



## WORKING PAPER

### **Innovative Approach to Evaluating Interventions in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States: The Case of Helmand.**

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## ABSTRACT

In 2011, there can be few environments in which donors and military agencies are under more pressure to deliver and demonstrate results than Afghanistan yet, conversely, few environments where there is more of a challenge in doing so. The imperative to work towards a credible, conditions-based security transition makes 2011-2014 a crucial period for stakeholders engaged in Afghanistan. This, combined with the focus on measurable effect and pressure on value for money emphasised within recent UK strategies such as the Security and Defence Strategic Review (2010) and DFID White Paper (2009), necessitates more emphasis on results-based programming in order to make maximum use of shrinking public sector resources.

The tension between the scrutiny placed on delivering results in fragile states, combined with the inherent difficulty in conducting rigorous assessments in such contexts, demands an innovative approach to evaluation. Considering the challenges involved and the possible ways of addressing this brings together the conference's central themes – the altered nature of the environments in which we work and the need to better understand them - as well as the central mission of the Cornwallis Group to provide a platform for the exposure of new ideas, problems, and techniques to contribute to international peace and stability.

Focusing primarily on the Helmand context, this paper will discuss the challenges to evaluation in environments of this nature including the dearth of baseline data available in a complex and fluctuating operating environment characterised by insecurity, hampered by fractured government systems and swayed by political imperatives. The paper will examine the role of evaluation in such contexts and provide practical examples of innovative approaches to evaluation including the application of geospatial mapping, methods for conducting primary research in insecure environments and the development of information management systems to assist practitioners in working collaboratively towards joint civilian-military assessments of progress against the campaign plan.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

*"I can well understand those who feel less generous today given the state of our economy [...] but we will not balance the books on the backs of the poorest people on the planet."* It was in those terms that Andrew Mitchell, the UK Secretary of State for International Development, addressed the audience at last year's Conservative Party Conference to justify the pledge made by Prime Minister David Cameron during the general election campaign to ring-fence the budget for overseas aid in spite of Britain's abyssal deficit and the brutal cuts undergone by most other government departments. This decision, a politically difficult one in the current economic and social context, will enable the UK, by 2013, to join the handful of industrialised countries that meet their UN obligation to spend a minimum of 0.7% of GDP on aid for development.

What this also implied, however, was that the Department for International Development (DFID), spared by the 2010 and the 2011 budget cuts, would come under an increased level of scrutiny to demonstrate results and justify each pound of taxpayers' money spent overseas. It is for that very purpose, for instance, that a group of Conservative, Labour and Liberal-Democrat MPs set up the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, a watchdog dedicated to maximise the effectiveness and impact of UK aid to developing countries, with a particular focus on Value for Money. This push towards results based decision-making had already been emphasised by DFID in its 2009 White Paper, which stated that it would *"work to ensure every pound of UK aid is spent well"*<sup>1</sup>. Recent developments indicate a reinforcement of this trend for the foreseeable future.

While it has long been advocated that results-based Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) - the most commonly used method for assessing the success of public policies of all sorts in industrialised countries - should become the rule rather than the exception in the field of international development, it has proved difficult to for donors to carry out, or commission systematic and robust M&E programmes. Alongside the lack of political will, which the current economic conditions have contributed to, the intrinsic challenges associated with setting up meaningful M&E systems in poor and unstable environments and the prohibitive cost of doing so have contributed to poor uptake, and chronic lack of robustness in outcome and impact measurement.

This is rapidly changing. A combination of economic pressure and a flow of technical M&E expertise into the field of international development have made the prospect of setting up comprehensive, robust and innovative M&E systems attractive for many donors and groups of donors wanting to show that they are making a difference to a sceptical and increasingly aware audience of taxpayers and auditors. This is particularly true in conflict-affected environments, where entire economies and formal governance mechanisms need to be built from next to nothing, and where success in achieving economic, social and institutional development is a prerequisite of stabilisation and ultimately the departure of foreign troops.

Arguably, nowhere is such a pressure for results-based M&E as strong as it is in Afghanistan. Conversely, there are few environments where there is more of a challenge in doing so.

Helmand Province, Afghanistan, crystallises this tension and exemplifies the value in establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation system. As the focal point of the United Kingdom's diplomatic, defence and development efforts in Afghanistan, practitioners in Helmand are under ever-growing pressure to justify British presence and activity.

Scrutiny of progress in Helmand spans the general public, the media and extends up to Members of Parliament who expect to receive quarterly updates on progress in Helmand. Increasingly, the requirement is not just to report progress but to demonstrate outcomes and effects. To do so, requires the implementation of an integrated evaluation system with established baselines and objectively verifiable indicators which can go further than counting outputs to provide an assessment of impact.

The establishment of such a system, particularly when linked to solid knowledge management tools, enables practitioners to communicate information to multiple audiences quickly and effectively. For international donors engaged in Helmand, this enables better management of reputational, political

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<sup>1</sup> DFID, *"Eliminating World Poverty: Building our Common Future"*, July 2009

and fiduciary risks and supports the Government's commitment to demonstrate value for money, impact and facilitation of transparency.

