PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

INNOVATIONS FOR
SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES
Building Institutions, Escaping Development Traps

Building Trust in Government:
Afghanistan's National Solidarity Program

In 2002, as Afghanistan emerged from 30 years of conflict, interim national leaders sought quick ways to expand economic opportunities for people living in impoverished rural communities, promote a sense of shared national citizenship, and overcome widespread skepticism about the government's ability to deliver services. A team of Afghan decision makers and international partners developed the National Solidarity Program (NSP), which provided block grants directly to poor communities. With the help of an elected village council and a civil society partner, villagers used the NSP funds to select, plan, implement, and maintain reconstruction and development projects and strengthen local governance.

During a 10-year period, the NSP disbursed more than US$1 billion to communities and financed 65,000 projects that improved villagers' access to basic utilities and provided a short-term economic boost to communities. Project success rates, however, varied across districts and some of the planned benefits did not materialize. In addition, the NSP's reliance on donor funds and outside consultants raised doubts about the program's sustainability. A new **ISS case study** documents the implementation and results of this program.

Indonesia's Kecamatan Development Program (KDP) provided inspiration for the NSP, although the two programs differed in significant ways. A **recent ISS case study** highlights the development and implementation of KDP. Both Afghanistan's NSP and Indonesia's KDP offer examples short-route accountability.

Improving Government Accountability and Leading Reform

Innovations for Successful Societies (ISS) helps public servants, policy makers, and scholars share institution-building strategies that work in especially challenging contexts. Interview-based case studies facilitate these exchanges and provide a basis for scholarly research.

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To date, ISS has published 121 case studies and 370 interviews, all of which are available for free on a web repository. Governments use the materials to learn from each other, inspire discussion in their ranks, and recall the steps they took to implement a reform. Universities and training programs use the case studies in the classroom to engage students in the operational and strategic aspects of public sector reform.

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