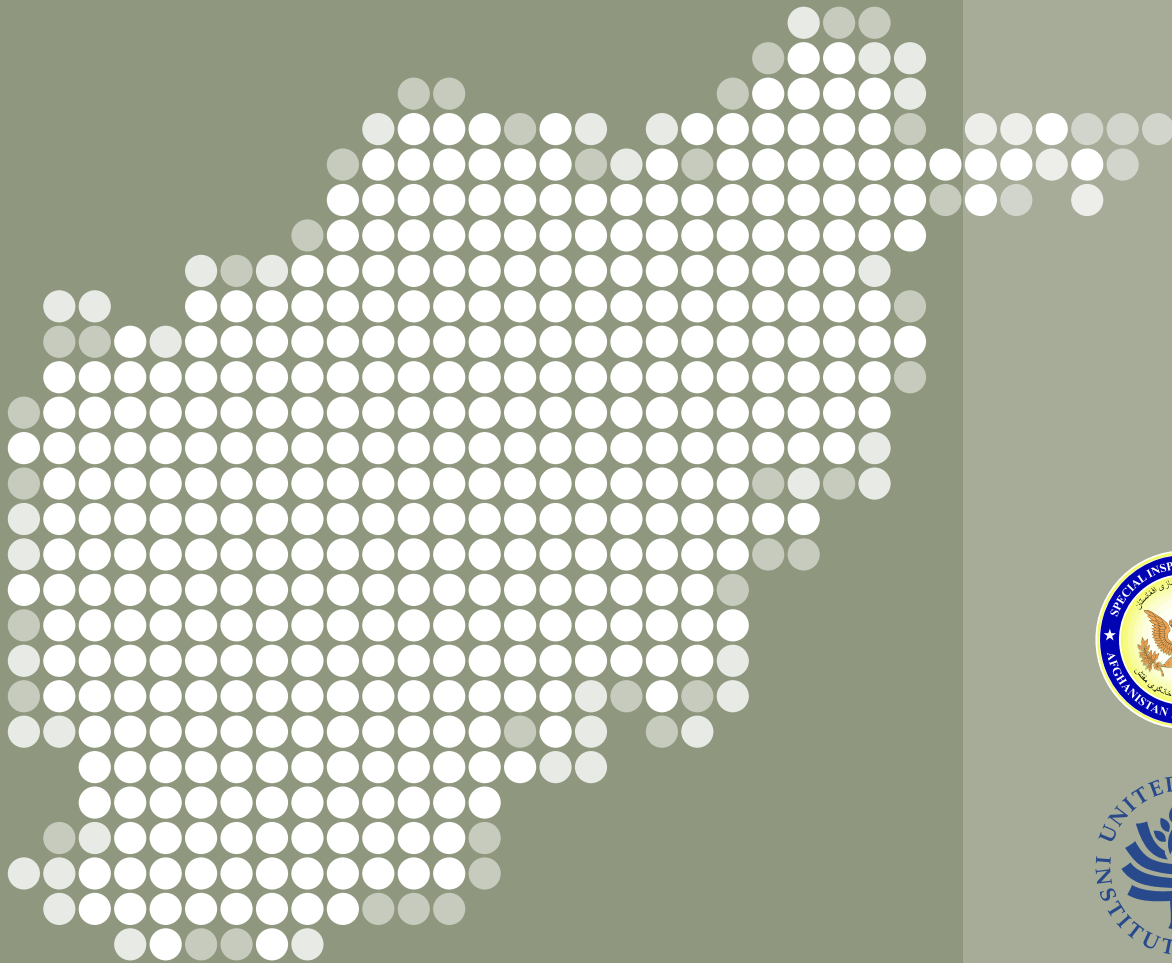# Report on an International Symposium on Monitoring and Management in Insecure Environments:
Applying Best Practices to Afghanistan

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**Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)
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Message from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

An important topic, not only for Afghanistan but for other fragile countries, is the challenge of overseeing foreign assistance in a conflict zone. We all know how dangerous Afghanistan can be. Every day we hear stories of brave soldiers, civilians, and Afghans who lose their lives in the struggle to build a better Afghanistan. So it comes as no surprise that due to security concerns, significant portions of Afghanistan are already inaccessible to civilians working for non-governmental organizations, implementing agencies, and the oversight community. Sometimes these areas prove so insecure that they are inaccessible even to our Afghan partners.

Even though it is difficult to predict the future of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, the ability of U.S., coalition, and international employees to monitor, manage, and oversee programs in Afghanistan will only become more difficult this year and possibly for years to come. Significant portions of Afghanistan are already inaccessible to SIGAR and other U.S. civilians. These inaccessible areas are outside the "oversight bubbles," (i.e., areas where the U.S. government has the ability to provide both adequate security and rapid emergency medical support), and these "oversight bubbles" are getting smaller as U.S. military units are withdrawn and coalition bases are closed.

While the "oversight bubbles" are shrinking, U.S. and international assistance to Afghanistan is expected to continue. Almost $14 billion of the over $100 billion appropriated by the U.S. Congress for the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan has yet to be spent. Billions more may be added over the next decade. Managing and protecting these funds will be a challenge for everyone working in Afghanistan, including SIGAR. For this reason, we joined with the United States Institute of Peace to invite government and non-governmental organizations, think tanks, academia, and the military to participate in a symposium to examine and identify the most cost-effective means for providing meaningful monitoring, evaluation, and oversight of foreign assistance. Our objective was to share best practices and lessons learned, discuss our successes, and learn from our failures, in order to help us improve results, along with maintaining the trust of the taxpayers, donors, and beneficiaries who we seek to help.

Countless government and private sector officials in Afghanistan are trying hard to develop alternative means to help protect donors' investments. Almost everyone I talk to inside and outside of Afghanistan wants an opportunity to meet with their counterparts to discuss their experiences, concerns, and ideas for the future. My hope is that the symposium will help advance that shared desire for collaboration. Congress created SIGAR, in part, to help achieve this very goal. Our agency is tasked with looking across all of the reconstruction activities in Afghanistan. By doing so, SIGAR seeks to identify not only challenges, but also help propose solutions. Collectively, we can help improve the performance of programs, and ultimately improve the lives of those we are trying to help. If we can develop effective methods for remote monitoring and management in Afghanistan, we can apply what we learn to other foreign assistance programs across the globe. That is a lasting impact all of us should strive to achieve.

