excellent or good overall quality as reflected in Figure 13. Although this led to more allegations being reported, it was seen as a positive sign of transparency and trust in the system. As of September 2024, 1,421 grievances, suggestions and queries were received and were reported to be handled in a timely manner.[42] However, it remains unclear how was it ensured that NGOs did not withhold reporting grievances for fear of damaging their reputation. The nature of the grievances shifted over time, initially, they came from NGOs, particularly regarding non-selection for capacity building or logistical issues (related to the first project output) or non-eligibility for receiving the low-value grants offered by the NCCSP. They then became more about cases of beneficiary dissatisfaction about specific services provided by the NGOs/CSOs, including complaints about delayed trainings, insufficient material for tailoring courses and sometimes the competency of trainers. In response, NGO-level GRCs were

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[41] UNDP.2021. Social and Environmental Standards UNDP Social and Environmental Standards | United Nations Development Programme
[42] This total includes 328 grievances, 993 inquiries, and 100 suggestions received since the project's inception.

developed with a chairperson, deputy, and members from local communities with diverse representation, including nominated ESS focal points and the NCCSP Regional GRM Coordinators.

The established NGO GRCs received training by the project on GRM, which was found excellent by 64 percent of participants and good by 29 percent. Multiple communication channels were established between the communities and NGOs/CSOs through the GRM to ensure accountability. Posters were distributed and beneficiaries were able to contact the project directly via email, WhatsApp, mobile calls, or toll-free number 410. Additionally, NGO-level GRCs were encouraged to hold monthly and bi-weekly meetings to update beneficiaries, discuss progress, share service-related information transparently.

Figure 13: Overall quality of the GRM training
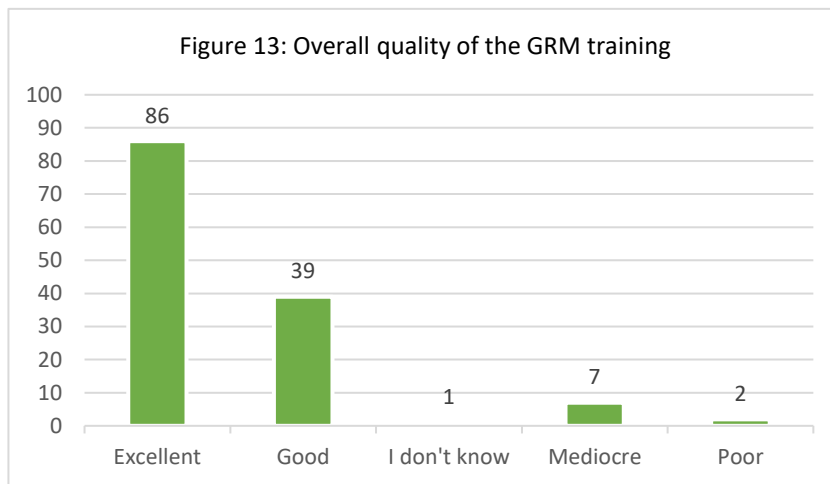
Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

Monitoring, Reporting and Compliance

Monitoring comes across as one of the most efficient systems adopted by the NCCSP. The project's logical framework was logic with well-articulated causal links between the development objective, medium and long-term outcomes, and outputs. The indicators were well-defined and clear, incorporating a balanced mix of both quantitative and qualitative measures. However, some indicators were not specific nor time-bound, [43] which was compensated by the diverse qualitative and quantitative monitoring activities and regular detailed reporting on progress by the UNDP team, albeit with more focus on process monitoring. The M&E component designed for the project entailed conducting mapping, needs assessment, preparing and delivery of training activities, which the project conducted under Output 1. The design initially planned to depend on UNDP's M&E capacity together with a third party monitoring to monitor progress towards outputs are ensure funds reach the intended beneficiaries of the low-value grants through and verify a sample of project activities implemented by UNDP's implementing partners and cross-reference verifications. During implementation, no third

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[43] For example, outcome indicator 'NGO/CSO personnel capacity enhanced in core management and service delivery focused areas' does not specify which capacity is being measured and over how much time. Likewise, indicator 'Operational support sub-grants benefitted women-led NGOs/ CSOs or delivered activities benefitting primarily women and girls' does not specify what type of benefit will be measured and the activities over how long. Output 3 indicator 'The NGO platform(s) was established and/or an existing platform was enhanced for national and local NGOs' does not allow measuring the quality of the platform or the level of accessibility and usefulness for the NGOs.

party was hired for monitoring or verification activity. Monitoring depended primarily on the UNDP M&E staff who conducted hundreds of site visits to the project activities across regions every quarter and rolled out satisfactory surveys and post-grant surveys. However, because some grants were only disbursed to NGOs/CSOs towards the end of the project, post-grant monitoring is so far insufficient. There was limited time for quality checks, documentation, and monitoring of project outcomes. There is a need to ensure timely grant distribution and more robust post-grant monitoring at an earlier stage to assess project success and impact.

The World Bank followed its customary practice of supervising all operations, including those led by UNDP, through supervision missions reviewing processes across management, procurement, and HR, ensuring accountability to donors and project stakeholders. These missions also tracked the progressive effectiveness of implementation and propose improvements in project management. UNDP submits quarterly progress reports to the World Bank, which were found of good quality and adequate level of detail, including reporting on cross-cutting issues and challenges.

At the NGOs' level, many struggled to submit accurate progress reports as requested by the NCCSP, even after repeated guidance during field visits. According to feedback from UNDP staff, most NGOs demonstrated good communication and coordination, only a few had difficulties, also, cooperation during the project monitoring visits and facilitating beneficiary engagement were generally positive.

EQ-11: To what extent were the inputs and strategies identified realistic, appropriate, and adequate to achieve the results?

Finding 13: The NCCSP was managed through the UNDP's Kabul office, regional teams in provinces and NGOs/CSOs who implemented the low-value grant projects, with adequate human resources in terms of expertise and size. However, the simultaneous disbursement of low-value grants to NGOs created workload for staff, which was reduced by dividing the implementation into two rounds. Female UNDP staff played equal roles as male despite restrictions by the DFA, while their counterparts at NGOs faced limitations, particularly on their leadership. Delays in MoU approvals by the DFA slowed implementation.

Human Resources

The NCCSP was implemented by the UNDP team in Kabul and eight regional offices and also through the firms and network of NGOs through a Project Implementation Unit (PIU) composed of international and national officers and support staff, in addition to filed monitors. Human resources in terms of size and capacity were adequate, including GRM and monitoring personnel, which ensured the project's efficient and effective implementation. 36 percent of the NCCSP non-support staff were women (8 out of a total of 22). The national women staff within UNDP are vocal and influential and positioning within the project. Female focal points are primarily working online due to challenges posed by the DFA, in some provinces, in-person training is feasible, while in others, online sessions are more practical. Because most of the low-value grants for NGOs/CSOs started almost at the same time, the UNDP project staff underscored that it was tough to manage, follow-up and support them all at the same time. This was addressed by dividing the implementation into two rounds; the first batch of agreements was signed in October 2023 and the second signed in February 2024. From NGOs FGDs, it is concluded that UNDP demonstrated strong coordination with them throughout the project duration, providing timely communication and feedback from the application stage to implementation. The team offered essential training on PSEA and environmental safeguards, along with consistent engagement through monthly reporting. However, there is a need for improved negotiations with the DFA at the Kabul level to secure better funding for capacity building, as the current administrative cost acceptance limits the sustainability of NGOs.

The evaluation reflects on the positive feedback by the interviewed staff of the donor, the World Bank, on the project's efficient performance and effective outcomes. One staff mentioned that: *"From the start, we had low expectations given the context, but the UNDP team surpassed very much every target and did much better than we thought and this project was well led despite the challenges, it was also well designed by UNDP after we spotted a real need and went for it".* The NCCSP was supported by the World Bank through a dedicated small team performing key roles. like a task leader, ESS focal point, financial and procurement experts, along with cross-cutting support for social development and operational issues.

At the NGO level, staffing faced internal challenges due to the DFA's refusal to accept female leaders in top positions within NGOs, leading to disagreements and dissatisfaction among employees. UNDP intervened to mediate the situation by facilitating meetings, providing coaching and fostering collaboration within the NGOs, which helped to ease tension and promoted smoother working relationships as reported by UNDP interviewed staff. There is a male dominated culture within NGOs, where the women in the NGO community are seen as having less voice and influence compared to their male counterparts. Some NGOs were able to bring the women to the field and the community elders would speak with the DFA and explain why women were needed for the livelihoods projects to deal with female beneficiaries and so some women were allowed.

Other challenges within NGOs is the insufficient HR, for example the lack of a dedicated focal point for PSEA within the project. While focal points were assigned, they held multiple roles, such as M&E, leading to limited focus on PSEA. NGOs also expressed concerns, suggesting that managing these responsibilities alongside others warranted larger value grants to compensate for the increased workload. Despite this, the issue was not seen as a significant obstacle to project implementation. Feedback from UNDP staff shows that there is need for a dedicated EES and GRM staff played a critical role in managing responsibilities and resolving internal disputes within NGOs early in the project.

The SC of the project played a role in overseeing the project's implementation, it included representation from the UNDP, the World Bank, the Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce, and Industry (AWCCI),[44] UN-Women and selected NGOs representatives. The committee ensured that the project could align with its objectives, address any challenges, and make necessary adjustments. The SC was very active and held regular meetings that were described by the few interviewed representatives as collaborative and inclusive, one mentioned that *"With over 12 participants, meetings allowed sharing ideas and holding the project accountable. UNDP was recognized for its inclusive approach, listening to feedback from participants and creating a space for equal participation and shared responsibility*." In the latest meetings, concerns around sustainability were raised and discussed.

Timeliness

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[44] The Chamber of Commerce offers one of the few spaces where women can operate without restrictions. The organization has a widespread presence, with offices in 19 locations and focal points in 14 provinces, providing crucial support for women entrepreneurs. Despite challenges, the chamber has continued to operate and host exhibitions, advocating for businesswomen and separating the business sector from humanitarian aid efforts.

The nature of capacity strengthening interventions as well as those focusing on GEWE require a longer timeframe for implementation to make change and achieve intended results. The project's capacity-building efforts were limited by time constraints, leaving certain standards incomplete, for example in relation to PSEA that required more time to solidify the project's impact on NGOs at the institutional and individual levels.

> *Lesson Learned: The capacity-building efforts revived NGOs and reconnected them with their communities, the short duration of the NCCSP as a whole, as well as the duration of the small low-value grant projects -only six months-limited its long-term impact. NGOs may not be able to sustain progress without continued support from UNDP, thus jeopardizing the long-term viability of the skills, systems and the platform developed.*

There has been a delayed start of the project activities and procurement, which, coupled with bureaucratic hurdles and restrictions by the DFA, has reduced the time available for the implementation of activities. Some small projects of the low-value grants supported NGOs were specifically affected due to additional delayed MOUs approvals by the authorities. Interviews show that the UNDP team underwent a learning curve, facing delays at the beginning, then compensated throughout 2023 and 2024 with accelerated implementation. The project was extended for four months to compensate for the delayed start caused by lengthy MoUs signatures between NGOs/CSOs and DFA.

Although the project successfully addressed needs several NGOs voiced concerns over the project's short timeline. The termination of the NCCSP without a follow-up plan was compared to *"taking someone out of the water only to throw them back in".* Many beneficiaries and NGOs face uncertainty, as they were just beginning to rebuild their capacity and economic independence when the project ceased. The limited duration raised questions about long-term sustainability and the risk of regression for both NGOs and communities. Some NGOs received an extension of the projects' timeline by two months, which helped completion, highlighting UNDP's responsiveness to the project's challenges when feasible.

4.5 Impact

EQ-12: To what extent is the project likely to contribute to improved capacity at the individual (employees of NGOs/CSOs) and institutional level (management and operations)? How significant are the changes to the NGOs/CSOs, their employees and communities that will be created because of the NCCSP?

Finding 14: Overall, the NCCSP project played a pivotal role in empowering Afghanistan's NGO sector, which had been the backbone of service delivery, gaining opportunities for growth, secure funding and legal stability and create a sense of collaboration with each other. The project's thematic and on-the-job training on 10 modules, combined with hands-on implementation of the low-value grants, significantly built the capacity of NGOs, and provided them practical techniques to function at higher standards and address operational challenges. Most importantly, the UNDP improved perceptions and acceptance by DFA of NGOs/CSOs work, including with focus on women and girls.

Key outcomes of the capacity building activities provided by the NCCSP to NGOs/CSOs include enhancements in financial management practices with improved operational efficiency, such as procurement procedures, accounting systems and resource mobilization. NGOs have demonstrated increased adherence to ESS standards, applying measures on ground through their small projects and services and integrating in their planning, budgeting, HR practices and monitoring processes. Most NGOs have developed PSEA policies, appointed focal points and incorporated PSEA clauses in contract agreements. While focal points train and raise awareness among beneficiaries on PSEA, it is too early to assess pertinent impact on communities. The project has led to improved awareness among NGOs

about their licenses and the importance of balancing financial accountability with project implementation.

210 NGOs/CSOs received low-value grants, 160 of them are women-led, many had been inactive for years due to a lack of resources. This provided crucial funding opportunities and fostered a sense of solidarity and a meaningful platform for collaboration amongst them. Because priority was given by the project to NGOs with limited financial resources, many credited the grants for their survival as indicated during FGDs under this evaluation. During FGDs, one NGO employee mentioned *"we were dormant, had no projects and nothing to do, based on this project, we have an office and can work from there, we have relationship with the 215 people who were our beneficiaries, we have the capacity and connected with the community and know their needs and what they want"*.
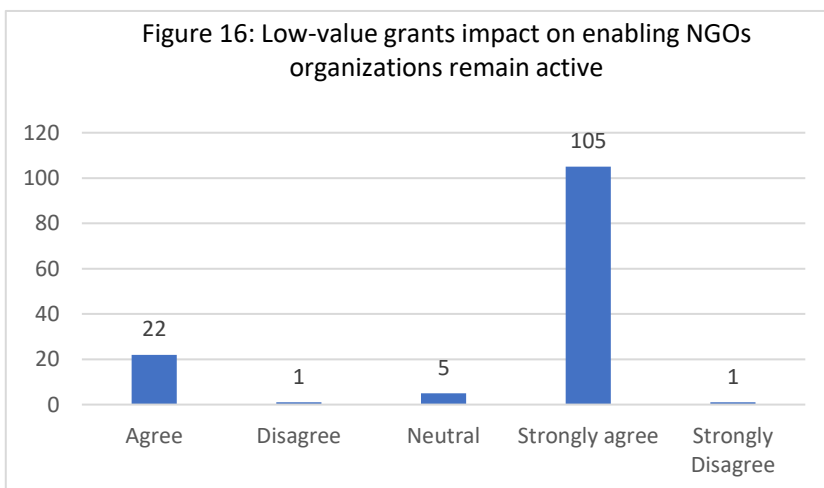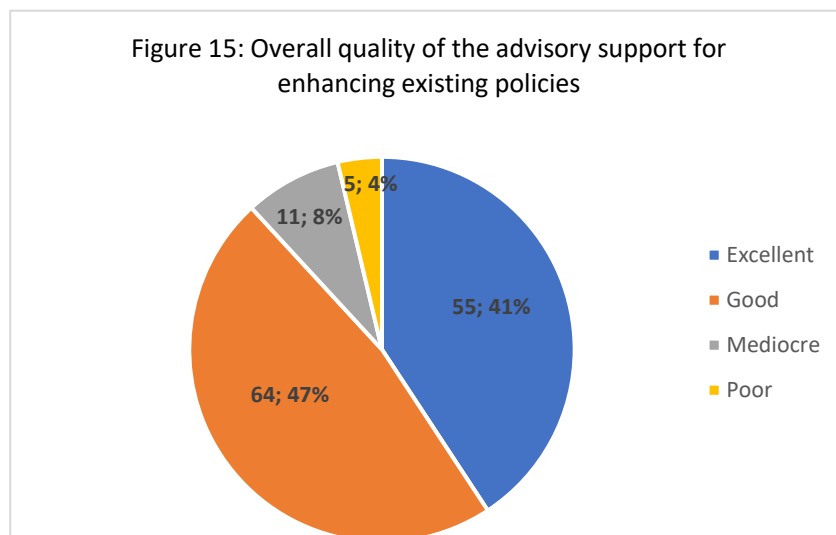
NGOs/CSOs gained experience in communication and stakeholder engagement which seem to have helped them establish stronger relationships with local communities and with the DFA at both central and provincial levels. NGOs are able to engage with line ministries, governors, and other authorities, ensuring their presence and recognition within the community, this strengthened visibility has afforded NGOs a greater degree of operational space within the country. According to feedback from UNDP and World Bank staff during the evaluation, prior to this project, such engagements were less structured, leading to NGOs and international institutions operating without clear frameworks. In certain provinces, particularly Kandahar, security concerns and difficulty in signing MoUs with the DFA have made it challenging for NGOs to organize awareness sessions for female beneficiaries. However, areas like Mazar, Herat, and Kabul have experienced fewer obstacles. One NGO employee expressed during FGD: *"Two years ago, when we speak with the DFA, they did not like NGOs but this project with UNDP was like a revolution and make a lot of money and work and solve problems and bring a good view for the DFA and the thinking of DFA is different from DFA side. NGO activities is becoming normal DFA."*

The mapping of 1,600 NGOs and CSOs across Afghanistan serves as an important comprehensive resource to the donor community and international organizations, updating the status of organizations that are still functioning in the country post-August 2021 and renewing their licenses. Additionally, the establishment of a national platform in October 2023 saw high participation of NGOs in a relatively short time, marking a key achievement by the project. Being inclusive and accessible to all NGOs and CSOs, regardless of financial capacity, this platform seems to be able to foster collaboration and further strengthen local organizations in a more effective way than other fee-based networks, such as the ACBAR and the Afghan NGO Coordination Bureau (ANCB).[45] While existing networks predominantly attract INGOs due to higher fees, it offers either free or low-cost membership, making it more accessible to national NGOs, with monthly meetings growing from 300 to nearly 500 participants. To ensure continuation beyond the project, UNDP has developed a sustainability plan for the platform (more details in EQ-17).