In addition to the external value of M&E in Helmand, the more fundamental impact is arguably for practitioners. Development and stabilisation efforts in Helmand are borne out of classic counterinsurgency doctrine in terms of the rationale for and nature of the interventions which are pursued; for example, the notion that improved Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) led service delivery will confer legitimacy on the government and lead the populace to reject the insurgency. Counterinsurgency doctrine is, to a large extent, based on assumptions about the impact of development on security. By interrogating assumptions inherent within programming, M&E enables those engaged in programmatic development at the grassroots level to better understand their contribution and impact to wider goals and to effect mid-course corrections to programming where necessary. In an environment where successful development initiatives are bound to national and international security, impact evaluation becomes inextricably linked to the protection of our national interest.

## **2 CHALLENGES TO EVALUATION IN THE HELMAND CONTEXT**

Whilst results-based programming is fundamental to internal and external stakeholders in Helmand, it is also fraught with challenges. In Helmand, challenges are political, relating predominantly to the complexity of the international community's operating environment; logistical, associated with the challenges to evaluation in an insecure environment; and cultural, reflecting the difficulties in applying rigorous research methods in a traditional, Islamic society.

### **2.1 Institutional and Political**

In Helmand the weakness, non-existence or fractured nature of government systems present serious challenges to data collection and M&E. Data systems required for baselines have been weakened, destroyed or discredited by association with the deposed regime leaving a dearth of baselines or time series data and unclear responsibility for data collection spread across disparate agencies. GIROA's statistical capacity has begun to recover, but there remains an all-round skills shortage.

Problems presented by GIROA's institutional weakness are compounded by the institutional complexity of the operating environment in Helmand. As the international community is represented by a range of nations, agencies and actors, there is a risk of operational activity being guided by multiple plans, differing timescales and reporting up mutually exclusive chains of command. Without careful attention to coordinated planning, the coalition effort can result in a lack of synchronicity in the objectives and agendas of actors engaged in Helmand which makes the establishment of a holistic and useful monitoring and evaluation programme problematic.

The pre-eminence of political and military considerations mean that contradictions can also exist within the programming of individual organisations. For example, stabilisation interventions supporting counterinsurgency in Helmand - which have a shortened timeframe and more immediate objectives - are arguably designed around a different 'endgame' to more traditional programmes designed to realise the Millennium Development Goals. An example of this is the health and education initiatives in Helmand which are not specifically designed around the actualisation of Millenniums Development Goals two, four, five and six but aimed at ensuring GIROA has the capacity independently to control, employ and maintain state institutions to ensure that it can provide governance to the population of Helmand.

Similarly, stabilisation efforts in Helmand may not always be intended to have universal benefit. Rather, they may be focused on a particular group, for example, specific tribal leaders, or a small area, for example the Upper Sangin Valley – with this focus seeking to achieve a political end. There is a consequent need for spatial and target group precision in evaluation efforts.

Finally, the scrutiny under which development activities take place in Helmand is one of the principal factors underscoring the need for a robust monitoring and evaluation framework. Conversely, this is also one of the factors that makes its establishment more challenging. Afghanistan's profile as a British, US and Danish foreign policy priority creates an inordinate pressure to deliver 'good news

stories'. A robust, impartial and objective M&E system is essential to ensure that assessment is non-partisan and that an accurate and transparent portrayal of progress is made. .

## **2.2 Logistical**

Further challenges are presented to the implementation of an integrated evaluation process through the actualities of the operating environment and the constraints imposed by the security situation. The tensions between what it would be desirable to measure and what is achievable, expose the delicate balance between adhering to best practice whilst accepting realities on the ground.

The reality in fragile states is that data is almost always patchy and of poor quality. This is extreme in a context like Helmand where a regime has been removed and thirty years of warfare has stunted governmental development. In such environments, there is likely to be a dearth of baseline data from which to begin measuring progress and a requirement to start from scratch which poses additional pressures for the system.

The difficulty of embedding an M&E system in an environment considered to be naturally at odds with it, is compounded by the wide range of staff expertise which is symptomatic of a multi-agency mission. The Provincial Reconstruction Team in Helmand, for example, represents an umbrella of military and civilian organisations who bring a range of skills to the campaign effort but who approach M&E with varying methodological perspectives.

Once the system has been designed, challenges are presented in delivery. Conventional evaluation techniques like household surveys designed to reach a representative sample of the population become fraught with challenges in Helmand where freedom of movement is significantly curtailed and association with ISAF puts enumerators' lives at risk.

The scale of the challenge and the perception that the populace is largely inaccessible to the international community can lead to a negativity about the feasibility of conducting research in Helmand, an associated scepticism regarding the reliability of results and a subsequent reticence toward embracing a measurable approach. Given this backdrop, it is crucial to produce robust data which stands up to scrutiny. But again the challenge of doing so is profound: the utility of the M&E system hinges on the credibility of the data it produces yet the verification process is complex. Security constraints make it impossible to directly oversee field research while mistrust and fear among respondents mean they are often unwilling to provide contact details.

Once the system is embedded, attention must be given to its continuation. In fragile states, postings are naturally shorter and this inevitable turnover of staff creates difficulties in establishing institutional memory. In Helmand, civilian deployments are approximately eighteen months in length and military tours are sometimes shorter and can be unsynchronised with civilian associates. It becomes imperative that an evaluation system is linked to a robust knowledge management tool which can act as the institutional memory in the midst of considerable flux and that attention is given to the transfer of knowledge and capacity to local counterparts.