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction

Message from the United States Institute of Peace

As someone who managed humanitarian and development programs assisting Afghans in the 1980s and 1990s, I saw first-hand the devastation caused by two decades of war. With that perspective, I am always impressed when visiting Afghanistan by the tremendous progress that has been made in rebuilding the country since 2001. While many mistakes were made, and achievements often fell short of expectations, it is important not to lose sight of just how much has been accomplished under difficult circumstances.

Effective monitoring and impact assessments are critical to measuring success, learning from failures, and ensuring accountability for U.S. taxpayer dollars. But monitoring, evaluating and determining the impact of programs can be very challenging to do well, especially in insecure operating environments. In Afghanistan, the difficult operating environment and the huge scale of military and civilian assistance made effective oversight and assessment both very important but also very challenging. The symposium on "Monitoring and Managing in Insecure Environments" provided a useful forum to share lessons and best practices on how to address these challenges. While there are different perspectives about how to do this right, the symposium highlighted that most objectives are shared, and that few are risking their lives to implement projects in dangerous environments like Afghanistan with the intention of doing so inefficiently.

Two factors make me hopeful that future assistance efforts in Afghanistan will be more effective and accountable. First, I think that the biggest impediment to the effectiveness of assistance in recent years has not been insecurity, but rather that too much money was being spent too quickly and often with insufficient consultation with Afghans. That is to say, too much money—not relative to the needs in Afghanistan, but relative to the capacity to spend that money accountably and effec-

tively. With external resources for Afghanistan shrinking during the coming years there will be a need to prioritize spending—rather than spending money because it is there to spend—which in itself should improve the quality of projects being implemented. Second, I am hopeful that the 2014 presidential elections will lead to a legitimate new government that recognizes that it will have to improve government performance by appointing more capable key officials and curbing corruption in order to continue to attract diminishing donor resources.

As the U.S. begins to reduce its footprint in Afghanistan, it is important to remember that the primary objective of the U.S. engagement has been to ensure that Afghanistan does not once again become a safe-haven for transnational terrorism that threatens the United States. Ultimately this will require an Afghan government that can control its own territory. While considerable progress has been made toward achieving this objective, the task is not over, and will require long-term international support -- albeit at more sustainable levels than those of the past decade. The key findings from the symposium summarized in this report should prove useful to agencies responsible for continuing to provide this support, as well as for those like SIGAR who are responsible for providing oversight. We also hope that it will contribute to finding ways in which we can all advance our common goals more effectively.

Andrew Wilder
Vice President, Center for South and Central Asia
United States Institute of Peace

Background

Humanitarian, development, and oversight organizations in Afghanistan are finding it progressively more difficult to access development and reconstruction project sites in many areas of the country due to deteriorating security conditions. As a result of the volatile security environment in Afghanistan and other conflict areas, humanitarian and development organizations are increasingly turning to remote management and monitoring approaches in order to continue providing assistance while safeguarding the security of their personnel.

Remote management poses particular challenges to conducting effective project monitoring and oversight, ensuring program effectiveness and accountability, and mitigating against fraud and corruption.

In a recent study, humanitarian and development organizations raised the following issues and concerns with respect to the use of remote management: potential deterioration in program quality; deterioration in the potential to ensure effective and rigorous monitoring; reduced regularity of visits and access to project implementation areas; inaccuracy of project data and reporting; limited capacity of their own and partner personnel; deterioration in technical oversight of projects, particularly those with a complex focus such as infrastructure or engineering; poor communication between country and field offices; increased danger and risks to local or national personnel, communities, and beneficiaries; increased pressure and expectations (social and political) on local staff; and increased risk of the occurrence of fraud and corruption.[1]

These are not new issues or challenges. In countries throughout the world, development experts have designed and implemented projects that provide for strong monitoring and evaluation despite the challenges. Good practices and innovative approaches to remote project management and monitoring need to be identified and shared in order to help ensure program quality and accountability in the complex, dynamic, and fluid operating environment of reconstruction in Afghanistan.

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1   "Monitoring and Accountability Practices for Remotely Managed Projects Implemented in Volatile Operating Environments." Tearfund. 2012.

> **Remote management:** an operational response to insecurity, involving the withdrawal or drastic reduction of the number of international and sometimes national personnel from the field. Remote management transfers greater program responsibility to local staff, local partner organizations, or private contractors. Projects and programs are then managed and overseen from a different location.
>
> **Monitoring:** an ongoing measure of the progress, quality, and impact of a project to determine what is and is not working well, so adjustments can be made along the way.
>
> Source: "Monitoring and Accountability Practices for Remotely Managed Projects Implemented in Volatile Operating Environments." Tearfund. 2012.

For this reason, the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) partnered to present an international symposium on "Monitoring and Management in Insecure Environments: Applying Best Practices to Afghanistan." The objective was to engage the U.S. agencies, international donor community, and think tanks involved in development and reconstruction work in Afghanistan in a focused discussion to identify and discuss past and current best practices, techniques and technologies, as well as limitations and challenges, of sustaining effective management and monitoring in insecure environments.

The symposium was held on February 12, 2014, at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, DC. To encourage candid discussion and the free exchange of ideas, SIGAR and USIP adopted a policy of non-attribution for the symposium. The remarks of symposium speakers, panelists, participants, and guests (herein referred to as speakers) will not be attributed to them directly or indirectly without their express permission. Videotaping and audio recording during the symposium was prohibited, as was the use of social media to communicate symposium proceedings.

This report describes the symposium discussions and the major themes that emerged from those discussions, and includes three appendices. A panel on "The Role of Oversight" was scheduled for the second day of the symposium but, unfortunately, was cancelled

due to inclement weather. Appendix A summarizes what the panelists intended to discuss. Appendix B is a list of pertinent readings, and Appendix C is a list of all the attendees.