During FGDs with NGOs, it was evident that the NCCSP project helped to create a robust network among NGOs, allowing them to share knowledge, best practices, and resources. This collaboration was deemed a significant achievement of the project. The expansion of communication channels and relationships between NGOs/CSOs enabled collective problem-solving and reinforced community connections. This network-building component is seen as crucial for future resilience and for maintaining the momentum of the project's initiatives.

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[45] The Afghan NGO Coordination Bureau (ANCB) was founded in 1991 as a network of national NGOs in Afghanistan, coordinating the activities among its members with the Government, International organizations, UN and donor agencies. ANCB strives to enhance the capacity of its member organizations and build partnerships with other organizations.

According to the online survey rolled-out under this evaluation, 77 percent (104 out of 134) of UNDP-supported NGOs find that they have a very good ability to fulfil their objectives and coordinate with stakeholders at the provincial and national levels and 20 percent (27 out of 134) rated their ability as good. Responses provided by the surveyed NGOs are shown in Figures 14 and 15 reflecting that the NGOs benefited most from the extensive capacity-building initiatives, including technical training, ongoing coaching, followed by financial support in the form of the low-value grants. Many NGOs reported that efforts enhanced organizational operations, improved employee skills, supported gender integration and strengthened financial management. Many NGOs indicated gaining experience in project implementation, report writing and accountability measures like PSEA. Additionally, the support empowered communities by providing vocational training, particularly for women, and enabled NGOs to better serve vulnerable populations. Few (12 out of 134) NGOs mentioned that the project also facilitated networking with UN agencies and other NGOs, boosting visibility and sustainability. Further, the vast majority the NGOs described the overall quality of the advisory support for enhancing their existing policies as excellent (41 percent) and good (47 percent). Further, the vast majority of NGOs indicated that the provided low-value grants have enabled their organizations to remain active, where 78 percent strongly agree, and 16 percent agree, as shown in Figure 16.

Figure 14: Ability to fulfill objectives and coordinate with stakeholders

- Fair
- Good
- Very good
- Very poor

2; 2%   2; 2%
27; 20%
104; 77%

Figure 15: Overall quality of the advisory support for enhancing existing policies

- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Poor

5; 4%
11; 8%
55; 41%
64; 47%

Figure 16: Low-value grants impact on enabling NGOs organizations remain active

Agree	22
Disagree	1
Neutral	5
Strongly agree	105
Strongly Disagree	1
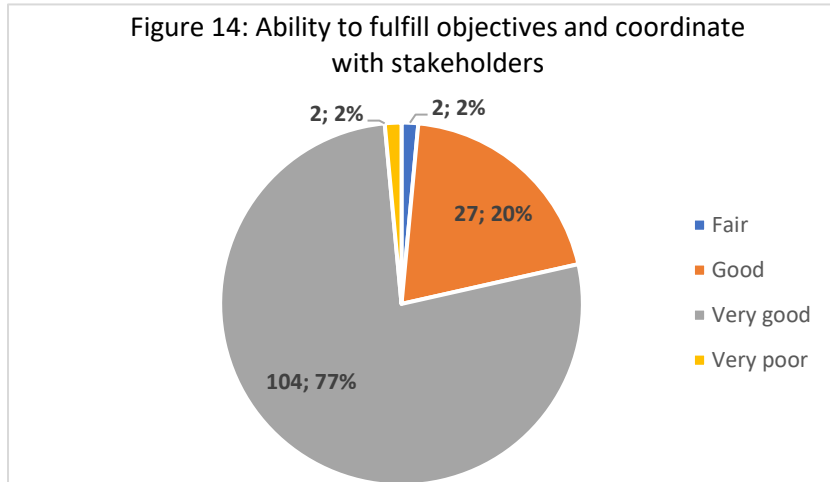
Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

Table 6: Indicator results under the project Development Objective

Development Objective : Enhancing capacities, sustaining operations and strengthening cooperation of select NGOs and CSOs				
Indicator	Consultants' assessment of indicator	Baseline	Target	Result
NGO/CSO personnel capacity enhanced in core management and service delivery focused areas	The indicator is smart, but may have been better monitored if time-bound. It also requires gender disaggregation to measure beneits to women personnel in NGOs	0	50%	60%
Share of NGOs/CSOs trained in GBV prevention and response and demonstrating proper protocols in-place to support survivors of GBV	The indicator is smart, yet may have been better monitored if time-bound	0	100%	100%
NGOs/CSOs benefiting from improved coordination and access to better information and networking	The indicator is not specific as to what improvement is implied, indicatrion to unit measurement of coordination or accessibility to information is required.	0	70%	93%

EQ-13 What positive and/or negative changes are the beneficiaries experiencing because of their participation in NCCSP activities?

Finding 15: The evaluation attests to the positive change on the supported beneficiaries by the NGOs' small projects. The transformative impact is evident, for example, livelihoods projects enabled participants to establish income-generating projects improving their financial independence and social standing. Education projects increased school enrolment and enhanced classroom conditions, fostering a better learning environment for children at schools and improving learning of languages and computer for young people. Agriculture projects improved crop productivity and climate resilience, while health projects promoted better hygiene practices and maternal care, addressing critical healthcare gaps. However, the short project duration raises concerns about the sustainability of these gains without continued UNDP support.

As a result of the **livelihoods** projects implemented by NGOs through the NCCSP low-value grants, beneficiaries acquired vocational skills, particularly in business and vocations such as livestock, farming, dairy production, tailoring, embroidery, and weaving. Vocational training graduates, for example, including women who lost jobs due to the conflict were trained to start businesses, were able to earn money by tailoring clothes, while poultry project participants sold eggs to support their livelihoods. This enabled them to increase sales of their products and improve their livelihoods. It could be safely confirmed that the project was transformative; transforming women's roles from passive home-bound individuals to active economic contributors, and supported men with no access to livelihood opportunities with skills to find jobs and increase incomes.

> *Lesson Learned: Given the complex, varying and unconventional context and needs across different regions in Afghanistan, NGOs may benefit from additional knowledge on the specificities of local needs and additional priorities. More guidance from UNDP's side and stronger coordination and integration would ensure that NGOs can identify and respond better to community livelihood needs. Additionally, a uniform six-month duration for all NGO projects, regardless of activity type, was limiting.*

Analysis of feedback from FGDs with employees of NGOs/CSOs confirms that the project played a significant role in improving the economic resilience of beneficiaries through livelihoods training, especially in areas like tailoring, literacy and entrepreneurship, their vocational skills are improved and some started microenterprises. Tailoring programmes, in particular, were successful in helping women establish local businesses, contributing to economic stability and reducing domestic violence. Multiple organizations highlighted how the projects fostered social cohesion and economic independence for women in both Kabul and rural areas. However, there is concern about the short duration of the project and whether these gains will be sustainable without continued support. However, similar to observations by the evaluators during field visits, the short duration of the project (six months) limited its long-term impact.

This transformation was observed during site visits carried-out during this evaluation to the livelihoods projects, including the one implemented by the Women Cooperation Organization for Development (WCOD) NGO in Bamiyan, which focused on empowering women through quilt production. 50 women were trained to produce quilts, which enhanced their vocational capacities and financial independence. It was observed how women are dedicated and interested to learn and work, they shared that the project proved essential to help addressing their economic needs, particularly those affected by GBV, IDPs and disaster-affected families. The sustained demand for quilts ensures ongoing benefits, though improving coordination and training would bolster long-term outcomes. Further, the project positively affected gender dynamics, elevating the role of women in both household and community settings. However, challenges such as communication delays with UNDP and inadequate training quality hindered efficiency.

Another visit to the vocational training project by CBRO NGO in Kandahar that aimed to empower returnees, IDPs and financially disadvantaged men provided training in tailoring, mobile repairing, and electric wiring. The project equipped them with marketable skills for employment or self-employment, Participants expressed high satisfaction with the knowledge gained and optimism about their ability to support their families. However, the three-month training duration was seen as insufficient by many who recommended during the visit to extend the training and provide post-training support, such as financial assistance for operational equipment and devices and technical advice on shop set-ups, which would enhance its long-term impact and sustainability. The Education and Women Economic Empowerment Project by HHRO NGO in Kandahar provided a 39-day online training programme that benefitted 70 women with communication, leadership, and entrepreneurship skills. The programme provided essential equipment like computers and Wi-Fi devices, with plans to develop websites for marketing their handicrafts. Beneficiaries during the field visit shared that, while they appreciated the

virtual format, technology access posed challenges, many expressed a desire for hybrid (online and in-person) training. Beneficiaries also emphasized the need for seed funding to launch their startups. The Empowering Rural Families to Increase Income for Sustainable Economic Development project implemented by the YBFSO NGO in Northeast in Takhar province successfully established small farms and conducted 20 kitchen garden training sessions for 500 beneficiaries (215 females and 250 males) that allowed them to start projects focusing on mushroom farming and kitchen gardening.

NGOs' small projects in **healthcare** were critical in addressing healthcare needs, especially following the collapse of the previous government, and promoting awareness on health issues. NGOs developed the financial and technical capacity to deliver better services. Training on OSH practices and the provision of safety and hygiene kits were appreciated by beneficiaries, particularly women, contributing to improved safety and wellbeing. A field visit was conducted to the hygiene training project for IDPs by the NPSCO NGO in Haret who have limited access to healthcare due to inadequate facilities, with local clinics often lacking sufficient medicine and proper infrastructure. They highlighted the scarcity of clean water and essential medications, which further worsens health issues, and noted that many families are financially struggling to afford healthcare. Reflections from the field visit show that this training project was well-received, providing valuable insights into hygiene practices and disease prevention that participants had not previously understood. Despite the training's positive impact, there is a clear need for ongoing support, particularly in accessing hygiene supplies and continued health education. This newfound awareness is expected to benefit both participants and their families, although resource limitations pose a challenge in maintaining improved hygiene standards.

Project in the healthcare sector not only addressed urgent local needs, but also strengthened coordination with local health clinics and expanded reach to sustain the improvements introduced and meet ongoing demand. For example, the SGOA NGO in Kandahar implemented a project focused on improving hygiene practices among vulnerable groups, including IDPs, returnees, disabled individuals, and women-headed families. Through hygiene awareness campaigns, the project educated 7,837 beneficiaries and distributed 1,050 hygiene kits. Despite challenges, including interference from DFA and difficulties with female staff involvement, the project successfully engaged local communities and leaders. Male beneficiaries reported improved family hygiene and advocated for project expansion, while female beneficiaries noted health improvements from awareness sessions and hygiene kits., Akron's organization Afghanistan (ATOA) in Northeast implemented a project that provides multiple health services in a sub-health centre that benefited 2,400 people, mostly such as PSS, community disease control, essential medicine supply, nutrition, family planning and postnatal care services. NGO employee mentioned that: *"AT the Monsab district where the project took place, at first, there was not any clinic or sub-clinic that people have access to that, any medical services in that area. So, once we open a sub-house in that area, daily we visit more than 100 beneficiaries. This is one of the biggest changes that happened*."

The Afghan Unique Development Organization (AUDO) in Bamiyan that implemented a project focused on child protection and maternal health, engaging 600 individuals from 80 villages (50 percent women). The project was critical in addressing maternal health gaps, it provided vital training and counselling to 700 women, including 200 pregnant women. A key impact was the change in gender dynamics, as men who participated in the training expressed increased awareness about maternal care, leading to better treatment of pregnant women and improved family attitudes toward maternal health. Engaging both men and women in the training sessions has fostered greater participation and acceptance, leading to better outcomes. One pregnant woman during discussions reported improved conduct by her husband after he participated in the training, exemplifying the project's positive impact on gender dynamics. The Empowering Women Toward Health and Ministerial Awareness and Health Protection

implemented by the AWRSA NGO in Northeast benefited 1,200 beneficiaries (800 women and 400 men) raising awareness on menstruation and hygiene through educational training sessions.

Few site visits were conducted during this evaluation to NGO projects in **education**, one was carried-out to the project implemented by RASTIN NGO in Balkh using the low-value grant provided by the NCCSP. The project involved repairing and repainting classrooms, providing 150 new chairs, and installing Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) infrastructure like a water pump, solar power, and sanitation facilities. Additionally, the NGO distributed school supplies to 976 students and conducted a 3-day training for 36 teachers, improving their teaching methods. Discussions with schoolteachers and students during the visit showed that the renovations introduced by the NGO directly addressed local challenges, increasing enrolment from 650 to 970 students, which reflects motivation toward education for Afghan children. Students expressed greater interest for learning, noting improved classroom conditions and an attractive learning environment, hygiene, and availability of supplies. However, challenges mentioned include security threats and the lack of electricity to fully utilize fans and an existing computer lab, in addition to teachers' training and more resources like school uniforms.

Another field visit during the evaluation was conducted to the project implemented by the Saina Exploratory Cultural and Tourism Organization (SECTO) NGO in Bamiyan that provided English language and computer courses to 60 young people (40 females and 20 males), addressing the urgent need for capacity building in the community following the collapse of the government. Alongside technical training, beneficiaries received monthly food packages for training, easing financial pressures while they focus on their education. The project significantly impacted the community by improving skills, enhancing beneficiaries' confidence, and encouraging family support for continued education. The Paktia project in Southeast enhanced educational opportunities for 300 vulnerable students in 10 schools, impacting a total of 1,010 beneficiaries. It provided school kits, library books and furniture and incentivized academic achievement through cash assistance to families. Additionally, it promoted female participation by encouraging girls in grades 1 to 6 to engage in debates, fostering their confidence and communication skills. One beneficiary woman during FGD said: *"Before receiving the equipment and internet, I had no knowledge of wifi or online learning. Now, I encourage children to study online. My income and skills have improved, and free internet for three months was very helpful for self-capacity building."*

Focus on **agriculture** was also an important area given the disaster prone nature of some areas in Afghanistan. Small projects implemented by some NGOs in agriculture are found impactful for the communities and climate adaptation. For example, the pest management project by ?? in ?? was useful to adopt modern practices instead of old methods, increasing productivity and reducing costs. Assessed projects in this area also show higher integration of sustainability, for example the GCDO NGO in Herat project enhanced the economic situation of women, who comprised 51 percent of the beneficiaries through targeted training and cash assistance, women developed small businesses, improving their financial independence, and addressing PSS issues. Despite DFA restrictions limiting women's participation, the project successfully trained some female gardeners and employed three women. Likewise, the AWSESO NGO in Bamiyan provided supported smallholder farmers with agricultural machinery distributing 24 tractors to 131 beneficiaries (39 females and 92 males), however, there was a comment on their selection without references from local committees. The projects by the DELTA NGO in Kandahar and the GRSP in Southeast created greenhouses and solar-powered greenhouses for families and offered training and mentoring on better agricultural practices to improve crop productivity and seasonality. This included female farmers increasing their engagement in agriculture and enhancing their access to income-generating opportunities. Further, engaging university graduates as mentors enabled them to secure employment.