Events in capitals and shifting priorities are other realities which challenge the continuation of monitoring systems in fragile states. By design, evaluation frameworks in fragile states must be adaptive, flexible and capable of responding to the often shifting strategic priorities that epitomise the environment.

## **2.3 Cultural**

The third challenge to evaluation in Helmand is presented by the cultural differences between the host population and the international community. As a conservative Islamic society, social interactions in Helmand are pervaded by the society's traditional mores and this has a profound impact on research. While social desirability bias can be present in any opinion poll, anywhere in the world, in societies such as Helmand, where individual rights can be constrained by culture and tradition, and dominated by social hierarchies, social desirability bias is more likely to colour opinions on contentious political, social and security issues. This means that questions on contentious issues can produce an abnormally high number of positive responses from some respondents which raises concern about the use of statistics emanating from contentious questions.

The difficulties associated with reaching women in a conservative society also pose a challenge to undertaking research in Helmand, as their views may differ significantly from those of men, particularly with regards to themes such as the role of the Taliban as justice providers, the accessibility of public health centres or education. The risk of collecting intrinsically skewed data is high, and finding ways to gather women's views becomes of critical importance for the establishment of a credible M&E system.

### 3 HMEP: A CUTTING-EDGE M&E SOLUTION

The Helmand Monitoring & Evaluation Programme (HMEP), a project commissioned by DFID and the PRT and designed in late 2009, seeks to address these institutional, logistical and cultural challenges through an innovative approach to M&E in fragile states.

#### 3.1 Project Background and Overview

Since the UK Government (HMG) entered Helmand in mid-2006, the tempo of activity has been such that it has been difficult to develop a comprehensive M&E framework. The nature of the environment prevented the establishment of the sorts of rigorous, best practice approaches that HMG would employ in a more stable environment. One consequence of this is that whilst HMG could account for its spending in terms of inputs and had been able to measure outputs to some extent, there was little readily available evidence of the wider impact of HMG projects and programmes in terms of outcomes and attitudes toward the insurgency. Hence the need for more rigorous monitoring of the effectiveness and impact of stabilisation and development work in Helmand, in order to improve the responsiveness of all stabilisation and development actors to local needs, and to increase the visibility and influence of benefits.

The goal of HMEP is to improve the delivery and effectiveness of the contributions of stabilisation and development programmes in Helmand to the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and the Helmand Plan. This is achieved through supporting the PRT to make more effective use of M&E tools. HMEP has four key outputs:

- **Established baselines** for the Provincial Reconstruction team (PRT) programme strands and DFID programmes in Helmand against which to monitor effectiveness and impact, focused on indicators chosen by the PRT and DFID.
- **An operational, up-to-date, user-friendly database and GIS database covering** DFID, PRT and Task Force Helmand (TFH), Task Force Leatherneck (TFL) and other donor activity in Helmand.
- **New knowledge and recommendations** from quarterly monitoring and up to four ad hoc reactive reports per year aligned with PRT and DFID reporting requirements.
- **Improved programming capacity** in the PRT that standardises approaches and affords consistency in reporting across PRT.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

Political, logistical, cultural and financial challenges associated with collecting data in conflict-affected environments have historically constituted the main challenge in setting up comprehensive, cross-cutting M&E systems where they are most needed. After an extensive phase of desk research, which examined the secondary information and data available in Helmand, it became apparent that discrete primary data collection would be required to build on existing measures and support the PRT to more comprehensively measure its effect.

Taking the Helmand Plan as the strategic starting point, the HMEP team worked with the PRT to design individual logical frameworks which established the conceptual journey from the intervention's rationale to the programmes' outcomes and impacts. As part of this process, a series of indicators were developed to measure progress in each of the thematic strands (Governance, Rule of Law, Infrastructure, Agriculture, Counter Narcotics, Health, Education, Growth and Livelihoods and Population Engagement) at the outcome and impact levels. Recognising that reporting was largely subjective and anecdotal at the output

level, attention was given to developing quantitative, SMART indicators (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) which measured impact. Given the considerable data collection constraints, particular weighting was given to attainability.

The dearth of readily available secondary data as well as the absence of existing baselines made primary data collection and analysis necessary as a means to populate indicators. A combination of statistically robust, Afghan-led quantitative data collection and informative qualitative data collection was carried out, complemented by primary and secondary data collected from third-party sources. This section of the paper will focus on the first and the second research methods.

Primary data collection efforts in Afghanistan have suffered from numerous, well-documented, problems.<sup>2</sup> HMEP's data collection methodology was designed taking into account the lessons learned from other existing primary research<sup>3</sup> so as to address the limitations of primary research in Helmand and to avoid duplication of effort. The HMEP approach to data collection is characterised by a carefully designed sampling strategy implemented by an Afghan research partner; robust sample sizes at provincial and district level; a longitudinal approach; and a combined quantitative and qualitative method.

### **A Carefully Designed Sampling Strategy**

HMEP took the 2004 census data and the Central Statistics Organization's (CSO) raw data on settlements (as per the 2004 administrative district boundaries) as its sampling universe. This data presented several difficulties for HMEP, common to environments where the reach of formal government structures is limited and data collection systems are weak.