This report will be posted on the SIGAR website at http://www.sigar.mil/ and the USIP website at www.usip.org. For additional information, please contact SIGAR's Office of Public Affairs at 703-545-5974 or sigar.pentagon.ccr.mbx.public-affairs@mail.mil or USIP's Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Mr. Linwood Ham, at 202-429-3870 or lham@usip.org.

Summary of Symposium Discussion

This summary describes the views, ideas, and concerns expressed by one or more of the symposium attendees. The summary does not reflect consensus or agreement among the attendees, nor does it necessarily reflect the views of SIGAR or USIP.

Transition Poses New Challenges for Reconstruction

This section summarizes the discussions about where we are today and the new realities in the post-2014 transition period.

1. **Afghanistan Today.** A dozen years ago Afghanistan was a failed state. The things that the government of Afghanistan is now able to do—the functions of the basic institutions of state, its ability to build and maintain infrastructure, the human capital that it is developing and sustaining—are universally different from the Afghanistan that the international community encountered in 2001 and 2002. Yet, even by Afghanistan's standards, the country today is at a point of unusual uncertainty. Afghanistan is perilously dependent upon the United States and on the international community. International military forces are drawing down and no one knows what the dynamics of that are going to be on the ground. The international community is dealing with a country that has not only suffered from decades of conflict, but is continuing to experience very high levels of conflict and insecurity.

2. **Growing Insecurity.** Fewer organizations are willing to assume the risks associated with the growing insecurity in Afghanistan. The number of international organizations working in Afghanistan, as well as the number of projects they are implementing and the provinces they are working in, have all declined. The transfer of risk—as aid organizations withdraw or reduce international and sometimes national personnel from the field, delegating greater program responsibility to local staff or local partner organizations, and oversee activities from a different location—has a number of consequences. In addition to the risks to project quality and account-

ability, there are increasing risks for beneficiaries and for local actors to whom aid organizations turn in order to spread their own risk, and increasing risks of losing touch with the reality of what is happening on the ground in Afghanistan.

3. **Afghan Priorities and Needs.** While we can learn from other conflicts, the international community needs to be attentive to the experiences that are particular to Afghanistan and to the priorities and needs expressed by the Afghans themselves. They want security, but not security just in terms of having armed forces to fight off the Taliban, as important as that is. It is also security of tenure. It is the knowledge that if something happens to you, you do not have to bribe someone to get justice. It is the security of confidence in the rule of law. It is the security of knowing that you can safely travel around the country. The Afghans also want jobs. They want livelihoods. They want access to basic services, such as health and education and electric power. And, they also want a sense that there is real opportunity, that the country is not just the preserve of the rich and powerful.

4. **Role of Development Assistance.** The future of Afghanistan does not primarily depend upon development assistance. The Afghans have to sort out their own political problems, but development assistance has an important role to play. A key question is how can development assistance be prioritized to make sure the gains that have been made are preserved and not wasted and to build resilience? How can the international community start making a dent in the growing massive humanitarian needs of Afghanistan? What can realistically be delivered and how can it realistically be overseen, given the insecurity, given the limited access, and given the weakness of Afghanistan's national systems, in particular.

5. **Political, Security and Economic Transitions.**[2] The United States and its partners are supporting Afghanistan through three transitions: political, security, and economic. These transitions and improved governance in Afghanistan will help put Afghanistan on a path toward sustainable stability. All three transitions are about Afghan ownership and Afghan sovereignty, and the priority must therefore be on Afghan decision making and Afghan priorities.

   • The political transition is in some ways the most prominent right now and perhaps the most important. The idea of moving from one government to another is something that Afghanistan has never done peacefully in its contemporary history.

   • The security transition has largely taken place. The Afghan National Security Forces assumed lead responsibility for security in Afghanistan last year. The security transition will continue to evolve through the end of 2014 as coalition forces plan for new roles in Afghanistan. While there has been no final decision yet about the size of the coalition presence in Afghanistan post 2014, the military and civilian footprint is going to be smaller than it is today.

   • The economic transition is both a short term challenge as military spending draws down in Afghanistan, but also a much longer term challenge of shifting from a wartime economy to one built on sustainable and more stable sources of growth in revenue. In the long term, progress on critical issues such as addressing the illicit economy and becoming less dependent on foreign assistance are necessary.

6. **U.S. Policy Objective.** The United States policy objective in Afghanistan is and always has been to ensure that Afghan soil is not used to launch terrorist attacks against the United States or our allies. That is why the United States went to Afghanistan, that is why the United States is in Afghanistan today, and that is why the United States needs to find a way to continue to provide assistance to Afghanistan after the security transition ends this year. The assistance provided by the United States, and specifically civilian development assistance, is essential to achieving the overall U.S. policy objective because the assistance supports the three transitions that are underway and also the longer term goal of an Afghan government that is capable of securing its own territory.

7. **Transition to a Smaller Civilian and Military Footprint.** There has been no final decision yet about the size or footprint of the military or civilian presence in Afghanistan post 2014.[3] However, given the security transition underway and whatever the final decision is, the civilian footprint is going to be smaller than it is today, and it is going to be much smaller than what we all have become accustomed to over the last few years. The smaller footprint, fewer civilians in districts and provinces in Afghanistan, and less co-location with coalition forces, means that one method of verifying program implementation will be severely diminished by the end of this year.

8. **Transition to Reduced Funding.** It is inevitable, notwithstanding the backlog of U.S. aid and other nations' money that still has to be programmed, that there is going to be a steep decline in the levels of development assistance flowing into Afghanistan. How steep that decline will be is a function of the politics, including whether the bilateral security agreement is signed between the United States and the government of Afghanistan. As the resources shrink in the post-2014 period, the United States and other donors have an opportunity to clarify their objectives as they are forced to prioritize how to spend declining amounts of development aid. It could be an opportunity to improve the quality of aid and ensure that aid is better geared to the core needs of this unique country. Fewer resources may also pave the way for more accountability. As resources shrink, there will be more competition

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2   Presidential elections were held in Afghanistan on April 5, 2014, with a second round held on June 14.