Additionally, some of the NGOs' projects had a progressive psychological effect on women, helping them bond, create a sense of community and form supportive networks. The small projects successfully reached women in both remote and urban areas where there were few or no existing social spaces, providing crucial opportunities for social and economic transformation in underserved regions. By providing economic opportunities, the project helped reduce mental health challenges among women and NGO staff who had faced job losses and domestic violence. The project provided a safe space for women to gather, work, and socialize, especially in environments where societal restrictions limited their mobility and market participation. Increasing restrictions by the DFA on women's mobility and participation in certain sectors, such as justice and GBV services, creates significant frustration that came across clearly in the project's implementation and feedback during data collection. Despite DFA's support for women-led SMEs, they tend to prioritize larger projects, dismissing the importance of programmes focused on social cohesion and psychosocial support. During FGDs with beneficiary women, it was clear that women valued these centres as places to disconnect from societal pressures while earning income. They openly shared stories of what they passed through, one NGO employee shared a story of a woman: *"One woman was trying to kill her husband because he used to beat her, after one month of participation in PSS, she said she was not mad anymore , she realizes that he is helpless and is an addict, and focused that when she started to get some income to help her family, the relationship between her and the husband changed"*.

EQ-14: To what extent the local communities benefited from the quick impact projects implemented through the low value grants?

Finding 16: Small projects implemented by NGOs/CSOs not only benefited individual participants but also fostered community engagement and knowledge-sharing, creating a ripple effect of positive outcomes and replicability.

The UNDP-supported NGOs/CSOs are very local, their constituents are the citizens in the places they come from, in the current context, which is a strength, yet they are operating in a shrinking space of human and women rights. They also require considerable resources, learning and capacity building to play an impactful role within their communities. The evaluation accounts for the potential benefits extending to the wider communities as a result of the implemented NGOs/CSOs' small project in target areas. For example, many participants in the language and computer education project of the SECTO NGO in Bamiyan shared their knowledge with their families, creating a ripple effect of learning. There is a high demand from the communities of joining this project which is empowering youth and promoting sustainability through ongoing community interest in education, noting that it is exceeding the capacity of the NGO. Community members -parents of children in school rehabilitated by the RASTIN NGO in Balkh- shared that it would be useful to replicate this project in schools in other districts, emphasizing the importance of further expanding educational opportunities, particularly in marginalized regions. FGD with beneficiary women demonstrates their eagerness to tap on their lost potential because they are not participating in social or economic life. They were eager to share ideas and needs of how they can be more active as teachers and trainers within the boundaries they are trapped into. One women said: *"Some of us would like to have more equipment, a safe room to prepare lessons, a whiteboard and better internet access. Some students do not have enough money, and it would be good if they received support."* Another woman also said: *"We can enhance our knowledge to better support the students and their PSS. We prefer in-person teaching, but due to the DFA, we have to teach online. This is the only way we can continue our work."*

The health-focused projects that were visited by the evaluation; by NPSCO NGO in Haret, SGOA NGO in Kandahar and AUDO NGO in Bamiyan, as well as many others participating in FGDs, such as PEVO in Bamyian and SOSA and HDO NGOs in Southeast provided better healthcare services and increased health awareness in the target communities. One NGO employee said *"The project that we implemented was supported by women and for women. Pregnant women were dying during delivery*

and could not manage their pregnancies or how to eat and where to seek support." These health interventions show promising potential for future expansion, as indicated by DFA interest in pursuing similar projects. Beneficiaries expressed a strong intention to apply this knowledge within their families and communities, its benefits are expected to be sustained through community knowledge-sharing and continued advocacy for women's health. During FGDs, some employees of these NGOs' highlighted that the introduction of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and OSH awareness was the first in Afghanistan, earning praise from ministries.

According to NGOs, small projects with focus on agriculture, such as those implemented by the <u>ARAA, GSRO and GCDO NGOs in Herat</u> extended beyond individual beneficiaries to include community workshops on agriculture and livestock, thus enhancing overall community knowledge and capacity. Other small projects directly addressed basic community needs, including the construction of water channels and the establishment of poultry farms, benefiting 25 families. However, there are sustainability concerns as the project has ended, with no clear plans for the communities about possible extended support, stakeholders recognize this as a risk undermining the gains made, with NGOs/CSOs and their beneficiaries once again left vulnerable.

Additionally, responses from NGOs to the evaluation's survey show that the low-value grants provided to the NGOs have helped to maintain links between the NGOs with the communities, as shown in Figure 17.
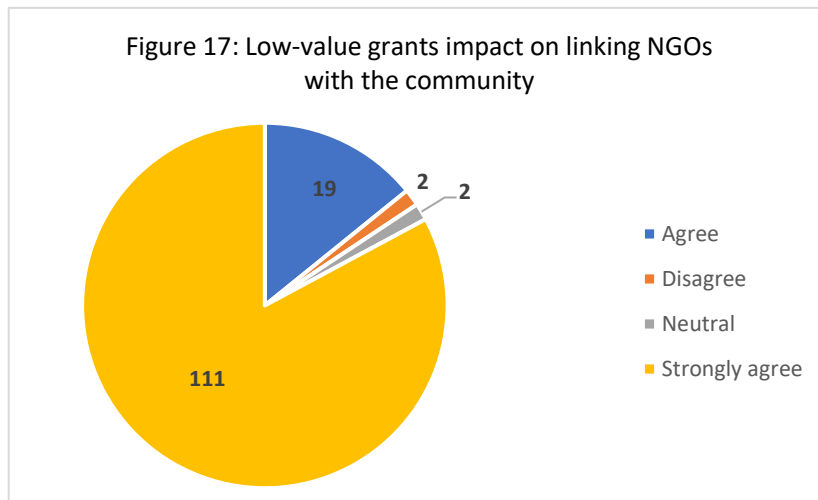
Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

Finding 17: The NCCSP project produced several unanticipated outcomes, including the high extent to which women's potential was unfolding and empowered, they revealed eagerness to re-engage in social and economic activities, particularly as teachers and trainers. The revitalization of dormant NGOs. The project also improved the DFA's perception of NGOs, leading to enhanced collaboration, as a result, many previously inactive, women-led NGOs were able to resume operations and reconnect with their communities.

One unanticipated result of the NCCSP project revealed during the FGDs with beneficiary women is their eagerness to participate more actively in social and economic life, despite the restrictions they face. Their desire to enhance their roles as teachers and trainers, and their suggestions for improvements (e.g., better internet access and teaching equipment), demonstrate a high potential for

empowerment that the project has helped to unlock, even though the extent to which this has occured might not have been fully expected at the start of the project.

Additionally, The ripple effect from participants in small educational projects, such as the language and computer education project of SECTO NGO in Bamiyan. Participants shared their newly acquired knowledge with their families, which extended the benefits beyond the initial participants to the wider community. This ripple effect demonstrates how small-scale interventions can have a broader, community-wide impact, which may not have been fully anticipated.

Also, unanticipated was the improved perception and acceptance of NGOs/CSOs by the DFA (De Facto Authorities). Prior to the project, NGOs faced challenges in engaging with the DFA, especially regarding their work with women and girls. However, the project facilitated a shift in the DFA's attitude, resulting in enhanced collaboration and recognition of NGOs' contributions to Afghan communities. This change, described by some as "revolutionary," allowed these inactive NGOs to gain greater operational space.

The revitalization of previously inactive NGOs, particularly those led by women. Many of these organizations had been dormant for years due to a lack of resources, but the project's low-value grants allowed them to resume operations and reconnect with communities and better understand their needs. In some cases, these grants were credited for the survival of NGOs, which was unexpected given their previous state of inactivity.

4.6 Sustainability

EQ-15: Did the NCCSP activities take specific measures to guarantee sustainability? Are activities supported by the local stakeholders and communities well-integrated into local social and economic structures? To what extent did the NCCSP bring momentum in the country for implementation of NGO/CSOs support activities?

Finding 18: The project's consideration of exit strategies to ensure the sustainability of results began late in the lifetime of the project; had these strategies been integrated from the inception, they might have yielded more impactful and viable outcomes. There is a higher guarantee of sustainability of results achieved under the project's Outputs 1 and 2. Contrarily, the sustainability of the NGO platform under Output 3 is not guaranteed, for which UNDP has developed a sustainability strategy.

The project's delayed consideration of exit strategies limited its sustainability prospects, however, there is a higher prospect of sustainability of results achieved under the project's Outputs 1 and 2. Contrarily, the sustainability of the NGO platform established under Output 3 is not guaranteed.

Output 1
The design of the NGOs/CSOs capacity building programmes, particularly through the on-the-job training, ensured that organizational systems are strengthened among the 210 organizations. For example, enhanced SOPs, improved policy frameworks and increased workforce performance were clear outcomes of the institutional capacity-building component. During interviews with UNDP and World Bank staff, they mentioned that focusing on organizational strengthening ensures that, if staff left, the institutional knowledge and improvements remained. However, the evaluation could not establish specific evidence around this assumption as it is still too early to validate. Further, ensuring the sustainability of the capacity building efforts in the multiple thematic areas of focus requires more time and continuous monitoring and follow-up, crucial to reach a positive impact on NGOs/CSOs at the institutional level. During FGDs, NGOs/CSOs' employees highlighted that their capacity has improved in proposal writing but still require further training and support to secure future funding from other donors beyond the UNDP project. Delays in verification on platforms like the UNPP portal have limited their ability to access new opportunities.

Output 2

On the individual level for people who benefited from the projects seem to have higher sustainability prospects. Women affected by DFA laws equipped with improved vocational capacities and skills are able to earn income independently after project completion. Nevertheless, the likelihood of the NGOs/CSOs to sustain their operations to reach more people in need hinges on the availability of financing by UNDP or other donors, the continuation of their small projects is uncertain, there is no guarantee that all will be sustained as they are jeopardized by financial constraints and a lack of resources. Results of the evaluation's survey show that 56 percent of the UNDP-supported NGOs do not have any funding other than NCCSP. The vast majority of NGOs (88 percent) reported that the project has helped them get new funding from other partners. that Likewise, the GRM was successfully implemented and operated during the project, albeit its long-term sustainability relies on future funding. The evaluation indicates that the commitment of NGO staff, who took on additional responsibilities, enhances the potential for sustained GRM use if funding is secured. However, if NGOs lack ongoing projects, community engagement and activities may decline, jeopardizing the sustainability of these initiatives.

Output 3

It is uncertain that the NGOs Platform established by the NCCSP under Output 3 would remain active beyond UNDP's support. The platform requires by-laws concerning elections, secretariat formation, membership fee collection and resource mobilization, in addition, ensuring its legal status without formal registration poses a considerable obstacle. There is also a concern that the platform could face internal conflicts and power struggles if not properly structured. Analysis based on field data collection and desk review shows that some measures could increase the Platform's sustainability prospects, yet this still depends on a number of viable options that are not guaranteed at this stage. For example, providing seed funding to a large national NGO or an international organization, along with appointing a funding manager to ensure financial stability or collecting periodic registration fees from member NGOs/CSOs. Another example is creating closer partnerships with networks like ACBAR to shift registration of members to it being established. Also, the formation of a Platform secretariat, continuing to carry-out regional and centralized meetings, coordination efforts, peer learning and exchanges using virtual meetings which is challenging due to connectivity issues. On this specific point, most NGOs' employees expressed intention to continue to attend coordination meetings, however 75 percent prefer in-person meetings and not virtual ones, as shown in Figure 18. An exit strategy for the platform was developed as explained in EQ-18.
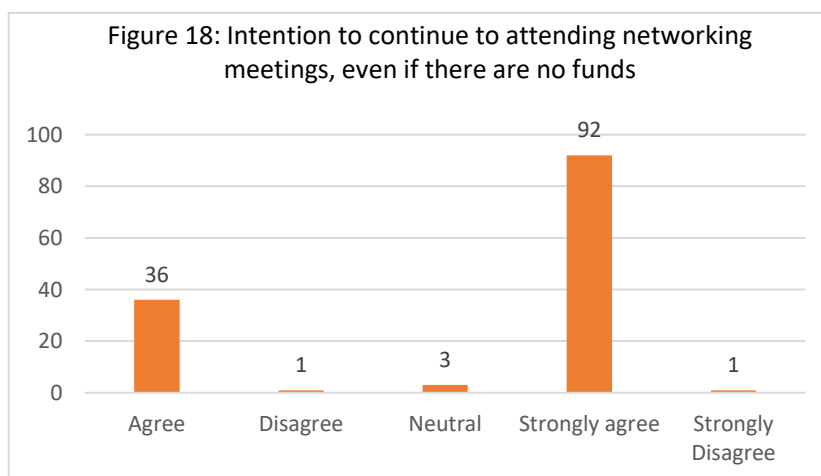
Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

EQ-16: What exit strategies are in place and how effective are they in ensuring the sustainability beyond the project life cycle? Are structures, resources, and processes in place to ensure the benefits generated by NCCSP are continued after its completion?

Finding 19: The sustainability of the established NGO Platform has been specifically critically considered by UNDP, given the lack resources beyond the project and absence of legal and governance framework or registration with the DFA. UNDP has developed a plan for the platform's continued operation, yet contingent on several risk-prone factors.

Integrating sustainability elements from the outset when the NGO Platform was designed could have increased the likelihood of a more effective financial mechanism to keep it active. For instance, concerning the NGO Platform, retrospective reflections suggest that introducing a small membership fee per NGO/CSO member of the 800 could have generated financial resources to support the platform at this stage, beyond the project's end. Furthermore, the possibility of organizing fundraising events during the project lifespan, rather than towards its end, would have helped create a more sustainable financial mechanism for the platform. Fundraising efforts are ongoing to maintain the network, as UNDP looks to transition the project to donors such as The Government of Japan or the EU.

> *Lesson Learned:* In a highly complex context such as Afghanistan, it is imperative to integrate the institutionalization of established bodies/networks, such as the NGO Platform, from the very outset. Equal weight must be placed on its technical functionality and operational effectiveness, as well as on its legal framework, formal registration and financial sustainability. Ensuring these foundational elements from the outset is critical to ensuring it can endure and function within such a volatile environment.

Exit activities currently being implemented by the project team include advocacy and networking events, documentation of best practices and lessons learned through meetings, consultations, and events, as well as the dissemination of results and success stories, within the limitations imposed on visibility. The project is also focusing at this stage on post evaluation and assessment surveys, including this final evaluation.

For that, UNDP has developed a sustainability plan that focuses on generating funds through an annual membership fee (during evaluation, the values mentioned ranged between USD 10 and 35 per organization). To further reduce costs, UNDP proposes to minimize expenditures like venue fees by partnering with educational institutions to provide free meeting spaces, hold virtual meetings to cut travel costs, and simplify refreshments. Member organizations will be encouraged to offer resources such as administrative support and volunteers will help with event organization. Sponsorships from businesses and philanthropic entities will also be sought to support specific activities and maintain essential operations. Further, the NCCSP has registered NGOs on the UN partner portal,[46] designed to facilitate a harmonised, efficient, and easy collaboration between the UN and its partners, where they were assessed and scored. This was possible because these NCCSP NGOs/CSOs have been strengthened to incorporate international standards within their practices and procedures.

EQ-17: How do beneficiaries at the individual and institutional levels perceive sustainability of NCCSP, for capacity building support? Do they plan to continue making use of the services/products produced?

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[46] The UN Partner Portal is simplifying and strengthening UN partnership processes. By choosing the right Partners, we can better support projects and programs, achieve better results and be that much closer to reaching our goals, making life better for everyone everywhere. https://www.unpartnerportal.org/landing/

Finding 20: The strengthened systems and enhanced employee capacities of the supported NGOs/CSOs are likely to remain within the civil society sector in the country, with a likelihood that these can potentially expand to other NGOs/CSOs on the longer-term if financing is secured and activities are sustained including through donors and UN partnership portals.

