Abstract

Most of the Afghan population lives in rural areas where agriculture and husbandry are the main sources of their income. The agricultural production is not enough to meet all the needs of the local residents. In this case, a large number of rural people suffer from poverty. In addition, local communities face lack of access to basic services in the most part of the county. Therefore, local communities need external assistance in order to achieve a more moderately prosperous life. This dissertation aims to present poverty situation throughout the country and addresses rural development programs, including National Solidarity Program (NSP) and National Area-Based Development Program (NABDP), which were launched by Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) of Afghanistan with financial and technical support from the international community in order to empower local communities and eradicate the poverty.

Local communities have suffered more than any other social entities in terms of poverty and lack of access to basic services, including education, health, safe-drinking water, useful irrigation system, sufficient roads, and many more facilities. Since 2003, impressive efforts for the purpose of community empowerment and local capacity building with the delivery of rural development activities change the situation and brought many hopes for local residents. In the beginning, Community Development Council (CDC) and District Development Assembly (DDA) were established as local institutions and community representatives at the village and district level to directly be in charge of
identifying local priorities and implementation of NSP and NABDP funded sub-projects.

This study is trying to address a couple of questions, including why poverty in Afghanistan and can poverty be reduced through empowering local community? How NSP and NABDP mobilized the local communities to be involved in development activities in rural Afghanistan? What is the overall perception of local people about CDCs and DDAs activities in Herat province? In this study, I have tried to discuss development activities carried out by NSP and NABDP throughout Afghanistan as a whole.

Two field works have been conducted for the purpose of gathering primary data through interviewing key informants, who were delivering rural development services through rural development programs, who were directly involved in rural development activities as community representatives, and who are or were beneficiaries of rural development outcomes. In addition, observation of the rural development output and outcome was applied to collect primary data in the field. For detail discussion and interpretation, Herat province was selected as research site in order to conduct field research and interviewing key informants at the local level.

Results show that as of December 21, 2014 the NSP has established 33,922 CDCs across the country, where 85,899 sub-projects, including transport, water supply & sanitation, irrigation, power, livelihood, and education have been funded by NSP. In addition, the elected CDCs have been able to maintain their sustainability and search more fund resources for development schemes from
other donors. The overall result regarding community satisfaction with CDC activities indicates their relative satisfaction. Active participation of both men and women as CDC and DDA members has changed the traditional method of decision-making at the local level. A variety of projects, including local economic development, rural productive infrastructure, and social organization were financed by NABDP to better the livelihoods. Moreover, the NABDP targeted to cover 388 districts throughout the country in order to help the poorest populations and develop their areas of living. According to the people responds, NABDP has few tangible results for the purpose of reconstruction and rebuilding of the rural areas. Thousands of rural development projects have been implemented to benefiting millions of rural populations.

Due to security problems and language barriers it is hard or even impossible for foreigners to conduct research in Afghanistan. And there are few researches and writing available in English about Afghanistan. Therefore, this study will be a source of data that present some information about Afghanistan, in particular rural development, community empowerment and poverty situation throughout the county.

**Key words:** Afghanistan, Community Development, Community Empowerment, Community Participation, Poverty, Poverty Reduction, and Rural Development.