3   On May 27, 2014, President Obama announced that, pending signature of the Bilateral Security Agreement by the Afghan government, 9,800 U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan after January 2015, with most of these troops being withdrawn by the end of 2016.

for those resources. Aid organizations will need to more clearly articulate how the money will be spent and for what purpose(s) with the understanding that they are going to be held accountable for achieving results.

9. **Transition More Aid to On-Budget Assistance.** The Afghans have been explicit that their concept of economic transition means less dependence on foreign assistance and a greater say in how foreign assistance is prioritized and delivered. Building the capacity of the Afghan government's ministries and systems to enable them to deliver services to the people is critical to the long-term viability of the government of Afghanistan. All the major donors are in agreement on the use of on-budget assistance to help build capacity. This does not mean that the United Sates and other partner countries should provide direct assistance regardless of the risks involved. What it does mean is that there is a need for donor countries to identify the risks posed by working through Afghan government partners and take the steps necessary to mitigate those risks. This is necessary for donor countries to be effective stewards of taxpayer money, but it is also necessary as a critical component of a successful program. In other words, success in building the capacity of the Afghan ministries means, at least in part, helping them to identify and redress the risks inherent in their financial and other management systems.

10. **Transition Focus of Aid to Sustainment and Capacity Building.** In moving forward after 2014, the first and foremost priority is economic development and growth. Afghanistan needs private sector led economic development to create revenue and replace the dependency that currently exists. The United States has to focus on sustaining and expanding the most important social gains achieved over the last few years, particularly for women and girls, and in health and education. It has to continue to provide support for civil society and the political process, although obviously in ways that are changing as Afghanistan asserts its sovereignty. It is shifting away from large infrastructure development and looking at maintenance operations, sustainabil-

ity, and the institutions of government. This does not necessarily make the oversight challenge easier, because in some ways it actually makes it harder, but at a minimum it makes it different.

What We Have Learned about Management and Monitoring

Speakers discussed a wide range of issues related to effective management, implementation, and monitoring of development and reconstruction projects and programs, as well as other lessons learned and challenges. This section summarizes those discussions.

11. **Assessing Impact, Mission Success, and Return on Investment.** Measuring the success and impact of development assistance efforts in Afghanistan is challenging.
    - Foreign assistance is an essential component of U.S. policy in Afghanistan because it supports the three transitions underway by building Afghanistan's capacity to secure its own territory and provide for the rule of law, economic growth, and social development. These conditions are critical to Afghanistan's ability to preserve the gains of the past decade, to continue improving the lives of its people, and to sustain stability.
    - For assistance projects, defining clear objectives is critical for monitoring and evaluation. Success can be measured at a variety of levels from the project specific to the high level national policy goals. While assistance projects collectively are all designed to contribute to the overarching macro-level stability goal, measuring the success of individual projects generally focuses on project specific targets and/or broader goals such as sustainable development or government capacity building. By definition it can often be difficult to articulate how specific projects advance campaign or strategic level goals.
    - A paradox for those trying to evaluate success at the campaign level is that, in some cases, programs may not show a clear return on investment and even fail if measured against

one set of objectives (development) but argu-ably succeed from the perspective of another objective (stability). For example, an observer might conclude there was considerable wast-age in U.S. government funded programs, but such programs were nevertheless having a very favorable strategic impact because they were steadily and positively changing the political orientation of the Afghan population. While in-dividual organizations may consider themselves successful according to their own specific objectives and measures of performance, there often has not been a connection between the organization's work and its programs broader impact on stability.

- Beyond the broadest level of preventing at-tacks on the U.S. and allies, mission success in Afghanistan has never been specifically defined. Depending on who is being asked the question, the desired end state in Afghanistan would like-ly include democratization, economic growth, education, improvement of border security, the advancement of human and especially women's rights, the reduction of poppy cultivation, and other goals. Donors in concert with the Afghan government viewed such goals as integral to creating a self-enforcing end to hostilities. Such goals emanate from broad consensus among donors, development institutions, and the Afghan government itself about how to build resilience and capacity in government and society. An effort to define success and evaluate the collective contribution of donor efforts to achieving it would help in better articulating the story to overseers, Congress, practitioners, and the Afghan people.

12. **Project Design.** Monitoring, when done properly, provides vital information to the implementers of development aid and reconstruction funding. It pro-vides implementers with information that they need in order to do their work correctly, with benefits for both current and future project execution. The data gathered through the monitoring process also gives confidence to Afghan and donor governments, as well as to the broader public, that the money is

being spent correctly. Monitoring should be built into the project design from the outset. It should be multi-faceted, and it has to include appropriate measures. Most of the problems seen in monitor-ing and evaluation could have been mitigated with more robust planning at the outset of a project, by clearly identifying early on what the project was trying to achieve.

13. **Risk Management and Mitigation.** Risks should be man-aged as an integral part of monitoring, evaluation, and oversight. Working in Afghanistan entails more than just security risks. It involves multiple risks, such as fiduciary, reputational, financial, procure-ment, and security. The type and level of risk varies by actor (e.g., beneficiaries; international partners; civil society, private sector, and non-governmental organizations; and the Afghan government). A risk management approach that is consistent with and rooted in the political, development, economic, and security transition objectives is needed. If the objec-tives include capacity development, which entails risks different from those if the objective is solely the provision of humanitarian or development aid, a different framework is necessary for risk man-agement. A risk management approach requires building monitoring and evaluation and supervi-sion considerations into the design of projects and programs up front. It requires a risk mitigation plan that should involve a recognized and agreed upon level of risk tolerance, and agreement on how to mitigate the risks. It requires spreading the risks through a portfolio of projects aimed at achieving a common set of goals so that higher risk projects are offset with lower risk projects within the portfolio. Inevitably some projects are going to be more risky than others but adopting a portfolio approach to risk management, rather than a project approach, provides a slightly different lens through which to manage and mitigate risk. If one of the projects within the portfolio fails, other projects within the portfolio may still be able to help achieve the desired objectives. Such an approach would encour-age experimentation and learning by doing, which is essential in an environment like Afghanistan. Within the international community, donors are increas-

ingly expecting providers to apply risk management practices and methodologies. Donor funding is now dependent upon risk management strategies, greater accountability, and transparency.