Several NGOs, initially supported by the NCCSP, have gained financial support from other donors, including contracts with agencies like WFP and FAO. Few NGOs, including KHANOA and SRP are successfully continuing operations on their own and some have even expanded, highlighting the project's role in fostering sustainable growth. KHANOA, led by an Afghan professional, has expanded, demonstrating the capacity-building effect of the project in retaining talent within Afghanistan. The NCCSP established NGO Platform which has gained momentum of high participation has the potential to include more members, however this may have been bolstered by its free subscription, which now puts its sustainability beyond the UNDP's support at risk. Beneficiary NGOs from NCCSP have been incorporated into ABADE projects, particularly through saving groups, ensuring some level of continuity and capacity building. Further, to receive the grants according to law, CSOs must transform to become registered as NGOs, which some were able to do with the support by UNDP. This is empowering for them and enhances sustainability on the longer-term on beneficiaries.

The livelihoods projects implemented by NGOs through the NCCSP low-value grants have significantly enhanced vocational skills among beneficiaries, particularly in sectors like tailoring, farming, and livestock management, resulting in improved economic resilience and community engagement. NGOs/CSOs implemented vocational training, educational services, and health-related programmes, reinforcing the sustainable impact of the grants on improving household livelihoods and community resilience. This integrated approach ensured that the support extended beyond one-time aid, fostering lasting positive outcomes. However, the short duration of these projects raises concerns about the sustainability of the gains achieved. Expanding vocational training for women and youth is essential for long-term sustainability, with participants advocating for increased marketing and business development training, vital for ensuring ongoing income generation. FGDs with NGOs/CSOs employees indicates the demand from the community for continued similar projects and authorities suggests the need for scaling up, particularly for replicable livelihood projects, one NGO employee said: *"UNDP can look into scaling up some of the successful project to inform more families like mushroom farming for example and employing people, these livelihoods projects are important".* While many beneficiaries reported increased income and established microenterprises, ongoing support is essential to maintain these benefits. The need for extended training, financial assistance, and continued access to resources is critical to ensure the long-term impact of the initiatives. Without sustained efforts, there is a risk of reverting to previous vulnerabilities, undermining the transformative progress made in women's economic participation and community cohesion.

With this in mind, ending UNDP's support to Afghani women is concerning; there is a dire need to continue to support women through similar or related interventions because the potential loss of this initiative could undermine the progress made in supporting women's social and economic participation and mental well-being. Women expressed anxiety about the future of the benefits they have been receiving, emphasizing the need for sustainable models that continue to provide these services after the project ends. One beneficiary woman in FGD stressed saying: *"UNDP should support Afghan women with as they are significantly affected and really need this support. Additionally, many are unemployed, and there are no job opportunities. It would be beneficial to provide training and support, and I suggest that UNDP also offers internet accessibility for students."*

EQ-18: Describe key factors that will require attention to improve the prospects of sustainability of Project outcomes and the potential for replication of the approach? What social or political risks may

jeopardize sustainability of project outputs and the project's contributions to UNDP Country Programme outputs and outcomes?

Finding 21: In addressing the sustainability of project outcomes and the potential for replicating its approach, several factors must be carefully considered, most prominently the issue of limited financing, fluidity of the labour market in Afghanistan's NGO sector, uncertainty around the continuation of the established NGO Platform and the complexity facing CSOs transitioning to NGOs.

The following factors outline important areas that will influence sustainability and highlight potential risks to the viability of the project's contributions on the longer term.

Limited financing

Limited financing opportunities by the donor community in Afghanistan is a major challenge for the sustainability of the NCCSP achievements. Beneficiaries and NGOs remain hopeful that UNDP will continue supporting new project phases. However, with many donors leaving Afghanistan, future funding opportunities are scarce, threatening the sustainability of these efforts. In FGDs, all NGOs' employees shared the concern about limited funding, one employee said: *"UNDP should tell us what to do next. There are not many options for us or donors around here. USAID is gone, and there is FCDO and GIZ, but they will leave. Before, there were many donors and we could get funding, but now the situation is very difficult. UNDP built the capacity of NGOs, leaving us 'half-baked' will lead to zero results; the staff will leave and the NGO will close."*

Fluidity of the labour market in Afghanistan's NGO sector

A key challenge to sustainability is the high employee turnover and frequent transitions between projects, NGOs, donors, or UN agencies. This factor requires attention because the capacity-building efforts and the skills and knowledge gained by individuals are thus at risk of getting lost and not sustained within the organizations. However, it could be assumed that these capacities will yet remain within the country, continuing to contribute to broader development and humanitarian work, this assumption will likely be difficult to monitor or validate on the longer-term.

Sustainability of the established NGO Platform

To ensure long-term sustainability and functioning of the established NGO Platform, several factors must be studied, including the creation of an inclusive, transparent, and effective governance structure, legal registration, and framework with the DFA, risks to women's inclusion, financial resources necessary for continuation of coordination and peer learning activities. These issues and more are addressed under the sustainability plan developed by UNDP and currently being discussed, but no final guarantees have been reached.

CSOs transitioning to NGOs

Given that CSOs are no longer able to operate in Afghanistan, future projects should focus on supporting NGOs rather than CSOs to ensure operational sustainability, there should be a more comprehensive approach to supporting CSOs on the short-term helping them transition into NGOs abiding by legal requirements.

4.7 RBA, LNOB and Gender Equality

EQ-19: How adequately were cross-cutting themes such as human rights, gender equality, age and social and environmental standards considered in the NCCSP?

Finding 22: With due consideration to the unique context in Afghanistan and oppressive restrictions against women and girls, the NCCSP has adequately considered, to the extent possible, cross-cutting themes in its design and implementation.

Human Rights

The NCCSP operated within an environment in Afghanistan where systemic gender discrimination and oppression persist and the restrictive measures imposed by the DFA, such as excluding women from education and public life, directly contradict international human rights principles. Despite these obstacles, the project continued to promote the right to freedom of association, empower local networks and enable civil society to organize, advocate, and participate in public life, as much as possible within the Afghan context. Recognizing CSOs and NGOs as independent entities acting in the interest of communities, the project fostered participation, transparency, and accountability through capacity-building trainings, coordination platforms, meetings, committees, and forums. This approach helps to make the voices of marginalized and vulnerable groups heard and improve service delivery for women. Because project efforts have been constrained by the deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan, particularly concerning women's rights, impact towards non-discrimination, dignity and equality are undermined.

Leave No One Behind

The focus was on vulnerable groups, with specific focus on women and girls, who, almost 75 percent of whom were forced to leave their jobs, schools or universities and are confined to their homes. They all benefited by the low-value grants projects, giving them hope and purpose in life, in addition to the economic and social benefits. One woman in FGDs mentioned "*After the DFA came in, I thought life is done but this project created a positive motivation in my mind. In this time the in-person education is banned for girls and women; after joining this programme, I learn online things for self-improvement. We also have increased income.*" The project also focused on the civil society sector, including women-led organizations and local NGOs/CSOs, who have been struggling with limited financial resources, capacities, brain drain and financial gaps. The community interventions implemented by the NGOs/CSOs, which were made possible through the low-value grants, helped to address inequalities, protection issues and poverty and to provide critical basic services.

Accountability

The project improved NGO/CSO understanding of Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) through training on ESCOP, leading to the application of ESS measures. This enhanced grievance management, gender safety, and awareness of environmental health, benefiting communities and empowering female aid workers. Through the established GRM and the GRCs' efforts of the supported NGOs/CSOs, information is shared with and feedback from community individuals through various communication channels and queries and complaints are addressed timely. The project ensured that NGOs uphold PSEA standards through trainings, awareness and dialogue.

Overall, the operational and business processes adhere to the UNDP accountability frameworks and programme and operations policies and procedures. For example, the low-value grant award followed public announcement, submission, selection and eligibility criteria with specific events for proposal development and equal information sharing. Nevertheless, many of the recipient organizations lacked the institutional capacity required for receiving low-value grants, such as having three years of financial audits, which made compliance difficult. Recognizing these gaps, the project directed some funding towards basic organizational functions, including management, human resources, and finance (USD 20,000 out of USD 50,000 total grant value). While serious safeguards by the UNDP and the World Bank were put in place by the NCCSP through an integrated risk management team, managing risks remained a persistent challenge as maintaining stringent oversight required additional resources that were diminishing over time.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

The NCCSP prioritized gender considerations by promoting women's participation, addressing gender-specific needs, and incorporating sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators, ensuring

women-led organizations were actively involved despite cultural challenges and initial resistance from some NGOs. As put by World Bank interviewed staff: *"The NCCSP is giving them a voice and agency at a time when they were asked to disappear from public space, this carries a merit that became activities and opportunities, and this is captured in the results framework of the Bank."* Both women and men were able to participate equally in the project activities, by NGOs/CSOs prioritised projects that respond to women and girls' specific needs. Women-led organizations were targeted with the NCCSP capacity building trainings. The NGOs/ CSOs mapping information covers the gender of the heads, whether the organization is women-focused or not, and whether they are working in the thematic area of Gender Issues and Women Development. The capacity assessment covered the organizations' capacity about gender issues, whether they have PSEA rules and/or plans or not, gender of the heads, whether the organization is women-focused or not. Initially, NGOs resisted such sensitive topics due to limited awareness and cultural differences, particularly around child marriage, yet the project ensured to uphold PSEA standards being contingent for UN collaboration with NGOs through consistent awareness and dialogue. The project ensured using sex-disaggregated data and gender sensitive indicators in its logical framework and reporting. Women-led organizations were included in the formulation of the project's SC, they participated in meetings every few months, contributing to discussions on how to select CSOs and ensure the involvement of women-focussed CSOs, despite the initial lack of active ones. In the capacity-building aspect, flexible selection criteria were introduced, adapting requirements like audit reports and budget thresholds to make it easier for smaller and women-led organizations to participate, further promoting their empowerment. More details on GEWE in EQ-20

EQ-20: To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in GEWE? Were there any unintended effects? How can the project further broaden in a future phase its contribution to enhancing diversity and inclusion?

Finding 23: In terms of GEWE, the project went beyond what was initially planned and what might typically be credited given the challenging context in Afghanistan. To the extent possible, it supported women to continue playing a role in the civil society sector, specifically focusing on women-led organizations. It ensured women remained heard and have access to livelihoods opportunities through services that respond to their needs. In addition, it promoted awareness on gender and protection among NGOs' employees to be extended to wider target communities The project's impact on GEWE could have been broader if not for the increasing restrictions on women and girls in the country.

The NCCSP has contributed to positive change in GEWE, but its potential impact is hindered by the growing restrictions and human rights violations against women and girls in Afghanistan. Without these barriers, the project could have achieved more substantial and meaningful change. The women-led, women-operated structure of many of the NCCSP activities was pivotal in restoring hope and purpose among beneficiaries. The project actively involved women-led organizations and achieved a minimum target of 40 percent female participation in capacity-building programmes, which is validated by responses to the evaluation online survey in which NGOs' employees indicate a very good or good participation of women in their organization, shown in Figure 19. The project strived to overcome difficulties limiting their full engagement, such as mobility restrictions and high illiteracy rates among women, especially in rural areas, which limited their ability to fully engage with training materials. This barrier was partially overcome when training sessions were adapted to include brochures with pictures and practical demonstrations to ensure comprehension.

Figure 19: Participation of women in the UNDP-supported NGOs
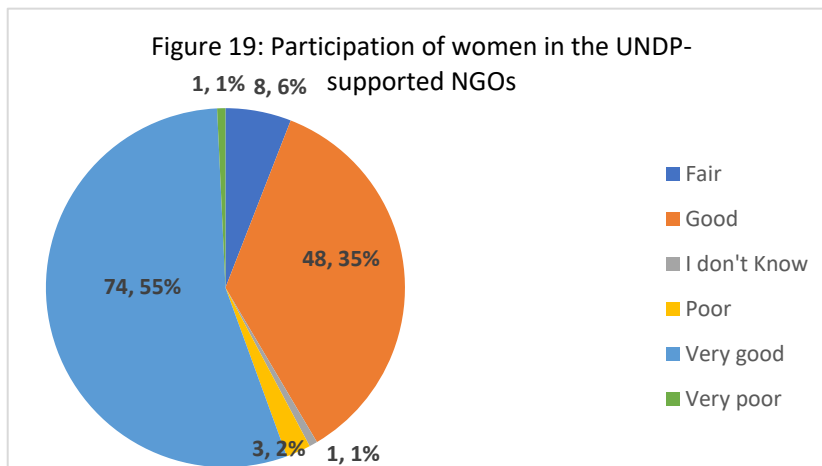
Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

The inclusion of women-led NGOs was an important achievement, despite challenges, for instance, one women-led organization had not received funding for three years before this project. Women-led organizations have strengthened capacities as result of the specialized thematic trainings, on-the-job trainings, low-value grants, and participation as members in the NGO platform. Key elements such as GRM and ESS policies were integrated into their HR practices. They to sustain operations and mobilize resources independently. By involving women in decision-making processes and leadership roles within these organizations, the project has fostered a more inclusive environment, for example through the NCCSP SC and the leading roles within the NGOs' organizational structure. The DFA did not formally accept female directors, NGOs indirectly/unofficially continued women's leadership roles. However, the authorities scrutinized beneficiary lists to ensure no female names appeared, posing additional challenges that were mitigated by the UNDP team by recording the names of the *mehrem* of each woman. During FGDs one NGO employee reflected saying: *"I'm proud to share our results. We witnessed changes in the skills of the women. We supported the women entrepreneurs, and they learned marketing, financial literacy, budgeting and investing, which allowed them to start their own businesses, contributing to their families and the local economy."* To ensure the sustainability of NCCSP efforts, NGOs were registered in the UN partner portal, where they were assessed and scored. NGOs have continued to engage, seeking guidance on incorporating these measures into proposals and policies, reflecting their commitment to maintaining standards beyond the project's duration.

On PSEA, a comprehensive capacity-building process was implemented, where directors, deputy directors and focal points were capacitated and 12 certified as PSEA trainers in areas related to PSEA and GBV prevention and response. NGOs' employees who received the training found it was of an excellent quality (75 percent), while 19 percent found it good. As in Figure 20. Now, PSEA focal points within the organizations are knowledgeable about its core principles and applying these concepts in their work, they are developing relevant policy documents, creating community-sensitive training materials, and registering in the UN partner portal. NGO employees find that PSEA is important, one said that: *"because we serve a community that is dominated by men and also prone to natural disasters, women and girls are at risk, now we have this opportunity to serve them and so PSEA helps the NGOs to protect the community members and ensures that our services are dignified and reachable"*. A notable observation during the evaluators' field visit in Herat is an Afghan male participant elaborated on PSEA concepts and child marriage regulations with clarity giving examples, showcasing significant progress in understanding and internalization of these issues within the NGOs/CSOs.

Figure 20: Overall quality of the PSEA training:

6; 4% 2; 2%
26; 19%
100; 75%

- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Poor
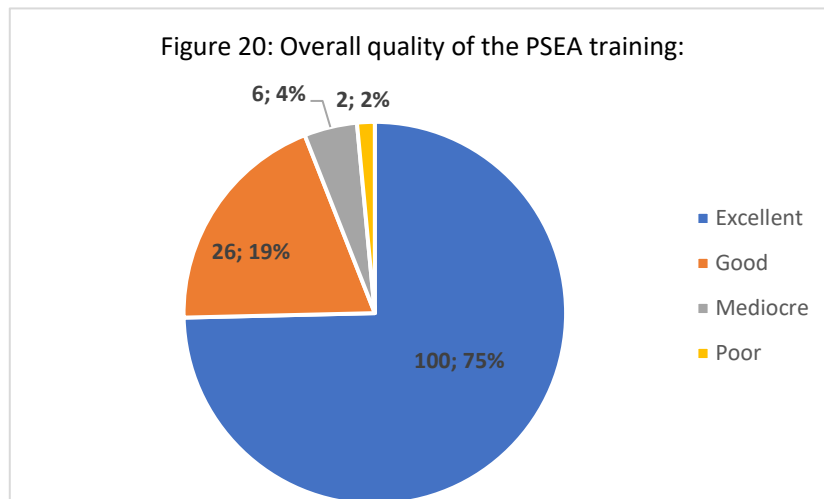
Source: Developed by consultant using results of evaluation survey responses

The NCCSP has also focused on raising awareness about gender equality issues and advocating for women's rights at both the community level and within the civil society sector, although this is considered a highly sensitive topic in the Afghanistan context. The project encountered resistance when addressing topics such as child marriage, especially since local marriage laws and cultural norms in Afghanistan differ from international standards. One UNDP staff mentioned during interview that *"At the start of the project, the sensitive nature of the PSEA subject within the context and NGOs' limited awareness and understanding of it made it challenging to engage in discussions with employees or engage in related activities, especially when speaking with male participants."* However, after consistent awareness-raising sessions and engagement by the NCCSP, the NGOs/CSOs recognized the importance of PSEA, became more familiar with its concepts and began attending sessions regularly. Eventually, NGOs accepted these standards as necessary for working within the UN system.