Firstly, as administrative reorganisation emanating from the Afghan Ministry of Interior occurred, district boundaries changed over time. This necessitated an update to the assignment of settlements to districts using the latest Afghan Geodesy and Cartography Head Office (AGCHO) boundary dataset. Secondly, the location of CSO settlements contained spatial coordinate errors. HMEP was able to correct this by mapping coordinates to village locations taken from spatial imagery. Finally, the population per settlement from the CSO data did not always reflect what could be seen on the ground through spatial imagery of Helmand Province. HMEP addressed this through a thorough spatial analysis and according adjustment to the number of inhabitants per settlements.

For reasons that were both statistical (the views of people living under a same roof risk being similar as a consequence of one person's influence in the household) and cultural (barriers to engagement with women) the decision was taken to target males Heads of Households (HOH) only through the household survey. In order to estimate the number of households in each district, a multiplier of 10 people per household was assumed in the sampling framework's design. This assumption held true as per the data gleaned during the first quarterly survey, which enabled HMEP to validate this assumption for the following waves. The unavailability of the CSO's household listing and the lack of other statistically robust datasets for Helmand province meant that the sample's statistical representativeness could not be tested using demographic, cultural, social and economic characteristics. Therefore, profiling results from different waves of the same HOH survey were compared with one another to refine HMEP's understanding of the profile of Helmand's HOH. Once a series of quarterly surveys has been carried out, a regional profile of HOH will be established, and results of the following surveys weighted by a number of key profiling variables (e.g. age, tribe, income, occupation, etc.); this will maximise the statistical representativeness of the HMEP survey. A

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<sup>2</sup> Examples include: Stephen Downes-Martin, *Assessments Process for RC(SW)*, 24 May 2010, DRAFT; Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Afghan War: Metrics, Narratives, and Winning the War*, CSIS, June 2010; Tessa Baker, Rick Orlina, Sabrina Pagano, Michael Salwen, & Richard Williams, *Methodological Considerations and the Use of Data from Afghanistan: A Review of the Utility of SIGACTS, TCAF, KLE and Polling Data for Population-centric Assessment*, September 2010.

<sup>3</sup> In designing the survey approach for HMEP, lessons were taken from the implementation of other survey work in Afghanistan namely: the Theatre Integrated Nationwide Survey (TINS), FCO Human Security Survey, The Asia Foundation's "Survey of the Afghan People", ABC News "Where Things Stand" 2010 and Military polling such as The Tactical Conflict Assessment Framework (TCAF) by way of example.

multi-staged random probability sampling process<sup>4</sup> was used with a random route for selecting households in each sampling point.

The HOH survey is implemented by an Afghan survey partner, which enables extensive reach within Helmand. Enumerators rely on local networks and facilitators to establish access to remote areas in Helmand and to provide insights into population groups that are inaccessible to the PRT. Whilst security constraints do impact the sample and the feasibility of implementing standard verification techniques, a research method implemented by local partners provides reach into Taliban-controlled areas and ensures a more representative sample is surveyed.

### Robust Sample Sizes at Provincial and District Level

In order to give a high level of confidence at the district level of disaggregation, over 4,000 HOH are interviewed across eleven Helmand districts, achieving a +/-5 confidence interval at the district level and a +/-1.5 confidence interval at the overall Helmand province level, each at the 95% confidence level (two-tailed). The former is the industry standard and the latter constitutes a particularly rare level of statistical robustness in any field, including election polls in Europe or North America.

**The HMEP HOH survey immediately became the largest survey ever carried out in Helmand**, with nearly 4% of all HOH living in Helmand interviewed every quarter. This unique magnitude at the provincial level, as well as the large number of profiling questions exploring household economy, access to facilities and demographics, led the HMEP HOH survey to be widely considered as one of the primary statistical data sources in the Afghan international community. The HMEP HOH survey improves on the robustness and accuracy of other Helmand surveys and generates data to complement the national census as a tool to inform decision-making in Helmand. The national CSO are also trying to identify how they can update the population estimates in lieu of a census this year.

**Table 1 - Sampling Framework Summary**

District	Estimated number. of residents	% of total Province population	Estimated number of households per District	Target number of interviews	Confidence interval at the 95% confidence level
Lashkar Gah	87,062	7%	8,706	368	+/- 5
Nahri-e-Sarraj	176,851	15%	17,685	376	+/- 5
Musa Qala	129,427	11%	12,943	373	+/- 5
Naw Zad	87,012	7%	8,701	368	+/- 5
Nad Ali	103,082	9%	10,308	373	+/- 5
Nawa-I-Barak Zayi	85,440	7%	8,544	368	+/- 5
Garmser	99,172	8%	9,917	370	+/- 5
Sangin	60,324	5%	6,032	361	+/- 5
Reg (Khanshin)	16,175	1%	1,618	311	+/- 5
Nad Ali (Marjah)	108,662	9%	10,866	371	+/- 5
Kajaki	113,228	9%	11,323	372	+/- 5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,066,610</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>106,661</b>	<b>4,011</b>	<b>+/- 1.5</b>