14. **Project Management Specialists.** Project management is vital to effective project implementation and monitoring, but many aid organizations do not employ project managers as such. Some organizations are specialists in project management, but other organizations tend to have more general program officers, who are not project managers but whose role it is to manage the projects. These individuals do not necessarily have the right expertise or skill set to manage a project to ensure it achieves its objectives. As a result, they often fail to recognize that there are key steps in project management processes that contribute to successful projects. The projects that have proper project management expertise are invariably much better in terms of quality control and standards than those that do not.

15. **Due Diligence.** Aid organizations need to exercise greater due diligence in collecting information about and asking the right questions of their Afghan partners. One aid organization has developed common minimum standards of due diligence to apply across the organization to see if they can raise the level of information that they are getting from their partners. Some partners have provided very little information—a phone number, name, location—but nevertheless get quite a lot of money to deliver a project. This practice has gone unchecked because of a desire to encourage support in the regions and the districts. These are business partnerships, not friendships, and aid organizations need to push back when necessary and deal with their Afghan partners on more strict business terms.

16. **Conflicts of Interest.** Aid organizations need to better understand some of the familial and other linkages of the people they are working with and employ some of the basic tools, such as declarations of conflict of interest, to avoid or minimize real or perceived conflicts of interest or bias in their

projects. A word of caution, however, is that at the local level, it is almost impossible to avoid some conflicts. In addition, what may appear to be a conflict of interested from a Western perspective, may be seen by Afghans as a way of mitigating conflict.

17. **Contract Clauses.** Investigations are hindered by the lack of both restitution clauses and requirements for declarations of subcontracting partners in the contracts employed by aid agencies. A restitution clause is important to be able to recover funds in the event of a breach, and a requirement for the subcontracting partner to provide information is necessary to support an investigation or an audit. Aid organizations need to look at and strengthen their own contracting processes.

18. **Technology.** Modern technology has had tremendously positive effects on project implementation, management, and monitoring, and it is part of the solution to the challenges created by the increasing use of remote management and monitoring in Afghanistan. Aid organizations are just starting to learn how to take advantage of some of the newer technologies. While technology is unlikely to overcome all of the challenges of working in a difficult environment like Afghanistan, it is a tool that can be used to help with oversight activities. Geospatial information and other forms of imagery, for example, can be used in monitoring construction activities. Such information can help assess the progress of construction, but it cannot tell whether a beam had a certain type of weld or the rebar was installed in a certain way. While giving some level of confidence that a school is being built at a specific location or a clinic is being constructed, it cannot tell whether the correct materials were used. The information provided by technology needs to be coupled with other information observed on the ground. In addition to its limitations, the use of modern technology creates a tendency toward imposing more centralized control of programs. Centralized control has disadvantages in highly complex, insecure environments where it is often important to empower field personnel who have knowledge of the local situa-

tion to make decisions and not micromanage them from headquarters.

19. **Country Nationals.** Some organizations have long experience in hiring Afghan nationals to help implement and run programs, benefiting from their much greater local knowledge and contextual awareness. Doing so not only has benefits for program implementation, but helps build national capacity, whereby international aid organizations transfer needed knowledge and skills to their Afghan counterparts (including through training and coaching provided to Afghan nationals). Other benefits are that Afghans may be able to a) access areas where it may be too dangerous for foreign nationals; b) provide a more effective means of communicating directly with contractors and help translate requirements to contractors and subcontractors; and c) serve as translators, as well as interpreters of the local social, cultural, and political environment. There is however the potential risk that they will be subject to manipulation or intimidation by the Taliban and others, or to difficult conflicts of interest at the local level. There may also be reluctance to direct contractors to redo work if the quality is found to be substandard, or to tell foreign bosses of problems they encounter onsite. They also may not be familiar with or understand the standards they are required to implement and enforce. These risks can be mitigated by investing in Afghan nationals' training, mentoring, and partnerships, and backing up supervision with other forms of remote monitoring and management. On the other hand, Afghan nationals often feel a greater sense of ownership over development activities, understand that the funds are intended to make their lives better, and are frustrated when they see waste or corruption.

20. **Personal Relationships and Local Engagement Are Important.** Working effectively in Afghanistan requires developing personal and professional relationships with the Afghan people at the local and community level. In Afghanistan personal relationships matter and developing these personal relationships—by spending the time to sit down and "drink tea" with individual Afghans—is neces-

sary to build trust. A sense of local ownership in the community for any project or program is also very important, as is the value of local engagement to facilitating project implementation, monitoring, and security. Implementing organizations need to engage communities to determine what projects are needed and whether they can be effectively monitored and how best to do so. They need to look to Afghan civil society organizations, local government officials, and individual Afghans, who need to feel and take ownership over results. An important lesson is that keeping communities informed and allowing them influence over decisions is key to successful implementation and monitoring.

21. **Use Multiple Layers of Accountability.** There is a need for layers of accountability, given that there is not going to be one perfect solution for conducting monitoring, tracking accountability, and checking the quality of services provided. An example of a successful program involved hiring local religious leaders who were paid only after others in community signed off that the leaders had completed the promised work. Along these same lines, it is always desirable to have the district development authority or community authority confirm that projects have been completed.

22. **Reliable Data.** One of the challenges in being able to measure program success is the ability to collect reliable data. Data collection in conflict zones is incredibly expensive and, more importantly, often puts lives at risk. There must be a balance between the need for obtaining the best data against the risks to colleagues and beneficiaries. In many situations, technology can help mitigate personal risks, but it is unlikely to overcome all of the challenges of the difficult environment. Most non-governmental organizations use a patchwork of different sources of information that they can triangulate. Conducting monitoring and evaluation often requires asking sensitive questions, perhaps taking photographs or bringing in outsiders to conduct evaluations, all of which could be construed as intelligence gathering or spying. It is possible for aid organizations to overcome such suspicions

and even to negotiate concessions, however, this often requires a significant investment in building relationships and trust with not only the community but also armed insurgents. In addition, data can become highly politicized given the political nature of the policy objectives and the need to show progress in order to justify future funding. Data should, ultimately, facilitate decision making and focus on those objectives that a decision maker cares about. This requires a deliberate discussion and agreement between decision makers and data collection planners on what truly matters.