Through the small projects implemented by NGOs/CSOs, the NCCSP played a pivotal role in empowering women with skills and resources that allowed them to participate in economic activities and reconnect with their communities. The income-generating activities they established positively influenced societal attitudes towards women's roles, creating better gender dynamics and inclusion within communities. However, the project's short six-month duration limited the sustainability of these transformative impacts on women's livelihoods and empowerment. Additionally, the training provided to women and their engagement in community activities and decision-making processes, increased their confidence and sense of self-worth, enabling more active participation. During FGDs with NGOs' employees, it was noted that enhancing women's economic status has led to increased respect within families and communities, their roles within the household are elevated. Communication on social media, like WhatsApp groups were mentioned to have helped in peer support networks among beneficiaries, enabling women to exchange ideas, resources, and opportunities, further enhancing their personal and professional growth.

Data triangulations through FGDs with beneficiary women confirms the increased respect and stronger position within women's families as they became income providers, contributing to household financial stability. They also said that this eased the challenges posed by movement limitations on women and girls, contributing to overall well-being and empowerment in a restrictive environment. Women's increased engagement in training and community activities led to greater visibility and influence in their communities. Numerous success stories were shared to reveal how this

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empowerment led to increased respect from both families and the broader community. Beneficiary women of projects in the livelihoods sector elaborated on the skills they gained in vocational fields such as tailoring, poultry farming and quilt production, enhancing their economic independence and shifting gender roles. Psychosocial support programmes fostered mental health improvements, created safe spaces for women to bond, and provided economic empowerment. The potential loss of these initiatives jeopardizes women's social and emotional progress, highlighting the importance of sustained support for vulnerable women.

From the education small projects reported increased access to resources, including laptops and internet connectivity, which facilitated online teaching. This improved their pedagogical skills and led to the development of diverse income streams. For instance, teachers have expanded their networks, offering specialized courses that attract both male and female students, thereby promoting gender inclusivity. Other women reported that the establishment of online businesses further supports their economic independence, and they were able to sustain their livelihoods and continue providing essential education, thereby fostering resilience and community development amid adversity. *The methods for conducting online sessions are new in Afghanistan, and we need to improve our techniques to make them engage. We need to find ways to recap lessons and conduct listening and reading activities; these methods would be very helpful moving forward."*

EQ-21: To what extent have local communities, women, youth, PwDs and other disadvantaged groups benefited from the project either direct or indirectly?

Finding 24: Although the project has benefited the communities directly and indirectly through the strengthened civil society, more consideration could have been given to the inclusion of PwDs in the various project activities.

A minimum target of 40 percent female participation was set and achieved in the NGOs/CSOs training programmes, demonstrating a strong commitment to gender equality. However, the inclusion of PwDs was limited, with fewer than 10 participants across all training activities. Although considered in the design, the evaluation could not establish evidence of inclusion in the actual implementation of the NCCSP. For instance, the mapping exercise did not specifically cover Organizations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) nor they were specifically targeted with support like the women-led organization. The capacity building training did not cover modules related to PwDs or that inclusion-targeted small projects were specifically implemented by NGOs/CSOs. With the exception of a very minor consideration of PwDs in Jalalabad (KII-91 can ask for details to add), no other mention of PwDs was included in interviews during the evaluation stakeholders.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

1. It is crucial to adopt a diversified and targeted approach to NGOs/CSOs' capacity building through training content and practices that are based on and tailored to their technical and capacity levels; one size does not fit all.

2. The integration of UNDP's IRMU in Afghanistan was central to support the NCCSP staff in managing risks such as counterterrorism and sanction compliance. Setting clear data quality standards for NGOs during the information submission process is important to identify and manage risks.

3. The process of signing MOUs with sectoral ministries under the DFA in Afghanistan often took over two months, which should be factored into project's workplans from the onset and an

inception phase is therefore necessary to focus on securing these agreements as needed for UNDP's partners and NGOs.

4. The capacity-building efforts revived NGOs and reconnected them with their communities, the short duration of the NCCSP as a whole, as well as the duration of the small low-value grant projects -only six months-limited its long-term impact. NGOs may not be able to sustain progress without continued support from UNDP, thus jeopardizing the long-term viability of the skills, systems and the platform developed.

5. Given the complex, varying and unconventional context and needs across different regions in Afghanistan, NGOs may benefit from additional knowledge on the specificities of local needs and additional priorities. More guidance from UNDP's side and stronger coordination and integration would ensure that NGOs can identify and respond better to community livelihood needs. Additionally, a uniform six-month duration for all NGO projects, regardless of activity type, was limiting.

6. In a highly complex context such as Afghanistan, it is imperative to integrate the institutionalization of established bodies/networks, such as the NGO Platform, from the very outset. Equal weight must be placed on its technical functionality and operational effectiveness, as well as on its legal done framework, formal registration, and financial sustainability. Ensuring these foundational elements from the outset is critical to ensuring it can endure and function within such a volatile environment.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

Table 7: Evaluation Conclusions

Criteria	#	Conclusion
Coherence	1	The NCCSP was implemented under the ABADEI framework in alignment with human rights standards, to the extent possible, leveraging UNDP's trusted role in Afghanistan. However, synergies with UN agencies, aside from UN-Women, were largely untapped, limiting the potential for more coordinated and impactful efforts in addressing the country's complex challenges. *Linked to Findings 1 and 2*
Relevance	2	The NCCSP effectively addressed critical gaps within Afghanistan's civil society sector that faces severe challenges in funding, capacity and operational freedom, particularly for organizations focused on women's rights. The project helped to bridge these gaps by providing essential technical support, financial resources and establishing what has become the largest NGO platform in the country, which was unanimously agreed by all stakeholders in this evaluation. It also aligned with key strategic frameworks, including the UN TEF, TCPRF and UNSFA, and directly supported UNDP's strategic priorities contributing to resilience building and women's empowerment, making it a critical intervention in Afghanistan. *Linked to Finding 3*
	3	Adopting a culturally informed strategy and close communication with NGOs/CSOs enabled the project to navigate the complex political and human rights restrictions imposed by DFA. It employed a mitigation measure such in the NGOs' selection criteria, registration of male *mahram* on behalf of women in activities, gender-

		separated training venues. This strategic manoeuvring enabled the project to uphold its objectives, including supporting 43 percent women-led organizations. *Linked to Finding 4*
Effectiveness	4	Overall, the NCCSP had successfully achieved all its outputs amidst challenging operational conditions. The capacity building programme enhanced NGO capabilities in critical areas, resulting in reported capacity improvements of 60% among participants, which was corroborated by survey participants, 86 percent of whom found the programme's overall quality good or excellent. While feedback indicated the relevance of training topics, there were calls by NGOs for more customized training levels to better suit their varying capacities. *Linked to Findings 5, 6, 7 and 8*
	5	The NCCSP disbursed USD 10.5 million in low-value grants to 210 organizations, including 43 percent women-led, with which, small projects were implemented by NGOs that empowered NGOs respond to diverse community needs in livelihoods, education, agriculture, and health sectors. Perceptions of the grants' selection process varied, with concerns on clarity of its processes and due diligence among NGOs. Further, the establishment of the UNDP NGO network platform successfully fostered collaboration among nearly 751 NGOs/CSOs. *Linked to Findings 7, 8 and 9*
	6	Risk management strategies employed by UNDP were vital in mitigating factors hindering the NCCSP's progress, including stringent DFA oversight, corruption, complex MoUs approval processes, exclusion of women from leadership roles, NGOs' capacity constraints and inconsistent DFA policies. To address these risks, the project worked closely with the HQ RRMU to clean and validate beneficiary data, track patterns indicating risks of collusion or extortion and extended the project timeline. Additionally, efforts were made to engage stakeholders and promote ownership, and vigorously advocated for women's participation in activities. *Linked to Finding 9*
Efficiency	7	The NCCSP demonstrated a generally efficient allocation of resources within its USD 20 million budget, with 52.5 percent dedicated to low-value grants for NGOs/CSOs. However, delays in finalizing MoUs between NGOs and DFA resulted in a slow expenditure rate during the first year of the project. Some allocations seemed lower than actual needs, for example the small grant size of USD 50,000 restricted the scope of NGOs' projects and the insufficient budget for PSEA training activities necessitated a shift to less effective online training modality. *Linked to Finding 10*
	8	The project was recognized by the donor and stakeholders for its efficient performance and effective outcomes, facilitated by adequate human resources in Kabul and across regional offices. M&E teams implemented efficient monitoring activities, one of the project's observed strengths, albeit the grant management process seems to have been intense with high workload levels for staff during its disbursement. The project was granted a four-months extension to address initial delays, yet the nature of projects with a capacity strengthening focus generally requires longer duration than the NCCSP's timeframe. *Linked to Finding 11 and 12*
Impact	9	It is evident that the capacity building programmes by NCCSP contributed to a stronger civil society sector in Afghanistan, particularly women-led organizations; the adopted integrated approach empowered target NGOs/CSOs through specialized training, practical experience through low-value grants and fostering collaboration. The project's capacity-building efforts, especially around PSEA and ESS standards, strengthened NGOs' resilience and visibility, enabling them to better serve their

		communities and approach donors for financing. However, the long-term impact, especially regarding sustainability and women's leadership, remain dependent on continued support by UNDP. *Linked to Findings 14 and 17*
	10	The NCCSP has laid a strong foundation for community transformation and hope for women and girls through the NGOs serving them. The implemented small projects have driven substantial positive changes across multiple sectors, particularly in improving economic resilience, education opportunities, healthcare, and social empowerment. However, long-term impact hinges on continued financial support and capacity-building for local NGOs and strategies to ensure the sustainability of these essential services. *Linked to Findings 15, 16 and 17*
	11	Vocational training equipped beneficiaries, especially women, with income-generating skills, transforming them into active contributors to their households and communities. Education and healthcare projects enhanced learning environments, increased school enrolment, and addressed critical health needs like maternal care and hygiene, fostering long-term well-being, while agriculture initiatives promoted climate resilience and crop productivity. However, the short project duration limits impact as both the NGOs still do not have the concrete capacity to sustain progress and many beneficiaries still require ongoing support to maintain these gains. *Linked to Findings 15, 16 and 17*
	12	ESS and GRM were pivotal to ensuring accountability within the NCCSP project, aligned with UNDP standards. The GRM stood out as an effective tool for managing grievances at the NCCP and NGOs levels, fostering increased capacities, trust, and accountability. Shifts in grievance types were observed from NGO issues to service delivery complaints highlight its evolving role in maintaining project integrity. Training and communication channels enhanced local-level accountability. Monitoring and reporting were also central to ensuring compliance and accountability and comprehensive risk management, though the late disbursement of grants did not allow for sufficient post-grant assessments. *Linked to Findings 2, 12, 14 and 23*
Sustainability	13	The sustainability of the NCCSP project is mixed; outputs 1 and 2, which focused on capacity-building for NGOs/CSOs and low-value grant projects for target communities, show higher sustainability potential. The strengthened NGOs institutional systems, individual capacities and enhanced skills and resources among beneficiaries have created a foundation for long-term impact, though ongoing support and monitoring will be crucial. However, the sustainability of the NGO Platform (Output 3) is less certain due to the absence of a robust financial and governance framework. *Linked to Findings 18, 19 and 20*
	14	The delayed integration of exit strategies into the NCCP project weakens the sustainability prospects in general, and of the NGO Platform in particular. Efforts have been on-going during the last few months of the project's timeframe through a recently developed sustainability plan to secure funding and NGO networking mechanisms, earlier sustainability considerations could have increased the viability of long-term outcomes. *Linked to Finding 16*
RBA, LNOB and GEWE	15	The NCCSP has made commendable efforts to integrate cross-cutting themes such as human rights, GEWE and accountability in its design and implementation. While the NCCSP has made notable progress in empowering women and fostering community resilience, the inclusion of PwDs remains under-addressed.

		Linked to Findings 2, 15, 16, 17, 22, 23 and 24
	16	Despite severe restrictions on women and systemic gender discrimination, the NCCSP has exceeded initial expectations in promoting GEWE within Afghanistan's challenging environment. As a result of the project, women-led organizations are empowered, and beneficiary women have increased livelihood and job opportunities and increased access to healthcare, education, and PSS services. Enhanced training modalities and consistent awareness-raising on PSEA and ESS have begun to shift perceptions among communities and NGOs employees. The project enabled women's marginalized voices to be heard and gave them hope. *Linked to Findings 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 23 and 24*

6.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Continued support from UNDP and the World Bank is crucial to empower Afghanistan's civil society sector and NGOs. Given the deteriorating human rights for women and girls and the narrowing space for NGOs and CSOs, the achieved gains by the NCCSP are at risk.

Support from UNDP and the World Bank for NGOs in Afghanistan will empower NGOs to reach the vulnerable populations with the assistance needed, not only with immediate response to needs, but essentially for longer-term development and resilience. Adequate financial resources and expertise for individual and institutional capacity strengthening will enhance their ability to manage projects effectively and independently and adapt to changing circumstances over time. This continues to align with the UN and World Bank's sustainable development plans for Afghanistan.

Linked to Conclusions 1, 2, 9, 10, 13 and 14

Responsibility: World Bank, UNDP, and other donors - Priority: High - Time implication: Immediate

Recommendation 2:

In future programming, extend the project timeframe to accommodate the inherently slow capacity strengthening progression and ensure adaptation to Afghanistan's challenging context and higher prospects of sustainable outcomes for local NGOs/CSOs and the target communities.

Capacity strengthening and institutional change are slow processes requiring sustained efforts over a longer duration because it requires individual skills development, changed perceptions and practices, as well as strengthening organizational structures, processes, and systems. Specifically in a challenging context like in Afghanistan, longer timeframes provide a buffer for operational uncertainties and help navigate complex regulations and build stronger relationships between stakeholders, including with local communities. A longer timeframe would allow for more detailed planning, thorough needs assessments at the project or NGOs' levels, as well as increased potential impact and sustainability of community interventions, with necessary M&E and post-grant monitoring to inform programming for continued support to the small projects by the NGOs.

Linked to Conclusions 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14

Responsibility: World Bank and UNDP - Priority: High - Time implication: Medium-term

Recommendation 3:

Building on the experience gained from the NCCSP, revise the management processes of the low-value grants model to introduce a wider scope and higher likelihood of impactful results for the target vulnerable communities.

Reviewing the design of the low-value grants is important, merited with the lessons learned and good practices learned from the NCCSP. Key elements to consider include robust grant selection and awarding indicators developed in consideration with potential risks and the initial relevance and targeting that aim to be achieved by the organization, clear communication and information sharing mechanisms with NGOs and stakeholders, with key messages/ Q&As for the GRMs, as well as thorough due diligence closely supported by IRMU, innovative data cleaning and validation systems, as well as adequate grant value packages and realistic timeframes covering a longer period of time.

Linked to Conclusions 3, 5, 6 and 7

Responsibility: World Bank and UNDP - Priority: High - Time implication: Medium-term

Recommendation 4:

Integrate sustainability considerations from the outset of project design phase and throughout all stages of implementation. Given the unique context in Afghanistan, a heightened focus on gradual phase-out and sustainability is inevitable to be integrated into the project workflow and not as an afterthought.

For future programming, embed sustainability as a fundamental element across all phases of the project, including stakeholder engagement during design and implementation, defining the specific sustainability objectives during the formulation of outputs, conduct an initial assessment of the potential environmental and social impacts to be considered in operational work plans. Assumptions and risks should be identified in consultation with NGOs, UNDP field staff and engaging other development partners to be integrated into M&E frameworks, capacity building activities and strategic and local partnerships. During SC meetings, sustainability should be discussed as a regular agenda item. While the recent development of the NGO platform sustainability plan by the project is commendable, its late introduction reduces its potential effectiveness and overall utility.