Source: Coffey

### Longitudinal Approach Providing Confidence in Time-Series Analysis

To enable HMEP to monitor dozens of outcome and impact indicators and hundreds of variables and combination of variables over time, it was essential to ensure a consistent sampling point selection method and continuity in the questionnaire rolled out each quarter. Building a panel proved impossible in Helmand because of the security issues associated with keeping interviewees contact details and physical addresses, and because of the potential respondent fatigue that a quarterly survey could create. However a range of statistical techniques, such as repeated cross-sections, enable the development of pseudo-

<sup>4</sup> **Probability sampling** is where a sample has been selected using random selection so that each unit in the population has a known chance of being selected. It is generally assumed that a representative sample is more likely to be the outcome when this method of selection from the population is employed. The aim of probability sampling is to keep sampling error to a minimum. Sampling error is the difference between a sample and the population from which it is selected.

panels and can partially address this gap. A World Bank paper by P. Lanjouw et al<sup>5</sup> (2011) explored the potential of using repeated cross-sections to investigate movements in and out of poverty. Potentially, a similar method could be employed in Helmand to consider movements in and out of satisfaction with the Afghan Government, the police or statutory justice mechanisms. Such methods will be explored as a way to overcome the impossibility of developing a genuine panel to carry out time-series modelling.

### **A Combined Quantitative and Qualitative Research**

The quantitative research revealed a number of interesting trends, some of which seemed counter-intuitive or lacked geographical consistency, and warranted further analysis to investigate the causalities at play. Qualitative research was designed and carried out to complement the quantitative findings and to enable the programme to fully unpack the observed trends in perceptions. This proved to be a crucial tool in assessing the broader picture of progress made against the Helmand Plan.

As the quantitative HOH survey in Helmand de facto excludes women, qualitative research was designed to capture these perceptions. The views of Helmandi women on quality of service provision as well as on the effectiveness of different governance structures and justice mechanisms are likely to differ significantly from those of men. In a traditional culture with strictly defined gender roles, female's perceptions and needs are likely to be gendered and research methods must be adapted to ensure these are captured.

Qualitative research also helped to unpack interesting trends resulting from the quantitative research: for example, exploring why only a fraction of respondents would consider going to Afghan National Police (ANP) if they were victim of a crime despite the vast majority expressing trust in the ANP as an institution capable of resolving disputes fairly and efficiently. Qualitative research identified that, for example, a preference for familial based dispute resolution and perceptions of ANP approachability helped to explain why ANP might be considered effective and yet under-utilised.

Qualitative research was carried out specifically to better understand the data, i.e. to reach those that a quantitative survey cannot reach, as well as to provide a more in-depth understanding of the 'story' and causal factors behind some of the less straightforward trends in perceptions observed through the quantitative survey. This necessitated ensuring the survey results had been appropriately analysed before planning the qualitative research process and tools.

Qualitative research was designed to concentrate on perceptions of change in attitudes about the various aspects of 'government' such as behaviour and services and to provide a means of exploring exactly what HOH think is wrong, what should be done differently, and whether they have noticed changes in the recent past. The research took the form of a combination of semi-structured, in-depth interviews and focus groups or kin group interviews with randomly selected HOH and women. A total of 20 interviewing sessions were carried out in each of the districts of interest, bringing the total of interviewees to several hundred. While not statistically representative, the qualitative research proved a crucial complement to the larger HOH survey when testing the theory of change, and understanding some observed geographical differences.

### **3.3 Analytical Thinking and Theory of Change**

The logical framework, which maps the conceptual journey of a specific stabilisation and development intervention from its rationale through to its inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts, is the basic analytical tool through which an intervention is evaluated and against which its progress is measured over the project's lifetime. However, as explained in section 2.1, this approach is complicated by the multiplicity of donors. Whilst committed to one plan, donor effort tends to be split by thematic area which can have the effect of reducing visibility of cross-functional effect. For example, if donor A builds a school, but donor B builds the road leading to that school while donor C ensures security along the road, the success of A's programme directly depends upon the effectiveness and timeliness of B and C in running their respective project. In the past, each donor reporting system has tended to be inward-looking with little overarching analysis or reporting across interventions. In environments where progress in security, governance and international development