23. **Evaluations.** Monitoring and evaluation are two methods of measurement that are sometimes considered synonymous but are in fact distinct. They can complement each other, but neither can serve as a substitute for the other. While monitoring can tell us whether a program was implemented correctly, an evaluation measures outcomes that can tell us whether the program was effective. Monitoring tracks the inputs and outputs of a program or project, such as the number of beneficiaries or schools built. Monitoring outputs are not usually sufficient for measuring the outcome or effectiveness of a project but outputs are often used for this purpose because they are easier to quantify and, therefore, measure. Outcomes should reflect the objectives of the program. Objectives may include development-specific indicators related to quality of life or political indicators such as enhanced perceptions of government legitimacy. While some may believe that impact evaluations are a luxury in fragile states, impact evaluations are even more necessary in places like Afghanistan than they are elsewhere because the cost of failure in Afghanistan is higher. Impact evaluations often take a long time, and program implementers and others do not want to wait years to learn about the outcome of a program. Nevertheless, evaluations are critical because they can provide a very important institution-building function by helping promote evidence-based policy making. More impact evaluations are needed; they are not very useful in isolation. Evaluations from a variety of programs need to be linked to policy decisions. Together with monitoring, evaluations can be used to figure out what is going wrong and how to improve projects.

Recommendations for Going Forward

Speakers offered several ideas for improving program implementation, monitoring, and oversight in Afghanistan and other conflict areas. This section summarizes those suggestions.

24. **Multi-tiered Approach to Gathering Data.** Monitoring can benefit from taking a multi-tiered approach to gathering and analyzing data from a host of stakeholders and then triangulating that data so better decisions can be made. Five tiers of monitoring actors were described.
    • U.S. government actors—including the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, Inspectors General, and U.S. Government Accountability Office—provide data and evaluations and monitoring that can be used to help change and adapt programming.
    • Implementing partners, including Afghan government ministries and local government officials, are a rich source of data. The Ministry of Public Health, for example, has a Health Management Information System that provides a wealth of data that can be used to evaluate health programming.
    • Other donors can be a rich resource by sharing what they are hearing from their implementing partners and other people about what is going on in a particular district or province.
    • Civil society organizations and the Afghan people are an incredibly rich and increasingly important source. The more stakeholders can give voice to the Afghans to help them figure out what is going on, the better it will be for both development results and for accountability.
    • Independent monitoring or third party monitors, which have been used for quite a few years in Afghanistan, are also an important source.

25. **Avoid Duplication of Effort.** A considerable duplication of effort occurs across individual organizations and among aid organizations. Organizations

need to conduct appropriate analyses to start to understand, in a strategic sense, if and how each of their programs differs from their other programs and the programs of others.

26. **Capture and Share Lessons Learned.** There is a need to share lessons learned and best practices both vertically within organizations and horizontally among organizations. Often lessons learned and best practices are discussed only superficially and may reflect an organization's selling of its brand rather than an in-depth exposition of the pluses and minuses of particular techniques and approaches. Organizations have to go a step beyond sharing practices and have real discussions about what practices have worked, where they have worked, why they have worked, and whether they are transferable from one province or village to another, and what practices have not worked. In addition, aid organizations should communicate more readily with each other about the problems they have experienced with implementing partners. In one instance, an aid organization official discovered that companies, about to be given multimillion dollar contracts, did not exist. In another case, it was discovered that multiple aid organizations were paying for the construction of the same facilities. When an organization encounters these types of problems, it very rarely will share the information with another agency or organization, or even with its own government. Organizations need to capture as much information as possible about the difficulties they have experienced with particular partners and share that information so everyone can be better informed going forward. Unless organizations make more informed decisions about their partnerships, they are not actually going to be changing the risk environment that they are working in.

27. **Assessments Should Incorporate Context and Mitigating Factors.** Development program assessments must try to capture and incorporate the policy, strategic, temporal, and resource context in which the programs were decided and implemented. Without this, it is often too difficult to fairly judge impact or to draw conclusions as to whether

particular development activities might be transferrable to other settings. For instance, it might be that a particular effort in Afghanistan was innovative and worthy of future study and emulation, although it failed to achieve its objectives in an environment that simply proved too hostile. Many projects would fail in Afghanistan that might do very well under less formative conditions. Assessments should also always include the relative history of development projects and the mitigating factors beyond the control of those in the field. For example, simply listing the names and tenures of the chain of key decision makers and responsible officers for each project being studied over several years would immediately make clear that rapid turnover of personnel in Afghanistan likely complicated all field implementation. If personnel turnover did prove in almost every study to be an important obstacle to achieving program goals, then perhaps a study of just that topic, the impact of turnover on development projects, should be undertaken. Other elements for consideration include unanticipated changes in levels of funding, shifts in military operational priorities, declines in security, and the loss of Afghan partnership and commitment. To use a common metaphor, we should be cautious before condemning farmers for failing to achieve high yields for crops that they are told to plant in the midst of a desert.

28. **Form Professional Partnerships and Collaborate.** Implementers and overseers should form professional partnerships and collaborate in appropriate ways with each other. There are some very strict boundaries that, if crossed, may compromise objectivity. Still, the ideal relationship, between the policy maker and the implementer, should be to view oversight and investigative agencies as vital members of the government team. Development work in conflict zones can be risky business, subject to huge errors in decision making and implementation, and vulnerable to corruption. If this is openly, candidly, and frequently acknowledged by implementers and monitors alike, the channels of communication between the two groups will improve. An upfront recognition of this by oversight bodies will encourage implementers to be more candid about their

program shortfalls. Equally important is an explicit recognition by leaders in the development field that rigorous, tough, sophisticated oversight is critical to maintaining mission credibility on the home front and to organizational learning. In addition, any and all oversight help that can be offered should be welcomed by U.S. agencies and military commanders. The various department and agency Inspectors General personnel on the ground should be invited into relevant planning and problem solving activities in military headquarters and embassies, asked when appropriate to conduct analysis useful to the implementing offices, and encouraged to exchange views on how program efficiencies and effectiveness can be measured. In return, those involved in monitoring should ensure that they include among their first principles a commitment to provide early warning to implementers when it appears a program is going awry. Such an approach can cause dilemmas, but the point is to be good stewards of taxpayer money and to promote organizational learning.