Linked to Conclusions 3, 9, 13 and 14

Responsibility: UNDP - Priority: High - Time implication: Medium and longer-term

Recommendation 5:

Adopt a differentiated longer-term approach to NGOs' capacity building tailored to their specific capacity needs of NGOs/CSOs, their thematic areas of operations, target beneficiaries and geographic areas.

It is essential to first conduct a comprehensive needs assessment for each organization, like NCCSP did, the results of which should be disaggregated and analysed for the development of a customized capacity building programme tailored to address the specific gaps in skills, resources, and knowledge. Clustering NGOs with similar capacity gaps, thematic focuses or geographic areas can enhance should be a basis for designing the content and methodology of the programme. Diverse capacity building approaches should be considered, incorporating a mix of workshops, peer-learning opportunities, regional exchanges, online modules, simulation exercises and mentorships, among other methods.

Linked to Conclusions 4, 6 and 9

Responsibility: UNDP - Priority: High - Time implication: Medium and longer-term

Recommendation 6:

Provide support to NGOs during the formulation of the community projects that they plan to implement, including since the identification, design, implementation and monitoring phases to ensure various needs of the different community groups are addressed, including targeted action to respond to the unique needs of PwDs and their integration in their communities.

NGOs should receive comprehensive support throughout the project lifecycle—identification, design, implementation, and monitoring—to ensure the diverse needs of all community members, especially PwDs, are met. This includes conducting inclusive needs assessments, providing capacity-building training on disability rights, and developing adaptive project designs that facilitate their participation. Engaging PwDs and organizations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) in planning and decision-making, establishing monitoring frameworks with specific PWD indicators, and promoting community awareness on inclusion are vital. Strengthening partnerships with OPDs will enhance project relevance and advocate for policies supporting PWD rights, fostering their integration into communities.

Linked to Conclusions 11 and 15
Responsibility: UNDP and NGOs - Priority: High - Time implication: Medium-term

Recommendation 7:

Strengthen partnerships and synergies between UNDP and other development organizations to further build capacity of local NGOs in Afghanistan with focus on enhancing human rights advocacy, community mobilization, and protection for marginalized groups, helping to build a more resilient and effective civil society.

Partnerships with other development and international organizations can augment efforts towards easing human rights challenges in Afghanistan. Such collaboration can leverage shared resources and expertise to strengthen the capacity of local NGOs, enabling them to operate more effectively within restrictive environments. NGOs can advocate for human rights, mobilize communities and promote awareness of human rights violations, providing protection services to marginalized groups and facilitate coordinated responses to the complex socio-political landscape, ultimately fostering a more resilient civil society. *Linked to Conclusions 1, 2 and 13*
Responsibility: World Bank, UNDP and international organizations - Priority: High - Time implication: Medium/long-term

6. ANNEXES

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

UNDP	UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

INDIVIDUAL CONSULTANT PROCUREMENT NOTICE/TERMS OF REFERENCE

Title of Individual Consultant: International Project Evaluation Consultant

Project title: NGO/CSO Capacity Support Project (NCCSP), UNDP Afghanistan

Duration of initial Contract: 2 months
Reporting: Project Manager
Duty station: Kabul, Afghanistan
Expected Start Date: 1 Aug 2024

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1. BACKGROUND

Background of NGO/CSO support project

UNDP implements NGOs/CSOs capacity support project (NCCSP) since June 2022. The Project aims to support operational NGOs with a view toward enhancing their basic service delivery, by enhancing the capacity of non-governmental implementation partners to deliver quality basic services to the most vulnerable people in the communities. UNDP implements the project with the general funding by the World Bank (WB) acting as the administrator of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). The Project builds capacity for a total of 400 NGOs and CSOs across the eight regions and 34 provinces of Afghanistan. The implementation period is planned for 28 months. UNDP set up Project Management Unit (PMU) for implementation of the Project.

The development objective (PDO) of the NGO/CSO Capacity Support Project (NCCSP) is to enhance the capacities of selected registered national and local NGOs/CSOs to improve their performance and effectiveness. The desired outcome is to build the capacities of select NGOs and CSOs, ultimately contributing to sustaining the provision of basic services and to providing life-saving support to the most vulnerable populations, in the short to medium term.

The project beneficiaries include local NGOs and CSOs, their staff (male and female) who participated in the capacity building trainings, community people (women and men) who benefited from the LVG (Low Value Grant) projects and local stakeholders such as CDC (Community Development Council) and community-based institutions.

The Consultant will work under the direct supervision of the Evaluation Manager. He/she will work in close communication with the national evaluation consultant and NCCSP M&E Specialist.

2. SCOPE OF WORK AND DELIVERABLES

Since the Project is at its final stage of implementation, the FINAL EVALUATION (FE) exercise aims to inform
UNDP Afghanistan, the donor (World Bank), and partners, of the lessons learned, outcomes achieved,

value for money ensured and recommendations for similar programing in future. The FINAL EVALUATION will draw out progress and achievements toward project deliverables, identify gaps in programming, efficient use of resources, impacts and key takeaways for future programming. Importantly, the findings and analysis of final evaluation will inform the designing of UN/UNDP's future interventions related to engaging with NGOs/CSOs. The FINAL EVALUATION will produce valuable lessons and experiences, providing useful findings to the other relevant projects and various initiatives organized by UNDP Afghanistan and other Country Offices. Responding to the Theory of Change (ToC) as described in the project document, the agreed results framework (RF) and the approved workplans, the FINAL EVALUATION is expected to assess the relevance of the project, quality of the project design, effectiveness, and efficiency of the implementation to date, sustainability of the overall project results, impact of intervention, and forward-looking directions for future. FINAL-EVALUATION is expected to produce a report on the achievements of the NCCSP project and success stories on the project, which will be published on UNDP website.

The final evaluation will geographically focus on the provinces and zones that the NCCSP project is being implemented. NCCSP covers all the national NGOs and CSOs across eight regions and 34 provinces of Afghanistan. The beneficiaries will primarily be the NGOs, employees who received capacity building trainings and the local stakeholders including INGOs who will be approached for the betterment of the national coordination platforms.

The evaluation should cover the following cross-cutting themes: (a) Rights-Based Approach (RBA); (b) protection mainstreaming; (c) disability inclusion; (d) gender mainstreaming; (e) environmental sensitivity and sustainability; and (f) accountability to affected populations (AAP). All the above-mentioned themes have an equal priority to the UNDP that should be taken into account in this evaluation and the data collection process should be able to equally and effectively address these cross-cutting themes.

The evaluation may require field visits and Key Informant Interviews (KII) with UNDP and World Bank staff, and the local stakeholders covering a representative number out the 34 provinces where NCCSP has a footprint of delivering capacity building activities. It may also require direct observation of project sites where NCCSP supported NGOs and CSO or indirectly support the local communities through provision of economic and livelihood support.

2.1. Responsibilities:
The consultant is supposed to implement the following tasks in cooperation with a national consultant to be assigned:
- Review the relevant project documents including the Project proposal, M&E and GRM manuals, TPMA guideline, quarterly reports and other relevant documents deem necessary to be reviewed to help set the scene about the project nature and activities.
- Maintain close working relationship with the UNDP management team in the country office as well as in the provinces, seek support where needed and coordinate regularly.
- Implement the ethical considerations throughout the process and ensure to comply with the UNEG's evaluation standards.
- Evaluation Consultant is expected to work within Afghanistan- Kabul working hours, particularly for the interviews.

- Develop and present a draft evaluation report and findings to the UNDP management and NCCSP management unit, consider all the relevant discussions and comments, and the track record of the changes being proposed/made on the next versions of the evaluation report.
- Submit the final evaluation report with due consideration of quality and effectiveness in line with the timeline that is initially agreed and approved by the UNDP.
- Organize sharing of inputs on final evaluation report.

2.2 The specific deliverables of the assignment will be as follows:

- **Evaluation inception report (10-15 pages).** The inception report should be carried out following and based on preliminary discussions with UNDP after the desk review and should be produced before the evaluation starts (before any formal evaluation interviews, survey distribution or field visits) and prior to the country visit in the case of international evaluators.
- **Evaluation debriefings.** Immediately following an evaluation, UNDP may ask for a preliminary debriefing and findings.
- **Draft evaluation report (within an agreed length).** The UNDP Evaluation Reference Group (Consisting of Development Effectiveness Unit, Programme Management Unit and Project Management) should review the draft evaluation report and provide an amalgamated set of comments to the evaluator within an agreed period, addressing the content required (as agreed in the TOR and inception report) and quality criteria as outlined in these guidelines.
- **Evaluation report audit trail.** Comments and changes by the evaluator in response to the draft report should be retained by the evaluator to show how they have addressed comments.
- **Final evaluation report, reflecting the achievements and success stories of the project.**
- **Presentations to UNDP and World Bank.**

Timetable, duration, and payment:

This assignment is planned for a total duration of 2 months **Place of work**

UNDP Country Office Kabul, Afghanistan (UNOCA Compound) **Payment Modalities:**

Payments under this contract will be paid as in 3 installments upon the satisfactory completions of the tasks indicated above, including approved deliverables and Certificates of Payments (COPs) and timesheets per UNDP procurement formats for individual contractors. The provisional payment schedule is as follows:

Deliverable	Instalment (percentage)
Deliverable #1: Upon approval of the inception report by the UNDP and arrival of the international consultant to Kabul as the duty station	10%
Deliverable #2: Upon submission of the first draft of the evaluation report	90%
Deliverable #3: Upon the submission of the final product including annexes and raw data and approval of UNDP Management.	

Consultant Profile

I.   Academic Qualifications:

- A minimum of a master's degree or equivalent in law, political science, development studies, history, or other relevant social science.

II.   Years of experience:

- At least 7 years of professional experience in the provision of policy, analytical, and technical advisory support for international development organization.
- At least 5 years of proven experience in development, risk assessment, and/or evaluation of programmes or projects in capacity building of private sector, government entities and civil society organizations in similar contexts to Afghanistan.
- Experience in the result-based management, evaluation methodologies and programme/project monitoring approaches with development partners
- The project Final review/evaluation experience with UNDP is preferred.
- Sound understanding of the UN system and of UNDP's mandate and role.

III.   Language:

- Excellent knowledge, both oral and written, of English with presentational capacities is required.

IV.   Competencies:

Functional Competencies:

- Ability to work independently.
- Ability to perform tasks in a timely manner and produce quality final product.
- Strong interpersonal, communication and diplomacy skills.
- Openness to change and ability to receive and integrate feedback.

Corporate Competencies:

- Demonstrates integrity by modelling the UN's values and ethical standards.
- Promotes the vision, mission, and strategic goals of UNDP.
- Displays culture, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability.
- Treats all people fairly without favoritism.
- Fulfils all obligations to gender sensitivity.

PROCEDURES AND LOGISTICS

- In Kabul, the consultant may either work from her/his accommodation or use the offices of the UNDP Country Office.

- Transportation related to visits within Kabul and the field if needed will be provided to the consultant by UNDP in accordance with UNDP policies and procedures as appropriate subject to clearance and approval by the UNDP Afghanistan Security Unit.

- The consultant should organize consultations with partners in accordance with established work schedules in Kabul.
- The consultant should arrange for her/his own insurance including evacuation in emergencies and war risk insurance. Related costs should be included in the consultant's financial proposal.
- The evolving security context and security risks in Kabul could impact on scheduled activities.

PRICE PROPOSAL AND SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

Shortlisted candidates (ONLY) will be requested to submit a Financial Proposal. The consultant shall then submit a price proposal when requested by UNDP, in accordance with the below:

1. **Daily Fee** – The contractor shall propose a daily fee, which should be inclusive of his professional fee, local communication cost and insurance (inclusive of medical health insurance and evacuation). The number of working days for which the daily fee shall be payable under the contract of **43 working days.**

2. **DSA/Living Allowance** – The Consultant shall be separately paid the Living allowance/DSA as per applicable UNDP rate for stay in Kabul and travel to other locations as per actual number of nights spent in Kabul or other locations. Deductions from DSA shall be made as per applicable UNDP policy when accommodation and other facilities are provided by UNDP. An estimated provision in this regard shall be included in the contract. The consultant need not quote for DSA in Financial Proposal.

3. **Accommodation in Kabul** - The Consultants are NOT allowed to stay in a place of their choice other than the UNDSS approved places in Kabul, Afghanistan. UNDP will provide accommodation to the Consultant for the duration of the stay in Afghanistan in UNDSS approved places. Deductions in this regard shall be made from DSA payment as per applicable UNDP Policy.

4. **Travel & Visa** – The contractor shall propose an estimated lump-sum for home-Kabul-home travel (economy most direct route) and Afghanistan visa expenses.

5. **The total professional fee** shall be converted into a lump-sum contract and payments under the contract shall be made on submission and acceptance of deliverables under the contract in accordance with the schedule of payment linked with deliverables and at the end of assignment.

UNDP reserves the right to withhold all or a portion of payment if performance is unsatisfactory, if work/outputs is incomplete, not delivered or for failure to meet deadlines.

Evaluation Method and Criteria:

Individual consultant will be evaluated based on the following methodology:

The award of the contract shall be made to the individual consultant whose offer has been evaluated and determined as:

1) Responsive/compliant/acceptable, and

2) Having received the highest score out of a pre-determined set of weighted technical and financial criteria specific to the solicitation.

Technical Criteria 100%
Financial Criteria (in line with roster or lower Fees)

Only candidates obtaining a minimum of maximum points would be considered for the Financial Evaluation.

Technical Evaluation (100%)

- Qualification TECHNICAL EXPERTISE (REQUIRED EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE FOR ASSIGNMENT) **Mark 50**
- RELEVANT REGIONAL OR COUNTRY SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE, **Mark 20**
- ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS (RELEVANT ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS IN LINE WITH THE TOR), **Mark 30**

Documents to be included when submitting the proposals:

Interested international Consultant must submit the following documents/information to demonstrate their qualifications in one single PDF document:

1. Personal CV or P11, indicating all experience from similar projects, as well as the contact details (email and telephone number) of the Candidate and at least three (3) professional references.
2. **Technical Proposal (can be attached with CV or response can be provided to mandatory question on jobs site):**
   a. Brief description of why the individual considers him/herself as the most suitable for the assignment.