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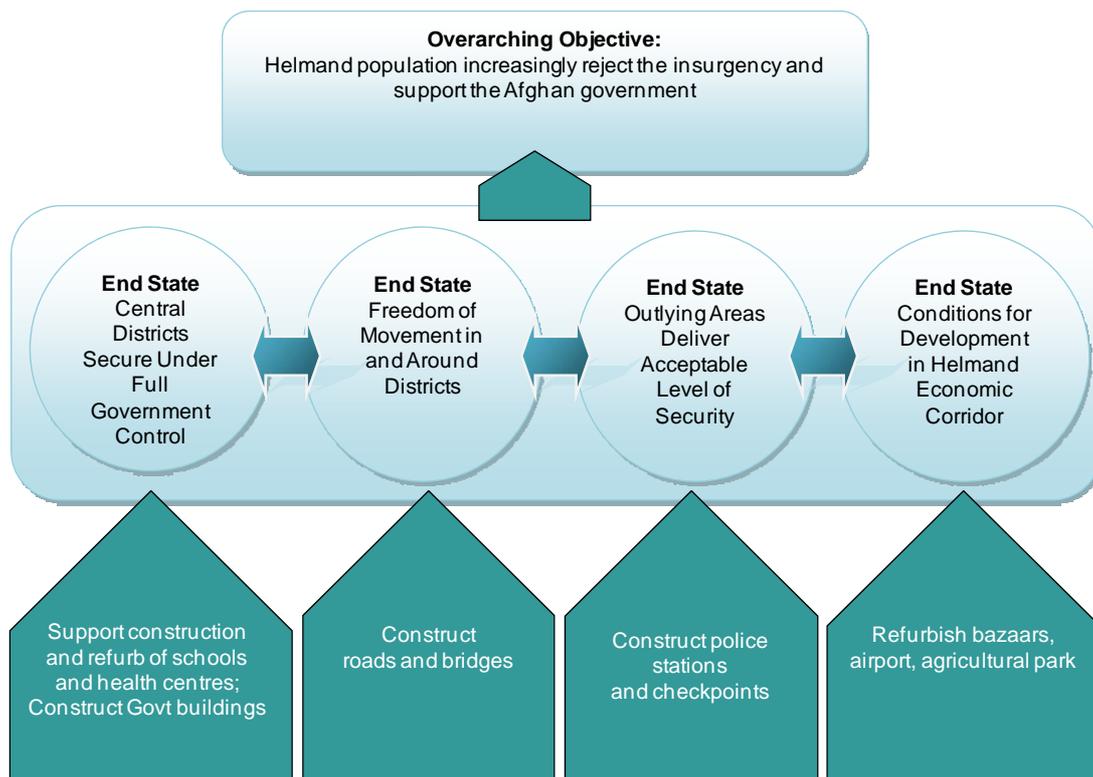
<sup>5</sup> Peter Lanjouw, Jill Luoto, David McKenzie (2011), *Using Repeated Cross-Sections to Explore Movements in and Out of Poverty*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper.

are mutually dependent, reporting within silos inevitably restricts ability to assess the relative effectiveness of programmes at the outcome and impact levels.

The Helmand Plan’s overarching objective was for the population of Helmand to progressively reject the Taliban as an alternative system of governance. The Plan’s underlying theory is that enduring security and stability will only be possible in Helmand if the state is able to demonstrate an adequate level of responsiveness to the needs of its citizens, fundamental to establishing its legitimacy and thereby providing a more attractive alternative to either the insurgency or ongoing instability. This is inspired by and reflective of a widely accepted model of counterinsurgency.

Recognising the complexity of people’s perceptions of their Government’s legitimacy in a context of fractured government systems and long-term absence of a formal state, HMEP’s research approach was designed to provide detail on the numerous factors influencing perceptions and how these causal factors were related to one another. Below is a simplified example of the causal logic used as a basis for conceptualising the journey from a range of infrastructure interventions in Helmand to improved perceptions of GIRoA in the province. In addition to the conventional, vertical flow from inputs to impact, a horizontal dimension was introduced: this reflects the basic principle according to which if X (e.g. freedom of movements) and Y (e.g. security along the roads) are both positively correlated with Z (e.g. government legitimacy), then they should also be positively correlated to one another. A failing link between freedom of movement in and around districts and security along the roads could seriously undermine the plan’s capacity to foster improved GIRoA legitimacy.

**Figure 1 - Example of theory of change analytical framework: Infrastructure**



Source: Coffey

Diverse statistical techniques were utilised to measure progress indicators and to test the HMEP theory of change. They included simple bivariate cross-tabulations, multivariate cross-tabulations, bivariate correlation analysis as well as multivariate probit regression modelling. The latter was used to examine further some of the key relationships between legitimacy and state capability, accountability and responsiveness that emerged throughout the early stage, cross-tabulation analysis.

All variables were transformed into dummy (binary) variables, taking either the value 1 or 0. For instance, those who agreed that the district government had improved the education services were

given the value 1; the others were given the value 0. From then on, the team ran a series of linear, probit regressions, taking one key perception variable as the dependant variable (e.g. satisfaction with GIRoA's education services), one or two key explanatory variables (e.g. the availability of primary and secondary schools) and a range of control variables (e.g. literacy, income, occupation, main source of income, assets owned). The resulting models were able to isolate relationships between, for example, the presence of a secondary school for boys nearby, and the likelihood of satisfaction with GIRoA education services, other things being equal.

### **3.4 Presentational Features**

Having established a system able to test the success of the plan and the validity of COIN assumptions, attention was given to the presentation and dissemination of this information. Recognising that regardless of the richness of the data, M&E is only valuable if it is used, the HMEP team designed a website and database to store and display information. The website contains a range of innovative presentational features, including links to a Geographic Information System (GIS) database supporting the visualisation of progress of information. This tool effectively facilitates transparency regarding the PRT's effectiveness in making progress against the Helmand Plan.