29. **Undertake Holistic and Systemic Evaluations.** As the war in Afghanistan draws to a close and organizations still have access and expertise on the ground, they should consider undertaking more holistic and systemic evaluations. Were the ambitious goals proclaimed at the outset of the campaign achieved? Are the gains to date sustainable? Organizations should examine accomplishments also in broad functional areas, such as counter narcotics, finance, border control, and women's rights. Diplomats, development specialists, and soldiers will find such studies, if they are well written, priceless as they prepare for the next foreign intervention of any scale.

30. **Report on Successful Programs.** Stakeholders should study, analyze, and report on some of the lesser known and, in many cases, low cost programs and projects in Afghanistan that have paid huge dividends. To illustrate, the U.S. government's support of the Afghan media, on a dollar for dollar basis, has had far more impact on improving government accountability than has the hundreds of millions of dollars poured into Rule of Law pro-

grams. The Afghan media has certainly helped build a sense of nation far more than any other development program. Projects to help restore the Kabul Museum and the Herat Citadel, or that supported the Afghan National Institute of Music, are probably more helpful, on a comparative cost basis, in strengthening the unity and confidence of the Afghan people, than the deployment of an additional battalion of U.S. Army infantry. Another example is the significant improvement in public finance management achieved by the Afghan government, particularly the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Finance. Under the leadership of the Finance Ministry, the country's Open Budget Index score increased from 8 points in 2008 to 59 points in 2012, demonstrating the government's commitment to budget transparency and accountability.[4] In the time remaining before the troop withdrawals are completed, organizations should look for examples of what has worked and document them. If they choose to only write about failures, their successors may become unnecessarily risk adverse.

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4   The Open Budget Survey measures the state of budget transparency, participation, and oversight in countries around the world. Afghanistan "has made steady and impressive progress toward greater budget transparency since [2008] — more than doubling its OBI [Open Budget Index] scores in each subsequent round for a total increase of 51 points. In 2010 the Afghan government made a specific commitment to reach a target OBI score of at least 40, which its 2012 score of 59 far surpassed. In exploring the factors that led the Afghan government to shift its focus toward budget transparency and achieve such impressive results, the political will of the leadership of the Ministry of Finance, as well as the government's desire to improve its international image, again emerge as key factors." Source: International Budget Partnership, Open Budget Survey 2012. Also cited was The World Bank Group report, Afghanistan: Public Financial Management and Accountability Assessment, August 2013, Report No. 80996-AF.

Observations

As coalition forces continue to drawdown in Afghanistan, international aid agencies and other donors will face increasing challenges and constraints on their ability to effectively manage and monitor reconstruction projects. Yet effective management, monitoring, evaluation, and other oversight mechanisms are critical to promote greater accountability and minimize risks of waste, fraud, and abuse. Inadequate management, monitoring, and evaluation limit our ability to assess the impact of reconstruction programs, and prevent ongoing adaptation and reform.

The SIGAR mission is to promote economy and efficiency of U.S.-funded reconstruction programs in Afghanistan and to detect and deter, waste, fraud and abuse by conducting independent, objective, and strategic audits, inspections, and investigations. A common thread in SIGAR's work is the failure of U.S. agencies and program implementers to conduct effective management and monitoring of reconstruction projects and programs. SIGAR wants to work with these parties to identify best practices and lessons learned in order to help them be more effective and accountable for taxpayers' money. SIGAR also wants to draw on their experience in remote management and monitoring to help inform the inspector general community on methods and techniques that may translate into meeting the challenges of conducting oversight in insecure environments.

In Afghanistan, USIP is pursuing its global objective of ending violent conflict and promoting enduring peace through an extensive array of programs and analytical work, supported by USIP's office in Kabul. USIP is working in close partnership with a number of U.S. government agencies, and looks forward to continuing and enhancing such partnerships. Unlike some other actors, USIP expects to maintain and, if anything, further increase its engagement with Afghanistan during and beyond the current transition, including by working with the new post-election Afghan government expected to come into office later this year. Like other organizations, USIP must address security issues and other constraints that affect program management and oversight in Afghanistan, and has benefited from the extensive discussions at this symposium. USIP looks forward to continuing to search for good-practice solutions, including through piloting some of them in its own programs.

Symposium participants raised and discussed important issues that are part of an ongoing and broader dialogue about the role of the United States, donor organizations, others in the international community, and Afghan government, national, and community organizations in the reconstruction effort. SIGAR and USIP want to continue the dialogue to identify the best and most effective practices, methods, techniques, and technologies to efficiently and effectively establish and sustain monitoring and oversight frameworks for development and reconstruction programs in Afghanistan and other insecure environments. SIGAR and USIP will be exploring other ways to continue this dialogue and look forward to continuing this work with other interested parties.

Appendix A. Panel on "The Role of Oversight"

A panel with the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, a Managing Director from the U.S. Government Accountability Office, and the Inspectors General from the Department of State, Department of Defense, and U.S. Agency for International Development, was scheduled for the second day of the symposium. Unfortunately, the second day of the symposium was cancelled due to inclement weather. Following the symposium, the panelists provided SIGAR with their prepared statements for the panel. Below is a summary of what the panelists intended to discuss.