Annex 2: NCCSP Project Results Chain[47]

Activities	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes	Outcome	Long-term Outcome
Component 1 Mapping and Capacity Strengthening of Select NGOs/CSOs	Database and taxonomy of active registered national and local NGOs and CSOs	Enhanced knowledge of the current civil society landscape, including capacity gaps of the NGO/CSO sector		
	Needs assessment conducted; capacity strengthening plan established; and training modules tailored	Strengthened capacity of select NGOs/CSOs to implement local service delivery & community mobilization	Enhanced performance of select NGOs and CSOs for service delivery and implementation on the ground	Improved access to life-saving support for the most vulnerable populations in the short to medium term
	Select NGOs/CSOs trained (in project management; fiduciary; reporting; etc.)			
Component 2 Operational Support Subgrants to Select NGOs/CSOs	Subgrants delivered to select NGOs/CSOs, with special focus on those working with the most vulnerable communities and women-led CSOs	Extended operational ability of targeted national and local NGOs/CSOs to implement on the ground		
Component 3 Development and Coordination of NGO platform	NGO platform (vision; operating procedures) designed in consultation with key stakeholders	Improved coordination structure and increased service delivery effectiveness of the NGO sector *[via networking; peer-to-peer learning; technical support]*		
	NGO platform (at national and provincial levels) active and functional			

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[47] UNDP. 2024. Afghanistan NGO/CSO Capacity Support. Afghanistan NGO/CSO Capacity Support | United Nations Development Programme (undp.org)

Annex 3: Evaluation Questions Matrix

Key Question	Sub-Questions	Data Sources	Indicators	Data Collection Methods
Coherence				
1. Do synergies exist with other interventions carried out by UNDP as well as intervention partners and stakeholders including the donor?	1.1 Did project design take into consideration complementary UNDP thematic areas of support in design and practice? 1.2 Were integrated/ joint outcomes identified and common approaches pursued?	- Project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff and key stakeholders	Integrated programming pursued	- Document review - Key informant interviews
2. To what extent is NCCSP consistent with international norms and standards to be applied to the existing context?	2.1 Did UNDP rearticulate its role within the UN development System? How successful was UNDP in proactively facilitating Signature Solutions to bring together different sectoral actors?	- Project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff and key stakeholders	Optimised integrator role	- Document review - Key informant interviews
3. To what extent is NCCSP complementary to other actors' interventions in the same context? To what extent does NCCSP add value and avoid duplication?	3.1 To what extent did UNDP programme approaches improve cooperation with UN agencies or enhance synergies to enable a coherent response in Afghanistan? 3.2 Did partnerships exist with NGO networks or private sector? To what extent were efforts and tools by UNDP able to facilitate engagement to improve contributions?	- Project documents -Interviews with UNDP staff, UN agencies, and partners	Strategic partnership with actors	- Document review - Key informant interviews - FGDs
Relevance				
4. To what extent was the project in line with the UN Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF, TCPRF and UNDP Strategic Plan) and to the needs of local NGOs and CSOs specifically for women-led?	4.1 How well did the project align with the TEF, TCPRF, and UNDP Strategic Plan? 4.2 To what extent did the project address the needs of local NGOs and CSOs, particularly those led by women?	- UN Transitional Engagement Framework - TCPRF and UNDP Strategic Plan documents - Needs assessments and stakeholder consultations	Responsiveness to national priorities	- Document review - Stakeholder interviews
5. To what extent has the project adapted to the changing external conditions following the changed happened at the national level after the DFA takeover in August 2021 and the recent ban on women education and work by the DFA?	5.1 How did the project respond to the political and security changes following the DFA takeover? 5.2 How did the project adapt to the ban on women's education and work by the DFA?	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff and partners	Adaptability to evolving context	- Document review - Key informant interviews - FGDs
6. To what extent, the inputs and strategies identified were realistic, appropriate,	6.1 Were the project's inputs (financial, human, and material	- UNDP project documents	Appropriateness of inputs and	- Document review

and adequate to achieve the results?	resources) sufficient to achieve the intended results? 6.2 Were the project strategies and approaches appropriate and realistic given the context and available resources?	- Budget and financial reports - Interviews with UNDP staff and partners	implementation strategies	- Key informant interviews
7. To what extent did the project achieve its overall outputs? Are the project's contributions to outcomes clear, especially contribution to GEWE?	7.1 To what extent were the planned outputs achieved? 7.2 How clear are the project's contributions to the intended outcomes, particularly in the area of GEWE?	- UNDP project documents - M&E reports - Interviews with UNDP staff, partners, and beneficiaries	Responsiveness to GEWE	- Document review - Key informant interviews - Beneficiary surveys
Effectiveness				
8. How effective were the strategies used in the implementation of the project completing the activities effectively in terms of quality, quantity, and timing? To what extent did outputs contribute to the achievement of outcomes and what factors were contributing?	8.1 How effective were the project's implementation strategies in terms of quality, quantity, and timeliness of activities? 8.2 To what extent did the project's outputs contribute to the achievement of its intended outcomes? 8.3 What were the key factors (internal and external) that influenced the project's effectiveness?	- UNDP project documents - M&E reports - Interviews with UNDP staff, partners, and beneficiaries	Programme outputs achieved	- Document review - Key informant interviews - Beneficiary surveys
9. Did the capacity support services deliver by NCCSP address the needs of beneficiaries and local communities and were the target beneficiaries reached as expected? (Are there significant differences between male and female beneficiaries?)	9.1 To what extent did the capacity support services meet the needs of the beneficiaries and local communities? 9.2 Were the target beneficiaries reached as expected, and were there any significant differences in the participation and benefits between male and female beneficiaries?	- UNDP project documents - M&E reports - Interviews with UNDP staff, partners, and beneficiaries	Results benefited those at risk of being left behind	- Document review - Key informant interviews - Beneficiary surveys - FGDs
10. What are the key internal and external factors that contributed, affected, or impeded the achievements, and how UNDP and the partners have managed these factors?	10.1 What were the key internal factors (within UNDP and partners) that influenced the project's achievements? 10.2 What were the key external factors (beyond UNDP and partners' control) that influenced the project's achievements? 10.3 How did UNDP and partners manage these contributing and hindering factors?	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff and partners	Responsiveness to internal and external factors	- Document review - Key informant interviews - FGDs
11. To what extent have UNDP partners, NGOs and local stakeholders been	11.1 How involved were UNDP partners, NGOs, and local	- UNDP project documents	Participatory and engagement effectiveness	- Document review

involved in project implementation following a participatory approach? To what extent stakeholders and beneficiaries are satisfied with the benefits they received.	stakeholders in the project implementation process? 11.2 To what extent are stakeholders and beneficiaries satisfied with the benefits they received from the project?	- Interviews with UNDP staff, partners, NGOs, and beneficiaries		- Key informant interviews - Beneficiary surveys - FGDs
Efficiency				
12. How cost-effective was the project? Were the financial resources used appropriately to achieve the intended results?	12.1 To what extent were the project's financial resources used efficiently and cost-effectively to achieve the intended results? 12.2 Were the financial resources allocated and utilized appropriately to achieve the project's objectives?	- UNDP project financial reports and budgets - Interviews with UNDP finance and program staff	Strategic usage of project resources	- Document review - Key informant interviews
13. What systems and tools were developed and implemented for social and environmental safeguarding? What challenges were experienced during use of the tools? How has it contributed to the quality of project implementation?	13.1 What social and environmental safeguarding systems and tools were developed and implemented by the project? 13.2 What challenges were encountered in the use of these tools, and how did they affect the quality of project implementation?	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff and partners	Adoption of environmental and social safeguards	- Document review - Key informant interviews
14. Did the project activities overlap, or duplicate other similar interventions funded nationally, and/or by other donors?	14.1 To what extent did the project's activities overlap, or duplicate other similar interventions funded by the government or other donors?	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff, partners, and other donors	Complementarity with other projects	- Document review - Key informant interviews
15. To what extent did the project produce synergies within UNDP and with other development partners and play complementary roles with each other?	15.1 How well did the project create synergies and complementarity with other UNDP initiatives and development partners?	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff and development partners	Synergies created	- Document review - Key informant interviews
Sustainability				
16. Did the NCCSP activities take specific measures to guarantee sustainability? Are activities supported by the local stakeholders and communities and well-integrated into local social and economic structures? To what extent did the NCCSP bring momentum in the country for implementation of NGO/CSOs support activities?	16.1 What measures were taken to ensure the sustainability of NCCSP activities? 16.2 To what extent were the NCCSP activities supported by local stakeholders and communities, and integrated into local social and economic structures? 16.3 How much momentum did the NCCSP create for the implementation of NGO/CSO support activities in the country?	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff, partners, and local stakeholders	Ensured local ownership	- Document review - Key informant interviews - FGDs
17. What exit strategies are in place and how effective are they in ensuring the	17.1 What exit strategies were developed to ensure the	- UNDP project documents	Sustainability prospects	- Document review

sustainability beyond the project life cycle? Are structures, resources, and processes in place to ensure the benefits generated by NCCSP are continued after the completion of the Project?	sustainability of the project's benefits beyond its life cycle? 17.2 How effective were these exit strategies, and what structures, resources, and processes were put in place to continue the benefits generated by the NCCSP?	- Interviews with UNDP staff and partners		- Key informant interviews
18. How do beneficiaries at the individual and institutional levels perceive sustainability of NCCSP, for capacity building support? Do they plan to continue making use of the services/products produced?	18.1 How do individual and institutional beneficiaries perceive the sustainability of the NCCSP's capacity building support? 18.2 Do beneficiaries plan to continue utilizing the services and products developed through the NCCSP?	- Interviews with individual and institutional beneficiaries - Beneficiary surveys	Perceptions on sustainability	- Key informant interviews - Beneficiary surveys - FGDs
19. Describe key factors that will require attention to improve the prospects of sustainability of Project outcomes and the potential for replication of the approach? What social or political risks may jeopardize sustainability of project outputs and the project's contributions to UNDP Country Programme outputs and outcomes?	19.1 What are the key factors that need to be addressed to improve the sustainability of the NCCSP's outcomes? 19.2 What is the potential for replicating the NCCSP's approach in other contexts? 19.3 What social or political risks could jeopardize the sustainability of the project's outputs and contributions to UNDP's Country Programme?	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff, partners, and stakeholders	Risks to sustainability and scalability	- Document review - Key informant interviews
Impact				
20. To what extent is the project likely to contribute to improved capacity at the individual (employees of NGOs/CSOs) and institutional level (management and operations)?	20.1 To what extent has the project contributed to the capacity development of individual employees of NGOs/CSOs? 20.2 To what extent has the project contributed to the institutional capacity development (management and operations) of NGOs/CSOs?	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff, partners, and NGO/CSO representatives - Capacity assessments	Capacities improved	- Document review - Key informant interviews - Capacity assessments - FGDs
21. What positive and/or negative changes are the beneficiaries experiencing as a result of their participation in NCCSP activities?	21.1 What positive changes have the beneficiaries experienced as a result of their participation in NCCSP activities? 21.2 What negative changes, if any, have the beneficiaries experienced as a result of their participation in NCCSP activities?	- Interviews with NCCSP beneficiaries - Beneficiary surveys	Evidence of positive change	- Key informant - Interviews - Beneficiary surveys - FGDs
22. How significant are the changes to the NGOs/CSOs, their employees and communities that will be	22.1 What significant changes have been observed in the NGOs/CSOs, their employees, and the communities as a result of the NCCSP?	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff, partners,	Extent to which capacities are improved	- Document review - Key informant interviews - FGDs

		NGO/CSO representatives, and community members		
created as a result of the NCCSP?		NGO/CSO representatives, and community members		
23. To what extent the local communities benefited from the quick impact projects implemented through the low value grants?	23.1 How have local communities benefited from the quick impact projects implemented through the low-value grants?	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff, partners, and community members - Beneficiary surveys	Results potentially benefited communities	- Document review - Key informant interviews - Beneficiary surveys - FGDs
RBA, LNOB and Gender Equality				
24. How adequately were cross-cutting themes such as human rights, gender equality, age and social and environmental standards considered in the NCCSP?	24.1 To what extent were human rights, gender equality, age, and social and environmental standards integrated into the design and implementation of the NCCSP?	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff and partners	Results benefited those at risk of being left behind	- Document review - Key informant interviews - FGDs
25. To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in GEWE? Were there any unintended effects? How can the project further broaden in a future phase its contribution to enhancing diversity and inclusion?	25.1 What positive changes in GEWE have been achieved through the NCCSP? 25.2 Were there any unintended effects, both	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff and partners	Results benefited those at risk of being left behind	- Document review - Key informant interviews - Beneficiary Survey - FGDs
26. To what extent have local communities, women, youth, PwDs and other disadvantaged groups benefited from the project either direct or indirectly?	26.1 How has the project benefited PwDs? Youth?	- UNDP project documents - Interviews with UNDP staff and partners	Inclusiveness	- Document review - Key informant interviews - Beneficiary Survey - FGDs

Annex 4: List of Persons Interviewed

#	Participant Group	Name	Position	Organisation/ Entity
1	UNDP	Mr. Yoshiaki Noguchi yoshiaki.noguchi@undp.org	Project Manager	NCCSP/UNDP
2		Ms. Asila Resoli	PSEA Specialist	NCCSP/UNDP
3		Ms. Doel Mukerjee	DRR – P	UNDP
4		Mr. Hamid Rasoli	Grant Management Specialist	NCCSP/UNDP
5		Mr. Anatoli Balovnev	Area Manager Jalalabad	UNDP
6		Ms. Francesca Cozzarini	Area Manager Herat	UNDP
7		Ahmadullah Ghairat	M&E Coordinator Jalalabad	NCCSP/UNDP
8		Hugo Marino and Robert Kibugu	IRMU	UNDP
9		Malaila Faizi	M&E Coordinator Kabul	NCCSP/UNDP
10		Wajih Nael	M&E Coordinator Herat	NCCSP/UNDP
11		Wahdatullah Wardak	SES Specialist	NCCSP/UNDP
12		Waheeb El Eryani	Area Manager Mazar E Sharif	UNDP
13		Zobaida Rezayee	M&E Coordinator Mazar E Sharif	NCCSP/UNDP
14	World Bank	Mr. Olivier Lavinal olavinal@worldbank.org	Task Team Leader	World Bank
15		Jovitta Thomas		World Bank
16	Steering Committee	Ms. Nancy Khweiss nancy.khweiss@unwomen.org	Project Manager	UN-Women
17				
18		Ms. Kochi Hassan kochay@awec.info	Director	Afghanistan Women Education Center (AWEC)
19		Ms. Salma Yousifzai	Director	Afghanistan Women Chamber & Commerce (AWCC)
20	Consultancy Firms	Mr. Ulfat Youssef	Component 1 Lead	MgtWell Consulting Services

NGO acronym	Region	Province	District	Community	Sector	Selected for (FGD / Direct visit)

					Health, Agriculture & Livelihood	Direct visit
NCRO	West	Herat	Kushk e Rubat sangy	Chul dukhtar		
ARAA	West	Herat	Injil	Lakani	Livelihood	Direct visit
MSEO	West	Herat	Guzara	Ziaratja	Agriculture	Direct visit
NPSA	West	Herat	Injil	Hawzai Karbas	Livelihood	Direct visit
SDP	West	Herat	Zawol	Aziz Abad	Agriculture	FGD
BSDO	West	Herat	Kushk e Rubat sangy	Kushk center	Livelihood	FGD
HBDO	West	Herat	Herat city	4 PDs	Livelihood	FGD
APTLO	West	Herat	Herat city	Jubrail	Education	FGD
GCDO	West	Herat	Guzara	Nisan & Shadi jam	Agriculture	FGD
GSRO	West	Herat	Zundajan	Shukiban	Agriculture	FGD
RPOA	South	Kandahar	Dand and Zherai	Pashmol, Sinzari, Qasam pol, Shirsorkh	Livelihood	FGD
DELTA	South	Kandahar	Panjwaye	Zangabad, Zalakhan, Dowab	Agriculture	FGD
OHA	South	Kandahar	Dand and Daman	Yaro Chena, Sadozo Chena and Walakaan Villages in Dand District Shakoor Kariz in Damaan District	Livelihood	FGD
WOPAA	South	Kandahar	Zherai	Sang-e-Hesar	Livelihood	FGD
SHAO	South	Kandahar	Kandahar City	PD 9, 10 (Loya Weala area)	Livelihood	FGD

GKRO	South	Kandahar	Panjwayee	1. Sapid Rawan 2. Zang Abad 3. Toloqan 4. Moshan 5. Markaz 6. Nakhonay 7. Rigwa	Livelihood	FGD
HRDA	South	Kandahar	Meyaneshin and Nesh	Loi Kariz, Deser Drasko village, SheikhaNo village, Tarlik village, Lajru village, Owi village, Amir Jabarak village, Kadwan village, Haji Mangal Khan Jamuzi village, Miani village, Abbas Khan village, Nawa Zamto village, Gosaleh Mango village, Sarnawi village, Taj Muhammad Khan village, Simchak village, Fida Muhammad village, Sacho Akhtar village, Muhammad village of Semuchak village	Health	FGD
SGOA	South	Kandahar	Panjwayee and Dand	1- Panjwai City 2- Mushan village 3- Nakhoni village 4- Regwa village 5- Safedrawan village 6- Talokan village 7- Abdul Hai village Dand District. 1- Angoryan village 2- Char	Health	Direct Visit

				Dewal village 3-Mansoor Kalay village 4-Nakodak village 5- Qadus Kariz village 6-Rawani village 7- Salo Kariz village 8- Yakh Kariz village 9-Zakir Shairf village		
KRO	South	Kandahar	Nesh	Dara-e-Noor, Char gumbat	Agriculture	Direct Visit
HHRO (former; HYCSO)	South	Kandahar	Kandahar city	PD 1, 7 and 11	Education	Direct Visit
CBRO	South	Kandahar	Kandahar city	All communities	Livelihood	Direct Visit
HARO	East	Nangarhar	Surkhrod and Momandara	Bar Saltan Pur, Bagh Bala, Shashapur; Baasawal, Daamaan, Gardai Ghous	Education	Direct Visit
CDSACO	East	Nangarhar	Kot, Momandara and Batikot	Laghar joo, Sefaai, Shestakhil; Sepay, pawaw, Chardi; Koz baasawal and Bar Baasawal	Agriculture	Direct Visit
ESRO	East	Nangarhar	Behsod and Surkhrod	Shashapur Village	Livelihood	Direct Visit
KDAO	East	Laghaman	Qarghaie	Kas Aziz khan	Health	Direct Visit
SARCDO	East	Laghaman	Qarghaie	Multiple Villages	Agriculture	FGD
OAWCK	East	Kunar	Asmar and Shigal	Multiple Villages	Livelihood	FGD
OHR	East	Nuristan	Paron and Wama	Multiple Villages	Health	FGD