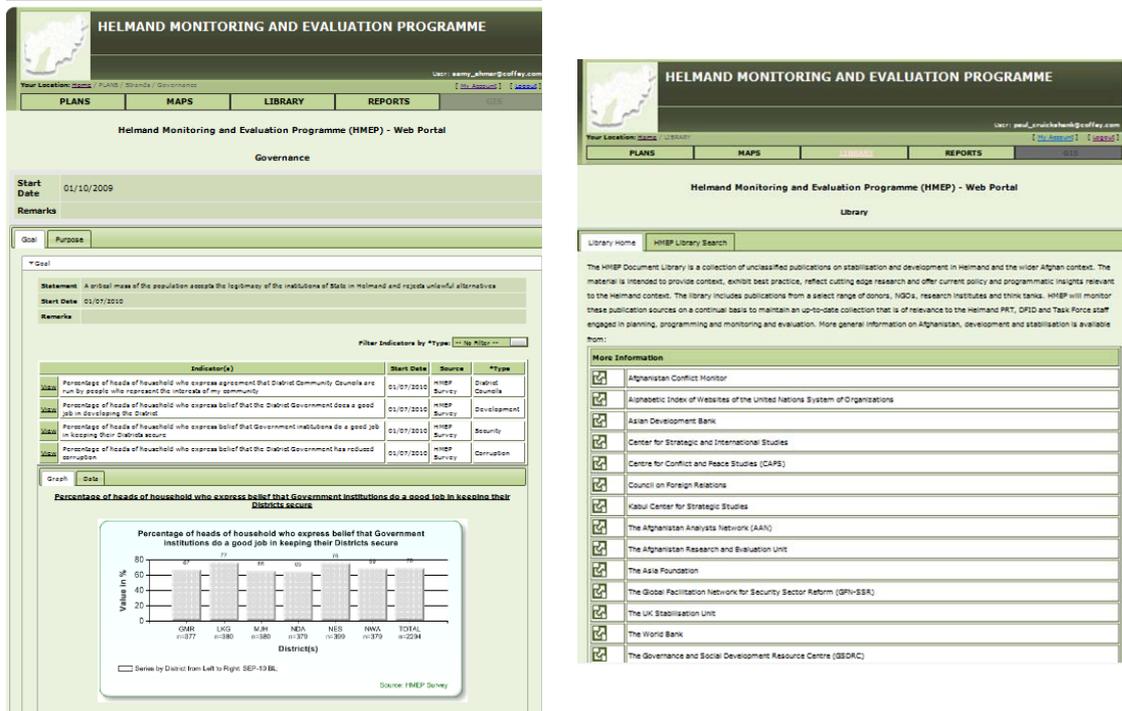
#### **Online Database**

HMEP Database schema design is based on the logical framework approach. Like the Aid Information Management System Development Assistance Database (AIMS-DAD), which was developed in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a means to promote the transparency and accountability of overseas aid in a range of developing countries, the HMEP Database is an information repository displaying extractable graphics, GIS maps, reports and documents relevant to stabilisation and development in Helmand. The website is linked to an interrogable Oracle database and interactive geospatial database which enables users to build their own GIS products.

While AIMS-DAD focuses on the 'input' aspect of overseas aid by collating financial and programme information exclusively, the HMEP Database schema design is based on the logical framework approach. It is a repository of existing baseline data, updated quarterly data on selected outcome and impact level indicators for thematic strands, combined with collated contextual data. The website contains a library of relevant literature, as well as the quarterly, annual and analytical HMEP reports.

A functional web interface allows users to extract and visualise the logical framework and associated indicator data. Graphs are generated in real-time and display a time-line, showing whether indicators are progressing in the desired direction.