Programmatic and External Risks to Aid Programs in Insecure Environments

Assistance programs in fragile and failed states face many challenges and corresponding risks.
- Insecurity, instability, weak governance, and high levels of corruption make it challenging to implement programs and conduct program monitoring activities. Contracting and grants officers' representatives, for example, may not be able to monitor implementation of awards through on-site inspections.
- Pressures to deliver rapid results to bolster stability often drive the pace of programming and spending, which may exceed planning and oversight capacity.
- Weak civil society and government bodies paired with a heavy initial focus on stabilization and reconstruction activities can reduce the sustainability of projects.
- U.S. government employee assignments in insecure environments are often limited to one year or less, resulting in higher staff turnover and limitations in institutional knowledge.
- Increased emphasis on implementing programs through local systems (e.g., Afghan First, Local Solutions, government-to-government) increases risks in many settings. These risks are amplified by weak accountability systems, poor governance, and reduced ability to evaluate program results, all of which are common conditions in insecure settings.
- Results of "soft projects" with less tangible deliverables (e.g., education, health, democracy) can be more difficult to verify than infrastructure projects

that can be examined at different points in time by more objective standards.

Approaches for Mitigating Risks

To address these risks, implementing agencies have a wide variety of mitigating strategies at their disposal.
- Several risk mitigation measures can be implemented early on in the project process to help improve development efforts and protect U.S. funds.
    - More intensive focus on proper planning and implementation of program efforts by agencies can reduce risks of waste, fraud, and abuse upfront.
    - Better application of program management principles could help ensure that project activities support intended goals and are sustainable.
    - Improved training for and deployment of contract and procurement personnel could improve choices about procurement mechanisms and help increase contractor compliance with the terms of agreements.
    - Use of some procurement mechanisms could shift cost risks to implementers.
    - Leveraging local employees' in-depth knowledge of the operating context can enhance implementing agencies' ability to navigate and interpret local systems.
    - Establishing financial reporting systems with strong internal controls, limiting cash transactions, and strengthening local audit capacity through vetting and quality control checks can prevent funds from being misused or siphoned off by corrupt actors.

- Development efforts focused on strengthening the accountability environment of the host country will help mitigate risks related to corruption and weak governance.
    - Programs and initiatives to improve the independence and professionalism of host country law enforcement, prosecutors, and courts, will help create reliable counterparts for U.S. authorities tasked with countering corruption.

- Establishing anti-fraud hotlines and anti-corruption programs will reinforce indigenous oversight institutions.
- Implementing agencies can work with new implementing partners to build their capacity to properly manage and administer assistance projects and funds, ultimately improving their ability to manage challenges that emerge during the implementation process.

- Diligently reviewing information provided by implementing partners and properly controlling the reporting requirements will help to identify areas at risk for waste, fraud, and abuse.
    - Assigning greater priority to project monitoring and evaluation could help agency managers identify problem areas sooner.
    - Careful review of documentation provided by implementing partners will often reveal discrepancies that are indicative of the lack of quality of those reports. For example, some reports may use the same photographs for different construction projects, or text that cannot be true based on other information in that same report or in others.
    - Ensuring that cooperative agreements and contracts include provisions that guarantee U.S. government agencies access to project records would improve the ability of agencies to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the project, as well as to detect irregularities in the records.
    - Maximize information sharing regarding risks by reinforcing reporting systems and coordination among oversight bodies.

Remote Management and Monitoring

When the operating environment restricts physical access to programs and projects, alternative strategies to provide timely, relevant, and useful oversight products could be considered.

- Using more third parties and contractors, such as local/international audit and accounting firms, can overcome some of the limitations caused by travel restrictions due to insecurity.

Increased use of Afghan and foreign service nationals will provide agencies with better knowledge of the local environment and assist in the use of surveys or other instruments to examine project activities, outputs, and outcomes.
- Technologies such as satellite imagery and GPS-enabled smart phones provide one possible way for agencies to examine project activities remotely.
- Utilizing assets of the U.S. military and intelligence community that already have access to a project site to provide project verification through direct observation or by other effective means, such as imagery from drones already overflying an area or military units utilizing GPS-enable digital cameras to take photos of a site.

Implications for the Oversight Community

The challenges and risks associated with insecure environments have several impacts on the oversight community's mission to detect and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse.
- Diminishing oversight access to development projects and increasing costs for alternative oversight measures will push the oversight community to prioritize its resources to focus on high risk areas that are most in need of oversight.
- Lack of oversight access to projects may cause the oversight community to limit its scope of work or produce products with reduced levels of assurance.
    - Security concerns can impede travel or make it cost prohibitive, thereby limiting the ability of agencies to access programs and projects to conduct oversight.
    - The oversight community will need to explore alternative standards of evidence and methods of gathering data, and weigh the pros and cons of alternative remote monitoring strategies. For example, contracting third parties to perform fieldwork may improve access to insecure sites, but it may be overly costly and require extensive vetting of third party employees.
- The oversight community should make these limitations transparent to Congress and implementing agencies.

- The oversight community needs to provide clear explanations regarding the strengths and limitations of the data collected and ensure policymakers and the public are well-informed about these constraints so that they can make their own judgments on the information provided. For example, imaging may provide information about infrastructure projects and whether they are making progress, but without physical access to projects sites and testing of materials, the images cannot tell us if the materials being used meet contract specifications.
- The oversight community needs to be proactive in managing the expectations of Congress and their agencies about the level and limits of oversight that can be achieved in the increasing risk environment.

- Increased coordination within the oversight community, and between the oversight community and implementing agencies, will enhance cooperation and reduce duplicate efforts.
  - Currently, implementing and oversight agencies operating in Afghanistan do not have sufficient visibility over the various activities and operations taking place throughout the country. This hinders effective coordination and cooperation. In order to make efficient use of movements outside of Kabul, it would be good to know what other U.S. funded activities may be in those locations. For example, an agency attempting to plan a site inspection of schools constructed in a province could coordinate its trip with another agency that is arranging their own site inspection of police buildings in the same province.
  - The Southwest Asia Planning Group is an example of how the oversight community can coordinate and work together, but its work would be enhanced if there were more complete knowledge of all U.S.-funded efforts and their locations in Afghanistan.
  - Members of the oversight community and implementing agencies should strive to develop a culture of sharing best practices and seeking opportunities to institutionalize inter-agency cooperation.

- As the oversight community continues to operate in insecure environments, it should look to use its past experiences to develop best practices to prepare for future overseas contingency operations.

Appendix B. Pertinent Readings

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Appendix C. List of Participants

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