WADAN	East	Nangarhar	Ghani Khil, Surkhrod	Shirgar kalai	Livelihood	FGD
ZAO	East	Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Khost and Nangarhar	Cities	Multiple Villages	Education	FGD
YCHDO	East	Kunar	Multiple districts	Multiple Villages	Education	FGD
BCESO	East	Nangarhar	Behsod	Khushgumabad	Agriculture	FGD
GSOA	Southeast	Logar	Baraki Barak	Siagil/Kaku Sahib	Agriculture	Direct Visit
WAFA	Southeast	Logar	Pole Alam	Kolangar/Pole Kandahari	Education	Direct Visit
PIDO	Southeast	Ghazni	Deh Yak	Asko	Health	Direct Visit
CCA	Southeast	Ghazni	Khwaja Omeri	Toormay	Livelihood	Direct Visit
ACRU	Southeast	Khost	Matoon	1200 Family	Livelihood	FGD
SAOA	Southeast	Ghazni	Center of Ghazni	Rawza	Health	FGD
GRSP	Southeast	Ghazni	Jaghoori	Angoori	Agriculture	FGD
ACDO	Southeast	Paktika	Urgoon	Sarakht	Agriculture	FGD
SCWO	Southeast	Paktia	Ahmad Aba	Koh Seen	Education	FGD
MHDO	Southeast	Logar	Khushi	Mayana Deh	Health	FGD
OFRD	Southeast	Logar	Khushi	Bala Deh	Livelihood	FGD
WAYPADO	Northeast	Kunduz	Kunduz	City center	Livelihood	Direct visit / FGD
AWRSA	Northeast	Takhar	Taloqan	Kalafgna, Baharak, Taloqan	Health	Direct visit / FGD
SBFO	Northeast	Takhar	Taloqan	Baharak, Warsaj, Taloqan, Khwaja ghar	Education	Direct visit / FGD
ASIO	Northeast	Kunduz	Kunduz	4 Darak, city center, Khanabd	Agriculture	Direct visit / FGD
ANOCED	Northeast	Baghlan	Pule Khumri	City center	Livelihood	Direct visit / FGD
CSSCO	Northeast	Baghlan	Pule Khumri	Dushi, Dahna ghuri, city center	Agriculture	Direct visit / FGD

OTSSO	Northeast	Badakhshan	Faizabad	Jurm, Baharak, City center	Livelihood	FGD
OSII	Northeast	Baghlan	Pule Khumri	Dushi, city center	Agriculture	FGD
YBFSO	Northeast	Takhar	Taloqan	Kalafgan, city center	Agriculture	Direct visit / FGD
ATOA	Northeast	Kunduz	Kunduz	Imam Sahib	Health	FGD
OWE	Northeast	Kunduz	Kunduz	City center	Livelihood	FGD
SSEOA	Northeast	Badakhshan	Faizabad	Faizabad, Ishkashem, Zebak, Wakhan, and Shaghnan	Education	FGD
OOTD	Northeast	Takhar	Taloqan	Farkhar, Baharak	Health	Direct visit / FGD
RSLSO	North	Balkh	Dawlat Abad	Dawlat Abad	Education	Direct visit
CACO	North	Balkh	Nahr-e-Shai and PD 8,10,11	Nahr-e-Shai and PD 8,10,12	livelhood	Direct visit
WECBCO	North	Balkh	Nahr-e-Shahi	Nahr-e-Shahi	livelhood	Direct visit
ICCO	North	Balkh	Shadian	Shadian	livestock	Direct visit
MIEOAD	North	Faryab	Gurziwan	Gurziwan	livestock	FGD
ORDR	North	Sar-e-Pul	Sayad, Sozmagala and Sancharak	Sayad, Sozmagala and Sancharak	livestock	FGD
KHANAO	North	Balkh	Khulm, Dhedadi and Nahr-e-Shahi	Khulm, Dhedadi and Nahr-e-Shahi	livelhood	FGD
SRP	North	Balkh	Kaldar	Kaldar	livestock	FGD
ADWSO	North	Balkh	PD 1 to 11	PD 1 to 12	Education	FGD
CDYO	North	Jawzjan	Khanaqa, Charmgarkhana and H Project	Khanaqa, Charmgarkhana and H Project	livelhood	FGD

TNSSO	North	Samangan	Dalkhaki, Ghantani,	Dalkhaki, Ghantani,	livelhood	FGD
DDSO	Central	Kabul	Farza	center	Agriculture	Direct visit
KOO	Central	Kabul	PD 18	Sare kotal	Health	Direct visit
TSHEO	central	Kabul	Deh Sabz	Bakhtyaran	Health	Direct Visit
AYGO	central	Kabul	PD 6	Qalae shada	Livelihood	Direct Visit
CSRSO	central	Kabul	PD 10	Taimani	Education	FGD
HAM	central	Kabul	PD 7	Doghabad	Education	FGD
WOMEN	central	Kabul	Bagrami	Qala e shanan	Livelihood	Direct Visit
DADAO	central	Kabul	Paghman	Chandalbai	Livelihood	Direct Visit
OJWA	central	Kabul	PD 3	Karti 4	Education	FGD
PEACE	central	Kabul	PD 5	Khoshal khan	Livelihood	Direct Visit
AGFO	central	Kabul	Paghman	Qargha	livelihood	Direct Visit

Annex 5: Interview Guides

Key Informant Interview Guide

Name of Interviewee:
Position:
Country:
Date of Interview:

Evaluator:
Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me about the ILO's project **'Afghanistan NGOs/CSOs Support Project (NCCSP)**.' We anticipate that it will take approximately <u>one hour</u> to respond to these questions. If you need to break off the interview at any point, we will re-schedule and continue later. I am an independent evaluator and want to assure you that your answers are confidential and anonymous and will only be analysed by category of stakeholder. Should I need to directly quote you, this will only happen after receiving a written consent from you.

Before we start the formal interview, we would like to know your level of involvement with UNDP Afghanistan CO, specifically in this project.

Coherence
1. Do synergies exist with other interventions carried out by UNDP as well as intervention partners and stakeholders including the donor?

2. To what extent is NCCSP consistent with international norms and standards to be applied to the existing context?

3. To what extent is NCCSP complementary to other actors' interventions in the same context? To what extent does NCCSP add value and avoid duplication?

Relevance
4. To what extent was the project in line with the UN Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF, TCPRF and UNDP Strategic Plan) and to the needs of local NGOs and CSOs specifically for women-led?

5. To what extent has the project adapted to the changing external conditions following the changed happened at the national level after the DFA takeover in August 2021 and the recent ban on women education and work by the DFA?

6. To what extent, the inputs and strategies identified were realistic, appropriate, and adequate to achieve the results?

7. To what extent did the project achieve its overall outputs? Are the project's contributions to outcomes clear, especially contribution to GEWE?

Effectiveness
8. How effective were the strategies used in the implementation of the project completing the activities effectively in terms of quality, quantity, and timing? To what extent did outputs contribute to the achievement of outcomes and what factors were contributing?

9. Did the capacity support services deliver by NCCSP address the needs of beneficiaries and local communities and were the target beneficiaries reached as expected? (Are there significant differences between male and female beneficiaries?)

10. What are the key internal and external factors that contributed, affected, or impeded the achievements, and how UNDP and the partners have managed these factors?

11. To what extent have UNDP partners, NGOs and local stakeholders been involved in project implementation following a participatory approach? To what extent stakeholders and beneficiaries are satisfied with the benefits they received.

Efficiency
12. How cost-effective was the project? Were the financial resources used appropriately to achieve the intended results?

13. What systems and tools were developed and implemented for social and environmental safeguarding? What challenges were experienced during use of the tools? How has it contributed to the quality of project implementation?

14. Did the project activities overlap, or duplicate other similar interventions funded nationally, and/or by other donors?

15. To what extent did the project produce synergies within UNDP and with other development partners and play complementary roles with each other?

Sustainability
16. Did the NCCSP activities take specific measures to guarantee sustainability? Are activities supported by the local stakeholders and communities and well-integrated into local social and economic structures? To what extent did the NCCSP bring momentum in the country for implementation of NGO/CSOs support activities?

17. What exit strategies are in place and how effective are they in ensuring the sustainability beyond the project life cycle? Are structures, resources, and processes in place to ensure the benefits generated by NCCSP are continued after the completion of the Project?

18. How do beneficiaries at the individual and institutional levels perceive sustainability of NCCSP, for capacity building support? Do they plan to continue making use of the services/products produced?

19. Describe key factors that will require attention to improve the prospects of sustainability of Project outcomes and the potential for replication of the approach? What social or political risks may jeopardize sustainability of project outputs and the project's contributions to UNDP Country Programme outputs and outcomes?

Impact
20. To what extent is the project likely to contribute to improved capacity at the individual (employees of NGOs/CSOs) and institutional level (management and operations)?

21. What positive and/or negative changes are the beneficiaries experiencing as a result of their participation in NCCSP activities?

22. How significant are the changes to the NGOs/CSOs, their employees and communities that will be created as a result of the NCCSP?

23. To what extent the local communities benefited from the quick impact projects implemented through the low value grants?

RBA, LNOB and Gender Equality
24. How adequately were cross-cutting themes such as human rights, gender equality, age and social and environmental standards considered in the NCCSP?

25. To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women? Were there any unintended effects? How can the project further broaden in a future phase its contribution to enhancing diversity and inclusion?

26. To what extent have local communities, women, youth, people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups benefited from the project either direct or indirectly?

Focus Group Discussion Guide for NGOs/CSOs

1. How relevant is the project to your needs and priorities?

2. What have been the key results or changes you have observed from the project activities?

3. What factors have influenced the project's ability to achieve the intended results?

4. How satisfied are you with the way the project has been managed and coordinated?

5. Do you think the project's benefits will continue after it ends? What are the key factors for sustainability?

6. To what extent has the project considered the needs and empowerment of women?

7. What has been the overall impact of the project on your community? Can you provide specific examples of how the project has improved your lives?

8. How has the project affected gender dynamics and women's empowerment in your community? Can you provide specific examples of changes you have observed?

9. To what extent has the project been coordinated and aligned with other development initiatives in your community? How could this coordination be improved?

10. If you could provide one recommendation to the project team, what would it be to improve the project's effectiveness and impact?

Focus Group Discussion Guide for End Beneficiaries

1. How relevant is the project to your needs and priorities?
2. What have been the key results or changes you have observed from the project activities?
3. What factors have influenced the project's ability to achieve the intended results?
4. How satisfied are you with the way the project has been managed and coordinated?
5. Do you think the project's benefits will continue after it ends? What are the key factors for sustainability?

6. To what extent has the project considered the needs and empowerment of women?
7. What has been the overall impact of the project on your community? Can you provide specific examples of how the project has improved your lives?

Online Survey Guide

UNDP has commissioned a mid-term evaluation of the **Afghanistan NGOs/CSOs Support Project (NCCSP)**. As part of the data collection process, the evaluators have designed this survey to gather the views and perceptions of the beneficiaries of the project on key aspects of the project. Your participation in this evaluation through the completion of this survey will be greatly appreciated. The survey should take about **15 minutes** to complete. Wherever there is an opportunity for a write-in response, you are encouraged to refer to concrete examples. If for any reason you cannot respond to a question, please skip it. We kindly request that you complete this survey by xx August 2023. The information you provide will be kept **strictly confidential**. Thank you!

1. Please indicate your age group:
    18-25   26-35   36-45   46-55   Older 55

2. Please indicate your gender:
    Male   Female   Other   Don't prefer to indicate my gender

3. Which type of organization do you represent?
    National NGO   Sub-national/local NGO   CSO   Other (Please specify)

4. Please indicate the region where your organization operates:
    Answer_____

5. What is your role (position) within the organization that you represent?
    Answer_____

6. How do you rate your organization's capacity in terms of its ability to fulfil its objectives and coordinate with stakeholders at the provincial & national levels?
    Very good   Good   Fair   Poor   Very poor   I don't know   I prefer to not answer

7. How would you rate the participation of women in your organization?
    Very good   Good   Fair   Poor   Very poor   I don't know   I prefer to not answer

8. Has your organization benefit from any support or activity by the UNDP's NCCSP project?
9. Yes/ If yes, please specify the type of support received. _____
    No

10. What motivated your organization to participate in this project activity?
    Answer_____

11. If you have attended any trainings organized by UNDP's NCCSP project, please rate the overall quality of capacity trainings (10 modules):
    Excellent   Good   Mediocre   Poor   I don't k
12. Please rate the overall quality of the on-the-job trainings (5 Topics):
    Excellent   Good   Mediocre   Poor   I don't know

13. Please rate the overall quality of the advisory support for enhancing existing policies
    Excellent   Good   Mediocre   Poor   I don't know

14. Please rate the overall quality of the PSEA training:
    Excellent   Good   Mediocre   Poor   I don't know

15. Please rate the overall quality of the GRM training:
    Excellent   Good   Mediocre   Poor   I don't know

16. Please rate the overall quality of the Environmental and Social Safeguards Training:
    Excellent   Good   Mediocre   Poor   I don't know

17. How relevant was the training provided by UNDP's NCCSP project to your needs and expectations?
    Very relevant   Relevant   Not so relevant   Irrelevant   I don't know

18. What specific training or capacity-building interventions have been most beneficial for your organization?
    Answer_____

19. Please rate the quality of the trainers who delivered the training content:
    Excellent   Good   Mediocre   Poor   I don't know

20. What type of training format do you generally prefer?
    Online   In Person   Hybrid (combination of online and in person)   Don't know/not sure

21. What significant and new things did you learn from the training organized by UNDP's NCCSP project? Please, provide some specific examples.
    Answer_____

22. Can you provide specific examples of how you have used or are planning to use the knowledge and skills you derived from the training you received from UNDP's NCCSP project?
    Answer_____

23. Did your participation in UNDP's NCCSP project activities help you establish any contacts, cooperate, and network with colleagues from other organizations? If so, how did that interaction take place and what was the result? Please, provide as much detail as you can.
24.
    Answer_____

25. Did your organization benefit from any sub-grants provided by the NCCSP project? If yes, in what areas/ services did your work continue (public outreach/community mobilization and/or service delivery)? how was this helpful for the organization to remain functional and effective?
    Answer_____

26. Has the project contributed to enhancing gender equality or women's empowerment specifically?
    Answer_____

27. Have there been any observable improvements in your organization's operational or programmatic capacities as a result of your involvement in the UNDP's NCCSP project?
    Answer_____

28. What aspects of the NCCSP project do you think could be improved (for example, training content/ topics, value of sub-grants, design of platform)?
    Answer_____

29. Are there any additional comments or recommendations you wish to make for the consideration of the evaluation team? Please share any additional comments or suggestions you have for improving this project.
    Answer_____

Thank you for your kind participation!

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Annex 8: Ethics Form

(Each UNEG member to create its own forms for signature)

Annex 2: United Nations Evaluation Group Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System

Evaluation Consultants Agreement Form

To be signed by all consultants as individuals (not by or on behalf of a consultancy company) before a contract can be issued.

Agreement to abide by the Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System

Name of Consultant: _____Nahla Hassan_____

Name of Consultancy Organisation (where relevant): _____

I confirm that I have received and understood and will abide by the United Nations Code of Conduct for Evaluation.

Signed at (place) on (date)

Signed by:

06-Oct-2024

Signature: _____14D311608CE547B..._____

<u>**(Each UNEG member to create its own forms for signature)**</u>

Annex 2: United Nations Evaluation Group Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System

Evaluation Consultants Agreement Form

To be signed by all consultants as individuals (not by or on behalf of a consultancy company) before a contract can be issued.

Agreement to abide by the Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System

Name of Consultant: _____ Sabahuddin Sabah _____

Name of Consultancy Organisation (where relevant): _____

I confirm that I have received and understood and will abide by the United Nations Code of Conduct for Evaluation.

Signed at (place) on (date)

Signed by:

Sabahuddin Sabah   06-Oct-2024

Signature: _____ 8C8BB53576224F3... _____