**Figure 2 – Snapshot of the HMEP Database**



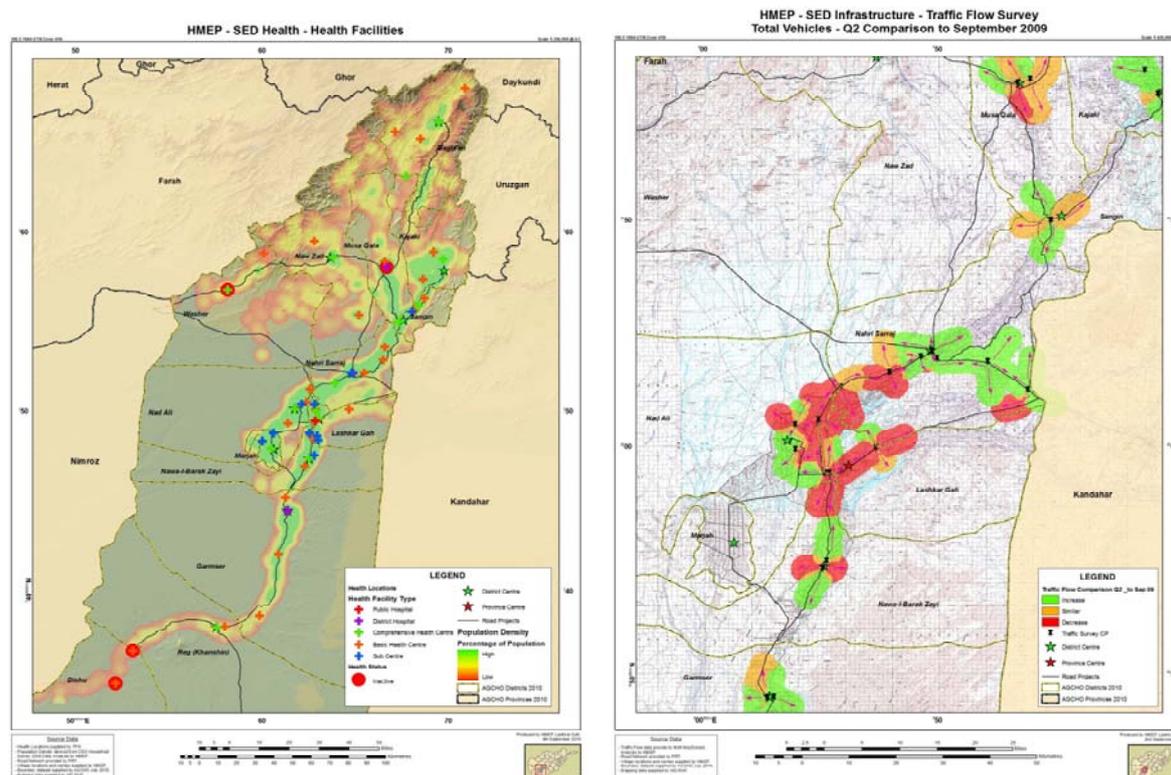
Source: Coffey

### GIS Mapping

The HMEP database also serves as a repository of spatial data used in GIS analysis and map production. The HMEP website displays products generated by the team and also links to an interactive geospatial database which enables users to develop bespoke GIS products.

The development of GIS products also attempts to resolve some of the problems created by the siloed working habits described earlier. GIS mapping enables users to visualise geographically the linkages and correlations between variables, and illustrates in an accessible, user-friendly fashion how mutually dependent the different strands of reconstruction, stabilisation and capacity building efforts can be. For instance, by overlaying areas of intense poppy cultivation with recorded security incidents and the presence of schools and hospitals, stakeholders are able to instantaneously visualise to what extent these overlap with each other, and how their work is potentially impacted by, or impacting upon, the work of others. Figure 3 below shows examples of GIS maps generated by HMEP.

**Figure 3 – Example of GIS maps generated by HMEP**



Source: Coffey

### 3.5 Intelligent Use of Information

In a diverse and strategically complex environment like the Helmand PRT, HMEP supports more intelligent use of information in assessments, planning and daily operations.

The HMEP evidence base is used to look back on a quarterly and annual basis on progress towards strategic goals. The HMEP team provide materials and lead quarterly workshops which provide a forum to consider results and discuss policy implications. HMEP tools are also utilised to look forward in terms of planning and future strategic direction. For example, HMEP are supporting the development of the current Helmand Plan by developing a GIS map which uses various datasets to build a geospatial picture of the extent of GIRA influence in Helmand. This product aims to provide an estimate of current reach, juxtaposed with a projection of future influence, thus providing PRT with a visual representation of their objectives. Finally, HMEP supports PRT's daily operations through improved information management in the collation and centralisation of relevant data and its storage in a centralised and accessible information management system.

## 4 FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR M&E IN FRAGILE STATES

HMEP's specificity lies in its holistic approach to implementing an M&E system in a part of the world where it is crucially needed but difficult to achieve. In demonstrating that stabilisation, peace-building and economic development efforts made by donors in Helmand are more than a sum of individual projects, HMEP overcomes a critical barrier to meaningful M&E in fragile states. Its focus on statistical robustness and comparable time series on a wide range of indicators and variables also makes HMEP unique in a conflict-affected environment.

Before assessing the replicability of the HMEP model, it is essential to understand what made it possible in the first place. The breadth of skills and areas of subject-matter expertise (M&E, governance, peace-building, statistical modelling, database development GIS mapping, etc.) as well as a sound contextual and cultural understanding of Helmand province and of the different forces at

work in the province and the wider region, were a prerequisite for setting up a credible and sustainable M&E system.

Arguably the most important factor of success is the very presence of a PRT, which bring together all institutional donors and create a single mission through which funds are delivered and invested, thereby creating a common sense of purpose. Such a structure facilitated the establishment of a comprehensive, cross-thematic M&E system. A total of twenty-seven PRTs exist in Afghanistan, combining some of the world's leading defence, diplomacy and development experts. As development and reconstruction efforts in conflict-affected states are mutually dependent, a holistic approach to M&E is crucial. It is particularly valuable in environments with substantial donor spend where entire systems of formal governance need to be built from next to nothing, and increasingly feasible where institutions like PRTs are capable of pooling donors' resources to ensure progress against a joint plan.

It is important to recognise that each province, region and country contains its own, specific set of contextual issues and challenges, which must be reflected in the evaluation approach. While HMEP does not purport to offer a magic formula, it does provides a model for the development of future M&E systems in conflict-affected states and, perhaps most significantly, has demonstrated that implementing robust, meaningful and sustainable M&E systems is possible even in the most difficult environments.

As we look to the future for Helmand and the increasing focus on building Afghan capacity for successful transition, the next challenge for HMEP will be to establish local ownership of a monitoring and evaluation system. As HMEP supports the measurement of the PRT's effectiveness in working to build capacity across thematic areas, so HMEP must work with local counterparts and in conjunction with national level programmes to transfer knowledge and ensure the sustainability of this fundamental approach.

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